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KARYN SCHELL

President, DP Solutions

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DP Solutions

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Left to right:

DP Solutions Owner and Chief Financial Officer Brian Usher, Executive Coordinator Joe Usher, President Karyn Schell, and Vice President of Sales and Marketing Michael Kear

Adapting to Change Leads to Success

DP Solutions President Karyn Schell Steers a Company Focused on Culture and Clients

BY GREGORY J. ALEXANDER | MAXIMILIAN FRANZ PHOTOGRAPHY



DP Solutions boasts a 25% female workforce.

“ DP Solutions has been in business for 49 years, and if we had at any point put blinders on and said, ‘No, that is not what we do,’ we would not be here today. ”

“We have five guiding principles and No. 1 of those is that ‘Our People Matter.’ When you walk into DPS, the first thing you see is the ‘Our Team’ wall, which displays every employee’s picture that works for DPS. It’s all about our people. Our people are the ones representing DP Solutions; our people are the ones interacting with our clients and communities,” says Schell. “Giving our people the opportunity to grow, evolve and develop is important. I love to tell the story about one of our escalation engineers on our service desk. When she started here, she said that she was hired ‘to answer the phone.’ I immediately told her that she was hired to do more than that. Since then, DPS has given her the education and training to succeed and she has grown and evolved into an invaluable member of our team. She moved to Maine a few years ago, but she still works for us remotely and has now been with us for over for 10 years.”

In addition to “Our People Matter,” DP Solutions’ other guiding principles include “Surprise and Delight,” “Take the Long-Term View,” “Think Teamwork,” and “Own It.” “I may not be the person who will solve the problem, but if you ask me about it and it’s on my plate, I am going to take responsibility for it. We instill in our staff that if you start something, you’re going to finish it and take responsibility that the job has reached full completion,” Schell explains.

Tailoring Solutions

DP Solutions has clients in a wide array of industries.

“One of the things that has always interested me in the technology field and in this company is the opportunity to work with many different people – we work with manufacturers, accounting firms, insurance companies, distributors, nonprofit organizations, and property managers, just to name a few,” says Schell. “The one thing that we find in common is that everyone uses technology but in different ways.”

One area that DP Solutions has opted to not engage in is competing for government contracts and has instead continued to focus on small and medium-sized businesses. “We’ve had clients who have secured a government contract and increased their staff, but when that contract ends, so does the need for those new employees. We did not want to be on that topsy turvy cycle,” Schell says.

You’d be hard pressed to identify an industry that changes more rapidly than technology. Almost daily, it seems there is a new must-have app, software updates are nonstop, and some people trade in their iPhones annually. The key to professional success in the technology sector is the ability to not only stay abreast of new technological advancements but also the willingness to embrace change.

“DP Solutions has been in business for 49 years, and if we had at any point put blinders on and said, ‘No, that is not what we do,’ we would not be here today. You must have the ability to adapt in this business to continue to grow,” says Karyn Schell, president of DP Solutions (www.dpsolutions.com), a technology services company that offers a large suite of services, including managed IT, disaster recovery, cloud computing, IT security and compliance, and IT project services.

Schell recalls the decision DP Solutions (DPS) had to make when its in-house data center became antiquated. “We had to decide whether to invest in a new data center or form relationships with third-party providers to handle the infrastructure. We decided to work with organizations that specialized in the data center business. We’ve also chosen to work more and more with Microsoft directly. We are a Microsoft Gold Partner, and we leverage that relationship and engagement to provide our clients with the latest in technology, such as Microsoft Azure and Office 365. Additionally, we identified

business offerings over the years that had either gotten too small or had become a distraction from our core services, and recognized that we needed to phase them out. These were very emotional decisions as some of the services were key foundations of the early DPS.”

Schell, who joined DP Solutions in 2007, was promoted to president in 2018. The family-owned, multi-generational company is based in Columbia, Maryland, has 65 full-time employees and is owned by Chief Financial Officer Brian Usher, whose uncle founded the company in 1971 in his home in Pasadena, Maryland.

“Brian is our business owner and CFO, and he is so supportive. Whenever we need to make an investment or make a major decision, if you present the facts to Brian, you’ll get the funding that you need. Plus, it’s a short trip down the hall to talk to the owner,” Schell says. “We try to foster a family atmosphere throughout the company. The values we have and the way we treat people is what sets us apart. Also, we can make decisions quickly because we are all onsite,” says Usher. “Karyn is a leader that people want to follow, and I am here to give her the support and tools she needs to succeed. It’s a great partnership.”

Michael Kear, Vice President of Sales and Marketing, notes that “among our larger competitors, we are the only one that has not been bought by a private equity firm. The fact that we are a local, family-owned business really resonates with our clients.”

Like many companies, DP Solutions had to quickly pivot to remote working when COVID-19 hit Maryland. “The No. 1 concern was how do we take care of our employees. Did the COVID-related initiatives add to the bottom line? No, but it was an investment in our people, and it shows them that they do matter, and we want to make a difference to them and their families. We have 65 employees and along with their families, we can positively impact hundreds of people every day by our actions,” Schell says.

Culture Matters

Like any effective leader, Schell sets the tone when it comes to company culture. “When I joined the organization, it was very much a male-dominated field. I started out in sales at DPS and had just reentered the IT field after 12 years working in manufacturing. While working in manufacturing I had the opportunity to wear different hats, which was good for me as I realized that I could do anything in my career with the right attitude and drive to move forward. I was always given the opportunity to speak my mind about what we needed to do as a company, what makes us different and how it relates to why people stay here,” she says. Schell notes that the average employee tenure at DP Solutions is 10 years, which is unusual in the technology industry, where the average tenure is less than five years, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“Our culture at DPS revolves around providing the best customer service possible, and there is little room for that in the RFP (Request for Proposal) process with government contracts, as it can be a little impersonal,” concurs Kear. “Customers have gotten more sophisticated, and they want to know what their customer service experience will be. Nowadays, no one buys a product on Amazon without first checking out the reviews. DPS has a 5-star Google rating and we thrive in providing an exemplary client experience, so focusing on small and medium-sized businesses just makes more sense for us.”

Some of DP Solutions’ clients have been with the company for over 35 years, and one of the keys to success for DPS has been the ability to identify and tailor customized solutions for each client and implement new technologies as the client’s business grows.

As an example, Schell mentions Baltimore Equitable Insurance, a 225-year-old Baltimore-based insurance company that has been a DPS client for over 35 years. “Baltimore Equitable Insurance started on an IBM mid-range platform, but as technology advanced and their business needs changed, we have always tried to be a strategic partner, understanding the needs of the applications, services being delivered and how best to leverage technology. More recently we transitioned them to Microsoft Azure Cloud, which was especially important this spring when they needed to work remotely. It has been a tremendous success.”

DP Solutions also works with Cove Property Management in Annapolis. “They were using a local storage device and not leveraging technology effectively. Through our engagement, we were able to transition them to Microsoft Azure Cloud. I recently spoke to the business owner, and he said it was the best decision they have ever made.” Now, Cove’s property managers and maintenance employees are equipped with tablets so that they can work more effectively at property sites.

DP Solutions, which boasts a 98% client satisfaction score, can serve as a company’s entire IT staff or augment a company’s in-house IT department. “Either way we are available 24/7/365. Clients’ IT staffs want to go on vacation and not answer calls at 2 a.m., so we can take care of that, manage backups and handle disaster recovery,” Schell says. She shares the story of when a couple of years ago, there was a fire at a manufacturing

company where the company’s servers were housed. “We were able to get the equipment out of their building, take it to our data center and the client could stay operational via their satellite office in Texas,” she says proudly.

With many companies’ employees working remotely nowadays, network security has never been so important. DP Solutions advises clients on IT security best practices, such as multi-factor authentication, assesses clients’ firewalls and overall network security and provides security awareness training.

“In IT, we can do everything perfect on the technology side, but if we are not educating the end users on best security practices, we will have issues,” says Kear. “We produce thought leadership, deliver content to educate clients’ staff and provide training and educational webinars. We can also perform phishing tests and other drills. Through education, we see an immediate improvement in behavior.”

Kear adds that despite the fact that DP Solutions is an IT company, its relationships with clients goes beyond solely technology. “We want to understand not just a client’s IT needs but what their overall business needs and goals are and what is most important to them. One of the biggest changes since Karyn took over is a shift from managing technology to managing the client and becoming a strategic partner.”

Growth in Staffing

Schell says that unlike many of its competitors, DP Solutions is actively recruiting and hiring, despite the national economic slowdown. The company has also added key individuals through acquisitions over the years. When hiring, she says that beyond technical skills, her company emphasizes soft skills such as communication and problem solving.

While the technology industry has experienced large growth in recent years, one area where the industry lags behind others is the percentage of its workforce who is female. Women make up 47% of all employed adults in the U.S., but as of 2015, they hold only 25% of computing roles, according to data from the National Center for Women & Information Technology. The number of women in technology is even less when looking at Black, Asian and Latino women. There are promising signs; however, as according to data from the National Science Foundation, more and more women

are earning degrees in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields.

It’s this disparity that makes Schell’s status as president of a large technology company even more important.

“Some of our most recent hires have all been women, including a former schoolteacher who wanted a career change. I believe that the engineering profession has traditionally been put into a male silo, but in the end, it comes down to who is the right person for the job. I am proud to say that DPS boasts a 25% female workforce,” Schell says. “Women and men may work differently, but what we are looking for when we are hiring are employees who will take care of people and make sure that problems are solved. We are a service company first so forming good solid relationships with our clients is important. We also make sure that we are providing what our employees need – if they need flexibility to take care of their children, for example, we work with them so they can be successful in both their career and their lives outside of work. I personally have been given some incredible opportunities to heighten my career both at DPS and in prior jobs, which as a woman in business, I know is not always the norm. But what I have noticed is that when you encourage and present new opportunities to people, regardless of gender, race or creed, they tend to take them.” I95



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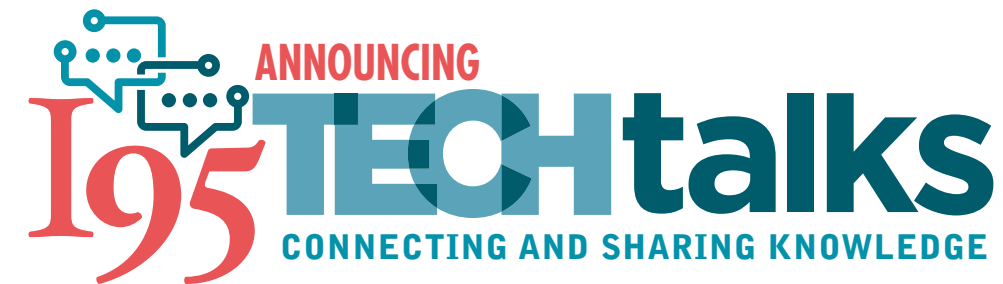
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