



### **Denice Kronau**

Former Chief Diversity Officer, Siemens AG  
Former CEO, Siemens Global Shared Services  
Former CFO, Siemens US and Siemens Healthcare Diagnostics

## **Denice Kronau's Leadership Lessons** **| ExCo Insights**

September 23, 2024

In this series, we explore some of the most important lessons and insights from our executive coaches and mentors.

Denice Kronau, an executive coach and mentor at The ExCo Group, former Chief Diversity Officer of Siemens AG, former CEO of Siemens Global Shared Services, and former CFO of Siemens US and Siemens Healthcare Diagnostics, shares her leadership lessons. She emphasizes the importance of pausing to reflect before speaking, being comfortable with admitting “I don’t know,” and recognizing that self-promotion is not a sin.

### **KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS**

The first one is to pause, reflect, and then speak. When I first started working after college, leaders were expected to have the answer and to tell people what to do. But later, when I ran my first offsite as a CEO with my leadership team of 30 people, I was struck by how everyone was waiting to talk—or not waiting and simply talking over each other—rather than listening. But we had a great facilitator who helped us understand that listening was almost like doing improv, where you build on what the person said before you rather than saying “but.”

I had to learn to pause and reflect on what was being said before I spoke. Those pauses can make people nervous because they don't like dead air. But that's okay because we're all thinking a bit more when we pause. So I learned early on that, as the leader, I didn't have to have the answers. I was comfortable saying, "I don't know," or, "I need help."

The second important lesson came when I ran a Siemens company in India. We started with about 25 employees there when I first joined the company and built it up to 2,000. I would go to India for meetings once a quarter. I would meet with the management team during the day, have dinner with them, and then, because my body was still in a different time zone, return to our site, walk the floors, and shake hands. That would happen overnight because the employees there worked US hours, so they came in at 10 pm and left at 6 am.



**Self-promotion is not a sin. Otherwise, your work is like a tree falling in the woods.**

One night, one of the managers introduced me to an employee named Manesh. The manager said, "He stayed here at the end of the quarter and worked 18 hours straight to pay 2,000 invoices. That way, the Siemens division he supports could close their quarterly books with actuals versus estimates." I said, "Manesh, tell me why you did this." He said, "Well, my team called in sick this week. I just felt I had to pick up what the team should have done. The House of Siemens is counting on me." It was an emotional moment that made me reflect on whether I was a good enough leader for the Maneshes of the world. How do I earn the right to lead people like him every day?

### **WHEN I COACH CLIENTS, WE OFTEN TALK ABOUT...**

I often ask my clients, "Who is invested in your success besides yourself?" The point is for people to understand what a stakeholder means for getting what they need to be done and what a sponsor means in terms of someone willing to advocate for you. Over my career, I had about half a dozen great sponsors, and I worked very hard to make sure I earned their sponsorship so that it didn't cost them anything, if you will, to sponsor me. They knew they could rely on me to go above and beyond and do what needed to be done.

So, with my clients, I spend a lot of time making sure that they understand intellectually what needs to be done to earn the backing of sponsors. Because people can be very task-oriented in their focus on executing the strategy and delivering the numbers, they need to make time to reach out and schedule lunch with a potential sponsor to get to know them as people. They need to ask them, "How can I help you? Is there anything I can do for you?"

The second theme that comes up often is that self-promotion is not a sin. Many people believe that their work should stand for itself. And I tell them that their work is like a floppy Gumby Doll and that you have to prop it up. It doesn't mean that you should be running around saying, "I'm the best. I'm the greatest." You have to let people know what you've accomplished. Otherwise, it's like a tree falling in the woods. You have to find a comfortable way to make sure that the people who matter most to your career know what you've done. It's even better if other people can talk on your behalf. So find those "noisy" people and let them know, and then they will tell others.