I am especially honored to be here, and to be affiliated with Robert Morris University. In my short time as a Trustee – I joined in March – I have come to appreciate the many special attributes about the university, one of which is its targeted focus on building broad leadership skills in students before they enter the workplace. Through RMU’s “Changing Lives” program, the university endorses student involvement in leadership roles, community service, international study, internships, research projects, and artistic efforts, among others. It further formalizes these efforts and publishes the “Student Engagement Transcript” along with the traditional academic transcript.

As the head of Human Resources for United States Steel, I can tell you that never before has this been such a timely and relevant undertaking. The competition for jobs is fierce, and students should differentiate themselves every chance they get; the Changing Lives program is certainly something that can set them apart. My company knows this first hand because we currently employ 250 RMU graduates.

In addition to our relationship today, Robert Morris University and U.S. Steel share rich and successful histories, and important roots to the early leaders of our country, academia and business. We are proudly linked to two great leaders – Robert Morris and Andrew Carnegie. Both were creative entrepreneurs and prudent businessmen who possessed the gifts of foresight, and the ability to lead change, to persevere and to manage successfully during challenging times.

Great leadership continues to be a hallmark of both organizations today, as is evidenced by Dr. Greg Dell’Omo, President of Robert Morris University, and John Surma, Chairman and CEO of United States Steel. Under the leadership of these contemporary executives, RMU and U.S. Steel continue to demonstrate their staying power in very dynamic times through a relentless focus on continuous improvement, innovation, quality, and driving value creation for their key stakeholders.

They are also strong people builders; both are dedicated to building greater levels of involvement and leadership by women in their organizations, which requires significant commitment and focus over a sustained period of time.

In the last 30 years, businesses and academia have invested heavily to proactively attract and develop women. Between 1979 and 2009, the number of women entering the workforce increased from 37% to 48% – or almost 38 million. But the first major contribution by women to the economy began in the early 1940s, when more than a million women entered the U.S. workforce, as their brothers, boyfriends, husbands and sons went to war. It is hard to imagine a time when women were expected to contribute, but typically not accepted.

My vibrant and intelligent 90-year-old Aunt Elizabeth is one such story. Earlier this year, on a long drive from my house to her farmhouse, she told me her career story. After receiving her college degree in administration in the late 1930s, she joined the large secretarial pool in a manufacturing company in Erie. Within a few years, she moved to the top of the pool, and as more men in professional jobs went to war, she was quietly tapped on the shoulder by a senior manager who asked if she would transfer across town to take the role of Buyer in the Procurement Division.

She was thrilled and eager for more challenging work, but there was ONE condition if she accepted the job – none of the customers or suppliers could know she was a woman. In all correspondence, and on all order entry, invoicing and contracts she could only be known by her first initial and last name – E. Steigerwald. If the phone rang, she answered it “Procurement Department”. If the caller asked for E. Steigerwald, she would take a detailed message, then follow up in writing, never using her full name.
All these years later you could tell she was proud, and she knew the manager’s decision to choose a woman for the role put him at some professional risk.

Rather than be offended by the need to operate under a gender neutral identity, she knew that he had positioned her to compete based on the merits of her ability and the impact she could bring to the role.

When she left the company a few years later to marry my uncle and raise a family in the country, she was among the top buyers in the business. She wondered out loud that day on our drive what her career might have been like if she had lived in a different time…

Fast forward to 2012.

Today, more than 51% of all Americans in management, professional and related occupations are women. In 2010, 58% of all undergraduate degrees in the United States were awarded to women, and women now account for 53% of the total college educated population in this country.

So, there is no question today whether a woman’s place is in the workplace. Our value, our ability and our impact are evident everywhere in business, government, academia and our communities.

While there is more work to be done to eliminate questions of compensation inequality and lingering gender bias, women have emerged as meaningful contributors and are succeeding on the merits of our individual strengths and talents, and in leadership roles.

For many years, women have been groomed to believe that our success was reliant on two factors: work hard, and wait for someone to notice you. Today, the vast majority of women with rewarding careers began like their successful male counterparts – with a good education, a lot of ambition and little relevant job experience. They built the basics, and then built on that foundation.

Barbara Bush once said, “You don’t just luck into things as much as you’d like to think you do. You build step by step, whether it’s friendships or opportunities.”

It’s important to note that there is no single path to career success, and the “rules” are no longer the “rules”. There are, however, well-understood and consistent patterns that have enabled men and women to accomplish a high degree of satisfaction and success while taking into account their personality and aspirations, their strengths and weaknesses and their personal situation.

My point of view about how women succeed as leaders has, of course, been heavily influenced by my own career, and also by the roles I’ve held in the last decade related to assessing, placing and developing leaders within three large American companies. So today I’d like to share seven observations, all based on my personal and professional experiences, and all of which have contributed in some important way to my own unique success. Whether you are listening today as a student, an employee, an entrepreneur, or a leader, I hope you’ll find something that is relevant to your own development, or as you are mentoring, coaching and sponsoring others.

**Observation #1: Build Your Skills and Experiences.**
Get exposure to a wide variety of experiences. Figure out what you like to do, and are good at. By its very nature, this assumes you will hold jobs and have experiences that you do not like, and may ultimately not be good at, but it requires you to learn from ALL of them – not just the fun ones, the easy ones, or the ones that come naturally. Whatever your choices throughout your career, make sure the experiences you gain provide you with a better understanding of your current and potential talents and interests. As you master functional skills, develop a track record, take on broader skills, and manage other people, you are building your experiential value. Your future, potential value is likely still untapped to some degree. So how do you build to your potential?

**#2: Take Calculated Risks.**
Once you have some baseline skills and experiences in place, you get confident in what you know. This often detains people who get fearful of making career transitions or can’t see opportunities outside of their comfort zone. They are often content with their success and assume they can continue to do what they’ve always done in order to progress. But what got you here won’t necessarily get you there.

To do that, requires some prudent risk taking, and a good understanding of how you can leverage your strengths and successes to expanded, advance or take on completely new or different challenges. While there is no longer a rule book, there is a formula for continuing your progress along the leadership chain and pointing yourself in new directions.

As a woman who is working to advance and expand your leadership responsibilities, you can’t just work harder – you have to work differently. Offer to take on a special project, turnaround a problematic situation, or step up in a crisis. Let your manager know that you are interested and
willing to take on new things to expand and stretch. Work smarter in your current role, grow your skills through additional education, hone your people management skills (decision making, delegating and effectively communicating are key). Take on higher profile work, even when it isn’t glamorous, if it creates opportunities for exposure with senior leaders.

OBSERVATION #3: CUSTOMIZE YOUR DEFINITION OF “WORK/LIFE BALANCE”

There is a lot of discussion today about having work/life balance. It is a common topic now across both genders and multi-generations, and has become less a woman’s issue and more a broad workplace issue.

There is a certain irony in a professional career in that work often requires the greatest personal sacrifices such as travel and long hours right when you are trying to raise a family. So, as best you can, try to make the key personal investments in your career when you can most afford them – those who make these sacrifices early often reap the rewards later on.

Based on my own personal experience, it is true that you can have it all, but NOT at the same time. To attempt to do so is unrealistic, and will likely set you up for failed delivery on something that is important to someone important in your life, whether that is your spouse, your children, your friends, your boss – or yourself.

In 2004, when I had just been promoted to vice president of global human resources at Arrow Electronics, one of our senior executives stopped by my office to offer his congratulations. After 35 years in business with a heavy travel schedule, he was getting ready to retire, and had just returned from his only daughter’s wedding.

A few days before the wedding, he made plans to get some quiet time with her, to tell her how proud he was of her, and to share some of his greatest memories of her growing up. In spite of his very demanding business load, he took great pride in the fact that he made an effort to be home for the major special events in her life – at least as he defined them. So, he was devastated when she told him that he had picked the events that were important to HIM, but not to her.

At the time, my sons were 6 and 7 and Steve’s last encouraging words to me were “you’re going to have a great run in this job, but make sure you never confuse what’s important to you vs. what’s important to them”. It’s one of the most powerful pieces of advice anyone has ever given me.

You have probably noticed that work/life balance is #3 on my list of observations – it’s not at the end of the list. In order to build your career on the leadership chain, you have to have some straight-talk with yourself about balance, and you need to do it early in your career and whenever change is underway.

For me, the acceptable standard of “balance” changes frequently – week by week. I choose the things that are most important for my family and my career. There ARE tradeoffs in those decisions – less time with friends, less time for myself, more limited time to “just do nothing”.

But it also brings a discipline to say “no” to a lot of things that simply are not my top priorities. Learning to say “no” is one of the most important skills to exercise when you are in a leadership role; otherwise you spend too much time on the unimportant activities instead of focusing on the critical few things that make a difference.

There is a wonderful book called “The Intentional Family” – my husband and I bought it years ago when our boys were toddlers, and the entire focus is on the importance of creating family traditions and rituals that are distinctly your own. At our house, honoring our chosen family rituals is a cardinal rule, and it is a great anchor when the chaos of work and life tempt us to drift off course.

OBSERVATION #4: REAL LEADERSHIP MEANS MAKING THE TOUGH CALLS AND PERSEVERING IN DIFFICULT SITUATIONS.

As Dale Carnegie’s famous book accurately stated, success usually requires “winning friends” and “influencing people”. But when you are in a leadership role, you often can’t do both. Getting along with people is critical in any job, but when you are the leader you will be faced with making tough decisions that will make some people unhappy. Aim to be empathetic in communicating the tough decisions, but understand that making them won’t likely make you popular. The ability and willingness to make the tough calls is another key differentiator between successful leaders and the average manager.

On the topic of persevering, another of the primary differentiators between average and highly effective leaders is the ability to persist under the most adverse of circumstances. Many times aspiring leaders are working hard to position themselves for the next big opportunity. But when adversity strikes, the leadership opportunities sometimes find you.

Such was the case in 1980 for a high potential logistics leader named BJ Scheihing, who worked for Arrow Electronics, a large international distribution company. BJ was assisting the senior executive team in its
preparations for a meeting with the company’s Board of Directors. While working from the basement conference room of a NY hotel, 13 Arrow executives were trapped and perished when a disgruntled hotel employee set a fire, blocking their only exit from the building. BJ was in a different section of the basement when the fire was lit, and was the only Arrow leader to escape. Overnight, she became one of the most senior ranking executives in the company. She attended each of the 13 funerals, and worked tirelessly to calm the unsettled employees, to stabilize the company with customers, and to assist the remaining Board members in the search for a new CEO. Years later, when I worked for BJ, she still recounted the story of how she was thrust into leadership in the most unimaginable of circumstances, and how it set her career on a dramatically different course.

**OBSERVATION #5: UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE.**

Benjamin Franklin once said, “there are three things that are extremely hard: steel, a diamond, and to know oneself.” Being a highly effective leader requires a great deal of effort and maturity, and while some people are more natural leaders than others, there is nothing “accidental” about becoming a highly effective leader.

At U.S. Steel, we have begun to introduce a model called Q4 behavior. The model focuses on four quadrants of behavior, which are either accelerators or barriers to leading effectively. Q1 is overly hierarchical and directive; Q2 reflects a leader who is content with the status quo – I can’t see the need for change and have no interest. Q3 is found in leaders who are fully aware of the issues but passive in dealing with them.

Q4 is the most consistently effective and includes the concepts of leading for results while demonstrating respect for people. It’s in living Q4 behavior that leaders can truly differentiate themselves and the performance of their organizations, while serving as good role models and coaches for those they are developing.

The journey to Q4 requires a leader to complete a feedback process, to role play with their peers in the classroom using real-life business problems, to be videotaped and to self-reflect. One of the most difficult things for evolving leaders is to invite and accept feedback, and to truly understand the impact of their leadership style. It is a humbling and sometimes frustrating process, but often is required for managers to develop and mature as professional leaders with the range of skills that allow them to successfully manage under a variety of complex, unfamiliar, ambiguous, and sometimes high-stress circumstances.

One of the common characteristics of leaders who are terrific developers of people is their ability to focus on the success of others. They are often self-effacing with good ego control. They are firm and decisive, set common goals and create alignment around the purpose, and create an environment where people can contribute their very best work. High performers and high potentials tend to thrive under this model which shuns micro-management and instead instills individual ownership and accountability for results.

Many organizations refer to this as an employee engagement model, but regardless of what you call it, it is simply a highly effective management style and creates a natural environment for the development of others.

**OBSERVATION #6: FIND THE RIGHT FIT.**

According to the book, “The 5 Patterns of Extraordinary Careers”, executives who consistently succeed over long careers fully leverage both their strengths and their passions more than six times as often as the average employee.

So what do they do that we don’t?

They practice three things religiously: They play to their strengths. They choose work they are passionate about. And they choose to work in environments where they fit in naturally and comfortably within the organization’s culture.

Of course, it’s not that easy to find the perfect workplace where you fit in, love what you do, and were born for the job. Many people spend a lifetime looking for it.

The seductive influence of pay, prestige and peer influence can lead you to evaluate career opportunities based on the wrong criteria and push your career off course.

Job satisfaction has everything to do with the quality of the job itself: how much impact you can have, the quality of the people you work with, the culture of the organization, the professional development experiences, and the intellectual stimulation.

There are also specific differentiators that are more commonly found in women than men, and which are highlighted in a series of McKinsey research studies called “Women Matter”. In one of the most recent studies, global business executives were asked what they believe are the most important organizational attributes that women look for to determine a good “fit”.

WOMEN OF RMU

ROBERT MORRIS
The four most common ones are: does the role offer sufficient intellectual stimulation? Do leaders in the organization lead inspire managers and employees to succeed? Does decision making occur in a participatory way? And, how are expectations and rewards established and aligned?

Finding an organization that is a natural fit for you and in which you like and respect the people is one of the keys to success and satisfaction, and it greatly increases the likelihood that you can be successful in the leadership chain within it.

**MY FINAL OBSERVATION - #7: INVEST IN THE VALUE OF OTHERS.**

My career has clearly been a journey marked by unexpected opportunities, a great deal of work, and a bit of serendipity. My work ethic and ability to persist in challenging circumstances are in my DNA – my parents were raised by German immigrants during the Depression era and grew up on small farms where everyone was expected to contribute, and there was a high priority on the value of doing the job right the first time.

But it was the individuals who mentored, coached and sponsored me, that opened my eyes to possibilities I never imagined, and then rallied behind my success.

A recently published LinkedIn survey reported that 1 in 5 women have NEVER had a mentor in the workplace. I found that to be stunning and unfortunate, and foreign to me, because that has not been my experience.

In a traditional mentoring relationship, a mentor is defined as someone who offers career advice and guidance to a less experienced colleague. Although I have had one formal mentor in my career, the most relevant experiences I’ve had have been the result of many remarkable informal mentors, and a number of executive sponsors. In some cases, the people I learned the most from never even knew I considered them a mentor. Some were talented peers, some were excellent leaders and role models, and frankly, some of them were terrible managers.

In my own learning and development, I sometimes learned more about good leadership just by observing poor leaders in action, then committing to never behave the same way.

So while having a formal mentor designated to you can be a valuable experience, I encourage you to write some new guidelines for yourself which apply whether you are the mentor or the mentee: 1) a good mentor is anyone you can learn from; 2) mentoring works best with more than one mentor; 3) sometimes the best mentors are the ones you choose for yourself; and, 4) the best mentoring matches are often mis-matches – sometimes you learn the most from people who are the least like you.

One of the best ways you can take action on “investing in the value of others” is to consider being an RMU mentor. There are materials throughout the room today with more information on how you can benefit from this experience, and assist someone in finding their own successful career path.

As we close out today, I would like to recognize the outstanding group of women leaders at Robert Morris University. It is a wonderfully long list:

- 4 of the 5 RMU academic deans are women: Barbara Levine, Marie Kalevitch, Mary Ann Rafoth, Lynda Davidson. And, former business school dean Derya Jacobs who was recently appointed Vice Provost for Research & Graduate Study.
- 6 of the 15 members of the President’s Cabinet of senior administrative officers are women: Wendy Beckemeyer, Kyle Fisher, Kim Hammer, Peggy Outon, Darcy Tannehill and Ellen Wieckowski.
- 8 of the current Trustees are women.
- And the many members of the coaching staff of our 12 Division I women’s sports teams.

Let’s applaud their many achievements and the work they do every day to serve as outstanding role models for the next generation of women leaders and RMU students. [applause]

In closing, I’d like to thank the Robert Morris University Women’s Leadership Advisory Council for organizing these forums where we can share ideas and learn from each other’s experiences.

Thank you.