



Sylvia Acevedo

Mission and Movement



An Interview with Sylvia Acevedo,
Interim Chief Executive Officer, Girl Scouts of the USA

EDITORS' NOTE In June of 2016, Sylvia Acevedo was named to her current post. Formerly, Acevedo was secretary of the National Board and served on its executive committee. She is currently a White House commissioner on the Presidential Initiative for Hispanic Educational Excellence and a national advocate for STEM education. She is a strategic consultant to companies that wish to use technology to capitalize on demographic trends, and she previously served as President and CEO of Communicard LLC. Acevedo earned her Bachelor of Science degree in industrial engineering from New Mexico State University and a Master of Science in engineering from Stanford University.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Girl Scouts of the USA (girlscouts.org) is 2.7 million strong – 1.9 million girls and 800,000 adult volunteers in 92 countries through USA Girl Scouts Overseas, who believe girls can change the world. It began over 100 years ago with one woman, Girl Scouts' founder Juliette Gordon "Daisy" Low, who believed in the power of every girl. She organized the first Girl Scout troop on March 12, 1912, in Savannah, Georgia, and every year since, the organization has made her vision a reality, helping girls discover their strengths, passions, and talents.

As you now lead Girl Scouts of the USA into the future, how important is it to sustain the organization's heritage while remaining relevant today?

For our 104-year-old organization, one of the key concepts of Girl Scouting is "bridging" – we bridge to the future from a really wonderful history of amazing experiences for girls and 59 million alumnae using the Girl Scout Promise and Law to guide us.

We think about how we can make Girl Scouting much more relevant to girls today, which is shown by our focus on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), and our love of the outdoors and different life experiences. We're making sure the experiences are contemporary for our young women today.

Has the mission that was so clear in the beginning changed or evolved, or has it been consistent throughout the years?

It has been very consistent. We're all about courage, confidence, and character for girls. This is also what has guided my life.

I was fortunate to become a Girl Scout. My family lived in an impoverished part of a New Mexico town. When my younger sister became ill from a meningitis outbreak in that neighborhood, my mother moved us into a different area where the streets were at least paved. Because of that, I

had the opportunity to become a Girl Scout. I'm so grateful for that, because of Girl Scouting I then realized that life isn't just left to fate; one can actually prepare, organize, and put contingency plans in place to guide your life. I learned that our skill-building activities could be fun to do with friends, including amazing outdoor experiences.

Also, at a time when many girls like me didn't think about going to college to become engineers, my Girl Scout experience in cooking and then achieving my Science badge made me realize that if one puts ingredients together in the right order and adds heat, one can make anything. This gave me the "Ah-ha" moment that helped me understand that science was just like cooking.

As a fourth-grader, earning those badges gave me the courage and confidence to study science, and to really study math at a time when it wasn't popular for girls to do that.



When my college counselor told me that girls like me did not go to college, I responded that not only was I going to attend college, but I was also going to study engineering. When she replied that girls don't study engineering, I told her that if I could cook, I could be an engineer. That led to my becoming an engineer and rocket scientist, and changed my destiny.

I had the confidence because of those Girl Scout experiences. It is what our organization is all about – how we can continue to create those experiences for girls, and how we can get our entire movement working together to provide additional opportunities for reaching more girls.

Many think of Girl Scouts as only for young girls. How important is it to build and strengthen that alumnae network and that mentality of being a Girl Scout for life?

I am a lifelong Girl Scout who "bleeds green." People know how much I love Girl Scouts and what the Girl Scout movement has meant to me.

They start telling me their personal Girl Scout experiences and how much Girl Scouting has meant to them. This is one of our primary areas of focus: how we can create that Girl Scout network and connect alumnae to each other. We all benefited from Girl Scouting and the country benefited from Girl Scouts as well as what those Girl Scout alumnae have done with their lives.

If we look at the huge impact we've had in terms of helping to create women entrepreneurs and those who are in political office or in other fields, these women of achievement often say they got their start from the leadership and entrepreneurial experiences they had as Girl Scouts.

Working with alumnae is an important part of the movement. We have to tap into the wonderful experiences they had and recognize that the things they wanted to do when they were kids are the same things girls want today – they want to have fun experiences with their friends.

As you assume the role of Interim CEO, how important will it be to communicate your vision and engage your many councils and other partners and stakeholders when it comes to moving forward with that vision?

I worked as an executive before, both in nonprofits and corporations. The most important objective is to make sure that everybody clearly understands where we're going and what we're doing to get there as an organization.

For me, it's about the three Ms – it's Membership, which means it's all about the girls; it's Movement, which is all of us working together to enable more girls to have the wonderful experiences that Girl Scouting offers; and it's Money, which provides the lifeblood of financial oxygen to really power the Movement through funding and investing in our future leaders – girls.

Along with that, I want people to realize we're all brand ambassadors because we live our lives according to the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

The reason we've been recognized as a great brand in many studies and surveys isn't because our logo is everywhere – it's because of the way our Girl Scouts and alums live their lives. This is crucial for young girls today, the women they will become tomorrow, and the contributions they will make to our country in the future. ●