

“Never say never” is this woman’s mantra

Expect a miracle

By Peter J. Malcolm

A FAMILY OF pigs flying south for the winter, the Mediterranean Sea parting to accommodate pedestrians, King Kong living happily ever after. What do these have in common?

Well, each would be a miracle, and anyone holding their breath for them to materialize might want to look for a soft place to land.

So why does Costco member Carolyn Gable live by the motto “Expect a miracle,” banking on occurrences that by their very nature are not likely to happen? It could be because she made the improbable transition from airport waitress to head of a multi-million-dollar company. It could be because she’s a single mother of seven children and she still retains her sanity. Or it could be because unending optimism is infused into the core of her being.

Whatever the reason for her sunny disposition, Gable parlayed it into professional and personal success. Gable is president and CEO of New Age Transportation, Distribution & Warehousing Inc. (www.newagetransportation.com), an Illinois-based company that offers freight operations for companies around the world. The company racked up more than \$22 million in sales for 2005.

That’s not to say any of this has come easily.

“There are moments in both situations [running a company and a family] when the high is higher than you could ever, ever describe,” she tells *The Connection* from her Chicago-area office. “And then there are lows when you think, ‘What the heck did I get myself into?’”

Gable’s path to corporate success began while she was waiting tables at a Chicago airport hotel, where the endless stream of women travelers in business garb fueled her ambition to change career paths. “I thought, ‘I could do that,’” she says. Indeed she could: She got a job as a customer service representative for Leeway Motor Freight. During the next few years, she worked her way into sales, changing companies and positions several times before founding her own company, New Age, in 1989.

Gable found that her “waitress mentality” helped as she established her new company.

“As a waitress, you learn to get along with the bartender who’s a jerk, the cook who’s a jerk and everyone else if you want to go home with money in your pocket,” she says. “And that’s how it is in business—you’ve got employees, customers, the bank, this and that. And you have to keep them happy at the end of the day if you want to be a success.”

Gable, now in her 50s, credits her truckload of children (ages 7 to 32) for teaching her the virtues of patience, tolerance and awareness—traits she says translate favorably to the business world. In fact, she draws many parallels between her children and her employees.

“There’s a similar bond and love,” she says. “That really great feeling when you can see your child start to read is similar to seeing your employee who’s been struggling finally get it.”

As an admittedly pathological multitasker (she describes herself as a circus performer spinning one too many plates), Gable is constantly looking for new endeavors to satisfy her super-charged ambition. She plans to write a book, begin public speaking and continue promoting The Carolyn Gable Expect a Miracle Foundation (www.expectamiraclefoundation.org), which provides aid for low-income, single-parent families.

Gable acknowledges she has been blessed with tremendous success and knows not to take any of it for granted.

“You can never stop being grateful for the grace of it all,” she says. “Because in a heartbeat it could all be gone. I’ve had many miracles in my life; I could die tomorrow and know that I’ve lived the life that I’ve imagined.

“How many people could say that?”

Peter J. Malcolm is a graduate of Western Washington University and was an intern at The Costco Connection.

Carolyn Gable: From waitress to CEO.

Carolyn Gable’s keys to success

1. Never take clients for granted. Always come up with new ways to service your accounts.
2. Keep your word and follow through on promises made to clients.
3. Never forget Gable’s golden rule: “It’s all about building relationships.” Keep the personal touch in dealing with clients.
4. Hire employees with a positive attitude who will be enthusiastic about their work and your customers’ needs.
5. Never criticize the competition. Focus on your business, not theirs.

CAROLYN GABLE

member profile

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Comments about Costco:
“One of our employee incentives is a Costco card. We are always at our local Costco. I love the store; I shop there whenever I can. Any function we have, we shop at Costco.”
—Carolyn Gable

