

Renee Schafer



Women in Secure Data Destruction

By Maggie Geolat

Secure data destruction is not just a male dominated industry. Women in NAID have made epic strides, even from the very inception of NAID, with their businesses, their local communities, and for secure data destruction as a whole. This includes NAID voting in the first-ever female President this year, Angie Singer Keating of Reclamere in PA, who was instrumental in the association adding hard-drive destruction to its NAID AAA Certification program.

We sought out additional women in leadership within our industry to see if they would pass along some of the wisdom they have gained along the road, and they were kind enough to oblige.

We were able to gain helpful insight from Renee Schafer of Data Security, Inc. in Lincoln, NE; Margaret Meier of UltraShred Technologies, Inc. in Jacksonville, FL; and Stacey Lombardo of Infoshred, LLC, in East Windsor, CT. Collectively, these three executives have over 60 years of experience in the industry.



Margaret Meier



Stacey Lombardo

With all this experience, I asked these leaders if they felt that the industry had changed much since they got into the game. Schafer answered, "Absolutely. 20 plus years ago, my college classmates and I didn't have personal computers and cell phones were not common. Today, you would have a hard time finding a college student without a personal computer, as well as a handy hand-held computer (aka "smart" phone). Technology has changed drastically, and with it, the need to secure data. When I started with Data Security, Inc., the only entities concerned with protecting their data was the US Government. Today, we work with banks, hospitals, universities, and even friends who want to upgrade their information's security."

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Ms. Meier noted, "Things are much more competitive now regarding price. We are also a smarter and more secure industry in terms of training, knowledge, certification, and security practices."

"We are a well-respected industry that is far reaching into the international marketplace. I remember when the industry started there were a few companies around a table


discussing, 'How do we make this a viable business?' We have come a long way," added Lombardo, who sat at the very first meeting.

While the industry itself has come a long way, so has each of their businesses, all of which are successful and in which they each hold a leadership position. We wanted to learn more and therefore dug right in...

An obvious start to any leadership conversation was for us to ask each executive just how they inspire their employees. Meier prizes individual merit and training - showing each employee's value to the organization. "The key to a smooth flowing growing operation begins and ends with staff members placed according to his/her strengths and developing more and more over time. The experience and talents that each person brings to the table makes all the difference in how UltraShred performs and is perceived over time."

Schafer leads by example and with clear communication and incentives. Lombardo had a bit more to add, stating, "My leadership style is based on principals of transparency, teamwork, cooperation, and collaboration. There is no one person in a company that has all the answers. I like to gain perspectives from all employees. For example, if you are trying to come up with a solution that affects your route drivers, ask individuals from different areas within your organization for their perspective as well. It could be someone in the warehouse or office that might have an idea that is very helpful to the situation."

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As a follow-up, I asked what mistake they see leaders in our industry making more frequently than others. Lombardo and Meier mentioned they see mistakes such as not having a team mentality when working with employees, as well as devaluing the worth of services provided. Meier added that this also applies to customer service, which at times seems lacking after the service contract is signed. "We field complaints all the time from clients who are not pleased with their service and turn to us to fix this."

When asked about some of the most common mistakes witnessed, Schafer stated that it often comes down to over-simplification. "Security takes on different forms and dimensions from one client to another, which means "one-size-fits-all" solutions may be part of the answer, but rarely are the complete answer in secure data destruction."

Listening to these responses, it is clear how much juggling can take place when you are in an executive role. With so many activities and tasks taking place each day, I was curious as to how a "harmony" between work and life is maintained, as this is something that many of us struggle with daily.

Schafer stated, "I appreciate that you use the word harmony instead of balance; personal/work- life balance is impossible, but harmony is attainable. Harmony requires effort and sacrifice on both ends. Such harmony isn't easy, but it is worth fighting for. The reality is that you don't always have tomorrow to do what matters most. I make being in control of my calendar a priority, so I can work smart: I set aside time to do what needs to be done, work on projects that make a difference, and spend time with the people that matter the most."

Lombardo followed up by mentioning how strong of a support system she has. "I have good balance in my life because I have strong support both personally and at work. At home I have a caregiver/domestic engineer that helps me manage the care of my children and my household duties which is invaluable to me. At work I have assembled an extremely knowledgeable and hardworking leadership team. These strong support systems are very important to the good balance I have between work and home life."

Being such strong figures in the industry, I wanted to leave the end of our conversation open to any advice that they saw fit to give to upcoming leaders, as well as to the women of NAID.

Meier has run a successful business and raised six children in the process - making for a very busy but rewarding life. She attributes her success to a great team of people including first and foremost her husband, Walt - General Operations Manager, other team members, great industry leaders who own businesses, and vendors who provide much needed support. "We have been greatly blessed by God in making it all happen."

If maintaining all of that isn't enough, at the end of the day, these three are strong leaders and therefore always have development and growth on their minds. I was curious as to how leadership growth is maintained, and how these three make time to continually grow and develop their skills. All three women mentioned that reading, attending workshops, and networking are all ways to actively develop their skill set.

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I was also curious to see if these executives could pin down one characteristic that they believe every leader should possess. Meier quickly stated that grit was at the top of her list. Creating "the ability to come out on the other side of challenges and grow!" Chiming in was Lombardo, who said that an important characteristic of leadership is simply treating your employees with care. "I like to consider myself a heart-led leader. You need to care about the folks you work with. My employees are treated like an extension of my family."

Being such strong figures in the industry, I wanted to leave the end of our conversation open to any advice that they saw fit to give to upcoming leaders, as well as to the women of NAID. For first time leaders, Schafer said that it is important to not assume that you know how to be a good leader. "Learn from others and find a mentor." Meier encourages leaders to grow through the training provided by NAID's Shred School and CSDS education. Lombardo made it clear that staying humble, engaging with team members, and being confident in asking for help are also some of the keys to success.

As far as advice for the women of NAID, Lombardo summed it up well, "Be yourself and stay authentic. Trust that you are making the right choices and decisions."



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Data Security, Inc. is a manufacturer and supplier of hard drive degaussers, magnetic tape degaussers as well as hard drive and solid-state destruction devices.

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