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JOBS

THE BOSS

The Family Vision

By MAUREEN BEAL

MY grandfather started National Van Lines, and my father took it over from him. I began working for my family's company as a switchboard operator in Illinois when I was 19. I was divorced and a single parent and I needed a job.

Then I moved to Los Angeles and worked in claims and operations in our office there. I also remarried. When we consolidated operations in Chicago and closed the Los Angeles office, I stayed in California and worked in customer service and inside sales for a company that manufactured carpeting accessories. There, I learned what makes for a good boss.

Since I was no longer the boss's daughter, people would say things in front of me that they wouldn't have before. At lunch with my colleagues, I would hear them talk about terrible bosses. This boss was demanding or disrespectful, that one didn't listen, and another one never asked about anyone's family when it had a crisis.

Then my father called and asked me to return to Chicago and run National Van Lines' international division. I told him I didn't know anything about international matters, and he said it didn't matter. No one in the family knew anything about the division, and he wanted to remedy that. I agreed to return to Illinois. I had been gone 10 years and it was time.

I found that no matter how complicated something appears to be, if you put your nose to the grindstone, you can do it. When I took over, things weren't running smoothly.

As told to Patricia R. Olsen.

I learned on the job. The experience taught me that if I could be successful at that, I could do anything.

I also learned that you have to surround yourself with people who have the expertise you lack, even if it makes you uncomfortable. My father was a visionary; administration was not his strong point. It's mine, however, along with the ability to carry out a plan. If someone presents an idea to me, I can determine whether or not it will work. I can't always define exactly what I want, but I know it when I see it.

In 1985, I attended an air freight school in Germany. It was so cold that it made Chicago feel like the tropics. I met a number of people from countries that included Peru, Israel and Lebanon. We spent a lot of time together that week. I heard their perspective on the United States, and I learned that people aren't that different when it comes to how they feel about their homes and families.

I took my father's place as C.E.O. when he passed away at 90 in 1993. Dad chose me to succeed him because he knew I had the same dreams for the company as he did. Since then, one of my brothers has passed away, but my other



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AGE
66

HER WEAKNESS
Shoes

FAVORITE MOVIE
"Butch Cassidy and
the Sundance Kid"

brother is our computer guru. That's what he's happiest doing, and he lets me get the accolades.

Experts say that besides death and marriage, moving is one of the most traumatic life events. Once we received a letter from a woman whose father had Alzheimer's and had to move to an assisted-living facility. He was upset to be leaving his home, but he loved trucks. The driver picked up on that and let him ride in the cab of the truck for a couple of blocks. It calmed the man, and the move went much more smoothly. She was writing to thank us.

Another woman, who was moving to California, called us after the truck left her house with her belongings. She was frantic because her cat was missing. She said that the animal liked to rest in a dresser drawer, and she wanted us to check the dressers. Luckily the truck hadn't gotten very far. We called the driver and he stopped to search the dressers. When he opened the drawers, the cat jumped out of one and scared him half to death.

When I was 15, my father would tell people that he loved to go to work in the morning. At the time I thought, "Oh my gosh, he needs to get a hobby." Now I feel the same as he did.

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