



Marina Park

Girls and Families



An Interview with Marina Park,
Chief Executive Officer, Girl Scouts of Northern California

EDITORS' NOTE Marina Park joined Girl Scouts of Northern California as CEO in November of 2007. After attending law school at the University of Michigan, Park launched her impressive career journey, spanning the spectrum from impassioned community organizer and VISTA volunteer (just before law school) to Managing Partner at Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP – the nation's first major woman-led law firm as firm-wide Managing Partner. In recognition of her outstanding business acumen and innovative leadership, in 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, the San Francisco Business Times honored Park with the Most Influential Women In Business Award, and in 2015 recognized her as a "Most Admired CEO."

Looking back to 2007 when you joined Girl Scouts of Northern California, what excited you about the opportunity and what makes it so special?

When I joined, I had been at my law firm for almost 25 years, and throughout that time, I had a commitment to working with all of our attorneys to help them develop in their careers, and I had a particular focus on women attorneys.

I saw many amazing young women who had done incredibly well in school but, within three or four years into their careers, I could see that their confidence was shaken. I knew that it had been more challenging for me to figure out how to lean in and get opportunities than it was for my male colleagues, and I wanted to understand the reasons for that.

I had been thinking about the need to help women develop courage and confidence and willingness to take risks at younger ages. I saw these attributes as essential ingredients for women leaders.

In 2007, as my Managing Partner term came to an end, I happened to be volunteering at Girl Scout Camp CEO, where women executives mentor high-school age girls from under-resourced schools.

At Camp CEO, I learned that five Northern California Girl Scout councils were merging and they needed a CEO who had experience in mergers, and who was passionate about the Girl Scout mission – to build girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world

a better place. I looked into what Girl Scouts was doing around leadership and realized they were building into their program exactly what I felt women needed. I noted that the Girl Scout leadership program had many parallels to the Leadership Project that McKinsey & Company published around the same time, highlighting actions that corporations should be taking to help women develop as leaders.

What really propelled me to join Girl Scouts as a CEO was the concept of starting in kindergarten to help build a pipeline of women who are equipped with the courage and confidence to become whatever they are destined to become. That is the passion that brought me to Girl Scouts.



How do you focus on maintaining the heritage of Girl Scouts while making sure the programming is relevant today?

One of the first things I started talking about when I came to Girl Scouts is that we draw strength from our past and give energy to our future.

The foundation we stand on in Girl Scouts is important. We have generations of Girl Scouts who are giving back and volunteering – it's an incredibly important part of who we are – but our energy needs to go into the future, and we need to always be looking ahead. What do girls need today to be ready for what is around the corner for them, and what skills do they need? How can we equip girls, and continually work with our many layers of historic knowledge and experience in Girl Scouts, to make sure we're also bringing forward our volunteers to be able to deliver that to girls?

We draw a lot of strength from our history and legacy, but our commitment is to our girls and looking forward to what they need.

Where do you see growth opportunities in Northern California for Girl Scouts and how important is it that it be diverse?

Right now the majority of girls in grades K-12 are diverse, so when we define who our future membership is, we have to make sure it looks like Northern California in all its diversity.

We also think it is important that we recognize that there are many common elements to what parents desire for their daughters. They want their daughters to learn new skills, become risk-takers and challenge-seekers, and they want opportunities to spend more time with their girls.

We think Girl Scouts can connect with what today's parents are looking for, and our focus is on making these things happen for girls and their families.

Girls across all classes and races have similar things they're looking for, too – they want fun, friendship, and adventure. Our challenge is to find the intersection between what girls want and what parents want, and deliver it in an affordable way.

Is it important to engage the parents as well and are you looking at working with the whole family?

It's important to engage the full family. We see family experiences as a shifting focus, certainly within Northern California. I am hearing it from many of my counterparts in other Girl Scout councils as well. Families are so busy, kids are pulled in so many directions, and even technology is a distraction. We're hearing that families are looking for a place where they're disconnected from technology and are doing things and learning together.

It's interesting to see that some of our most popular programs the past few years have been family camps and "side-by-side" learning opportunities – where parents, caregivers, and girls learn new skills together.

We love being able to create that experience for our Girl Scouts and their families. ●