

7 leadership lessons women can learn from First Supply's Katie Poehling Seymour



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NIBCO Senior Vice President of Sales Ashley Martin remembers that day in 2013 when **Katie Poehling Seymour** of First Supply floated a trial balloon over to American Supply Association CEO **Mike Adelizzi**.

All three had spent the day recording video testimonials to attract young professionals to our industry.

“We were just about finished when Katie spoke up and said, ‘Mike — if you’re serious about attracting young people to our industry, you really need a women’s group,’” Martin recalls. “Mike said right away he’d support it. So what became ASA Women in Industry was all Katie’s idea.”

On Oct. 8, Poehling Seymour, recently promoted to president of Madison, Wisconsin-based First Supply, received the 2020 ASA Women in Industry Alice A. Martin Woman of the Year Award during ASA’s NETWORK2020 Virtual event. Poehling Seymour is the second recipient of the award, following Martin.

The award is named after Martin’s mother, Alice, who passed away in 2017. It recognizes women in the PHCP-PVF industry who have a record of significant accomplishment and embody the character of Alice Martin, who had been with NIBCO since 1984 in many key roles.

Back in 2013, after Poehling Seymour got the green light to get a women’s group off the ground, Ashley Martin volunteered to help. Together they founded Women in Industry, a special interest division of ASA. At the first national conference in 2014, the co-founders hoped to draw 50 women and were thrilled to have 80 attend. The division grew steadily from there, thanks to ASA’s continued support. Today, it remains ASA’s fastest-growing specialty division.

Women in distribution can learn a lot about leadership from Poehling Seymour, a fifth-generation executive at First Supply, and a respected leader in our industry. Here are seven leadership lessons we have learned by watching and working with Poehling Seymour over the years:

1. Decide to be yourself. Don’t try to be like “one of the guys.” To be accepted, respected and taken seriously, be exactly who you are.
2. Be passionate about your work. And be compassionate toward people.
3. Do more than what’s expected. Say yes to opportunities that will challenge you. Make time for those commitments in your life. Then make new things happen.
4. Volunteer to speak at industry events. The more experience you have as a speaker, the more prepared, comfortable, polished and professional you become.
5. Welcome other women at industry events. Be the first to invite a newcomer to join your conversation. Introduce her to people in your circles that she needs to know.

6. Be approachable and willing to help. When a leader with potential reaches out for advice, be there as a mentor. Help her get ready for her next role.

7. Know that you are a role model. Young women entering our industry are watching what you say and how you act — so watch what you say and how you act. Model the behaviors you want to see in others.

Business owners need to retain the women they have by developing them and giving them more responsibility. It's important for up-and-coming leaders to know there is room for more women in positions of leadership — to know that we belong and can make a difference.

The more women like Katie Poehling Seymour we see in these roles, the more we believe it is possible for us to get there, too.

Do you know a woman who deserves to be recognized as a leader in our industry? Nominate yourself or someone else for the 2021 ASA Women in Industry Alice A. Martin Woman of the Year Award. The application will be online soon at www.asa.net/Membership/Divisions/women-in-industry.

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