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WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Making their mark

Women are making strides and finding success in international trade

American women have helped pioneer different forms of transportation and trade since the birth of this nation, and today they are increasingly making their mark in executive boardrooms thanks to their own fearless initiative and the help of mentors.

Rebecca Lukens was one of the earliest women executives in the manufacturing and transportation industries, heading up Brandywine Iron Works in 1825 after the death of her husband. The Coatesville, Pa., iron mill was almost bankrupt when the new widow took over the business, but she successfully turned it around by calling upon the principles espoused by her mentor father. Her management skills established the rolling mill as a major producer of ships — and train locomotives — boiler plates as well as iron rails. The company's success lasted more than a century and more

than 75 years after Lukens' death.

During World War II, women operated machinery, streetcars, buses, cranes and tractors, and entered military service. Many had mentors to whom they attribute their success.

By 1983, women were taking major leadership roles in trade. That year, Sally Ride became the first woman in space, Elizabeth Dole was appointed secretary of transportation, and Carmen Turner became general manager of the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Five years before Sally Ride floated in space, Kathleen Broadwater joined Lykes Lines and became the first female management trainee to spend time aboard a ship, despite objections from her detractors about its appropriateness.

In 1987, Annette Youmans began her career with Colonial Marine

Industries Inc. in Savannah, Ga. Today, as a line manager, Youmans attributes her success to her experience working alongside captains, engineers and shipowners who have shared their knowledge.

The same year Youmans entered the transportation industry, Beth Peterson left her job as a truck driver to join a courier company in California. "The woman who owned the company that first hired me became my first mentor and taught me that the glass ceiling was breakable," recalls Peterson.

When many of today's women executives in trade first joined the industry, they were often the only female in their department or on the team. Along the way, they found mentors of both genders, and through commitment and hard work, they also found success climbing the corporate ladder. ■

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I have worked for TradePoint Systems (and its previous name incarnations) for the past 26 years. TradePoint has been providing software systems and services to the international trade industry for more than 30 years.



In the early days, it was a challenge converting customers from completely manual processes to automated computing systems that were far superior and so much more efficient than the typewriter. It was a revolutionary experience for new clients to actually enter data only once and print all of

the forms required by Customs.

Over the years, my experience with software development life-cycles, from requirements analysis to design, development, testing and then, training and implementation, have prepared me for leadership roles in the development of new applications for customs brokers and their trading partners. This practical experience coupled with my listening skills, keen attention to detail, team-first attitude and my desire to deliver the best software, has well-prepared me for leadership roles at TradePoint and within the industry. Along the way, I have also had the pleasure of working with many innovative customs brokers and colleagues that were willing to contribute and work as a team to

deliver successful and innovative software applications.

My overall experience as a woman in this profession has been a satisfying one. I treat customers and colleagues as professionals and they do so in return, so there have never been any issues there. One of the biggest challenges working women face today is balancing the needs of family with the demands of work schedules. When my children were younger, I did find the need to cut back on my work schedule. Setting priorities is an essential part of any professional's career, and my personal life and family is always included among my top priorities.

I started with TradePoint in the
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Training Department helping customers integrate customs brokerage and accounting software into their business operations. In the early 1980s, one of my first big management projects was for the design, development and implementation of ABI (Automated Broker Interface) software. TradePoint became the first vendor to implement the then-new Customs initiative creating an interface between the trade and the Customs computers for the purposes of expediting the release of goods and submitting payments for duty, fees and taxes. This program was one of the first modules of the Customs Automated Commercial System (ACS).

Subsequent to overseeing the success with our ABI product line, I began to gather the business and regu-

latory requirements for TradePoint's next-generation application for customs brokers. I traveled around the country, meeting with customers, to listen and understand what their business problems were, and what we could do to solve these problems. Working with a team of dedicated professionals, we created and delivered an application that has helped nearly 200 customs brokers respond to the demands of Customs, carriers, importers and other trading partners.

In the mid-1990s, I worked with Customs and the automotive companies to determine the requirements and design the message sets for the National Customs Automation Project/Prototype (NCAP/P). This project was implemented as the first segment of Customs new Automated Commercial

Environment (ACE) system. It has now evolved into the current Free and Secure Trade (FAST) program that is being used on the northern border. TradePoint became the first, and is currently the only, IT systems provider to offer carriers and importers a commercially available software application to facilitate the movement of trucks through many of the US/Canada border entry points utilizing the FAST lane processing system.

I was recently appointed the trade co-chair of the newly formed Trade Software Integration Subcommittee of the Trade Support Network. As part of this committee, I will once again be working with Customs and the trade to review proposals regarding technical and software migration for the new ACE system. ■