



Lynelle McKay

# Impact and Purpose



An Interview with Lynelle McKay,  
Chief Executive Officer, Girl Scouts of Central Texas

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Lynelle McKay harnessed her passion for female empowerment and service to the community as fuel for her work with Girl Scouts of Central Texas (GSCTX). Previously, she was an engineer with Freescale Semiconductor, retiring as Senior Vice President and General Manager of the company's \$1-billion Networking and Multimedia business. Before becoming the CEO of GSCTX, she served on its board, and she continues to serve on the board of the Ann Richards School Foundation.*

## How do you define what Girl Scouts means and the impact it can have?

It's a life-changing experience for a girl. The mission is as strong as ever – to build girls' courage, confidence, and character. I personally believe that it's the confidence that is often the missing link and is crucial for a girl growing up today.

If we can build up her courage and confidence, then as opportunities are presented to her, she is ready to go through that door and take advantage of all that is available to her.

A girl can be her authentic self and still take advantage of those leadership opportunities that all girls should have. We don't see enough of that in today's society, which is why we believe the Girl Scout leadership experience is so powerful.

## Central Texas has been a fast-growing market for Girl Scouts. Would you touch on where the market is today and the growth you see in the area?

We're in the middle of Texas so we feel we're at the forefront of the changing demographics that we're seeing across the nation. For us, the biggest challenge is staying relevant for all girls everywhere. In Central Texas, this means making sure we're there for girls in rural and urban areas, the growing Latino population, families and that we remain relevant for all the kindergarten through 12th grade girls out there.

## Are the needs different when it comes to that demographic and how important is it to customize the programs for the demographic?

It's very important. When we first started, we actually had a specific Latina initiative because we knew we needed to be able to scale programs and increase services to the Latina girls in our area. We began partnering with the Catholic Diocese, thinking this was the

best way to reach and engage this community. We had some starts and stops with our effort to grow our traditional Girl Scout troops and we quickly learned that we needed to address the whole family unit, not just the girls, in our recruitment and retention efforts.

We learned that we needed to present it to the girls and their families in a different way, because first-generation Latinas aren't growing up in a family that really understands the Girl Scout brand. When we engage with a Latina troop, we have to engage the whole family. This was a big learning point for us that clearly indicated that we had to do things differently. We had to make some changes in how we recruit girls as well as how we support their troop leaders so that they all have a quality Girl Scout leadership experience.

The network of the seven Texas councils and seven Texas CEOs is a very close-knit group. When I first came on board, they helped me get up to speed with all things Girl Scouts. They were there for anything I needed and shared best practices. We try to get together at least once a year to talk about what is working and what is not. Many good ideas have come from the Texas councils.

In addition, because the national culture we operate in has changed, there has been a resurgence of trying to bring all national CEOs together regularly to share best practices.

## In coming from a tech company, were your business skills transferable?

The similarities of running a billion-dollar tech business and a Girl Scout council are great because, at day's end, it is a business. Today, my biggest goal is to empower girls. It's quite a complex business because there are so many different stakeholders – the parents, the volunteers, the donors, and the community at large. I've had to use every single tool in my tool box to be as successful here as I was in the tech world.

## Were there certain things that surprised you when you assumed this role?

When I first took this job, I didn't realize how big a presence Girl Scouts has in the community. In the tech world, I was there to support my business, my employees, and customers. In Girl Scouts, the girls, the parents, and volunteers are my customers. But it was eye-opening to realize how big a role Girl Scouts plays in a local community. It isn't just about my customers anymore. We have the responsibility in every community we serve to stand up not just for Girl Scouts but for all girls.

It's even bigger than I imagined it to be, but that's the fun part.

## How important is it to create relationships with the girls as they grow older?

These girls are growing up before our eyes. They have many needs, including relationships with adult mentors. We know that no matter how much they hear something from their parents, if they can hear it and see it modeled by other adult women, it opens their eyes to what they can become. Part of our challenge is not just how we're staying relevant for today's girls, but how we show them a road map to success. One way is to provide real-life role models so that they can see that if a woman they admire and have a relationship with has done this thing, then they can do it too. ●



## How do you go about engaging the families and are you happy with how it has been received?

Generally, we allow tag-a-longs at Girl Scout events. Tag-a-longs are usually Girl Scouts' younger siblings, whether boys or girls. It was not necessarily our procedure to allow tag-a-longs to join in at events, so we modified those rules so they could participate in many of the activities. For example, we started inviting entire families to camp in order to expose them to the experience so they would feel comfortable letting their girl go to summer camp by herself or with a friend. These events enabled us to increase the confidence levels not just for the girls, but also for their parents.

## Is there close coordination among Girl Scout councils?