



*With CEO
Kathy Cloninger's
guidance, the Girl
Scouts are creating
the next generation
of leaders.*

By Paula Ketter



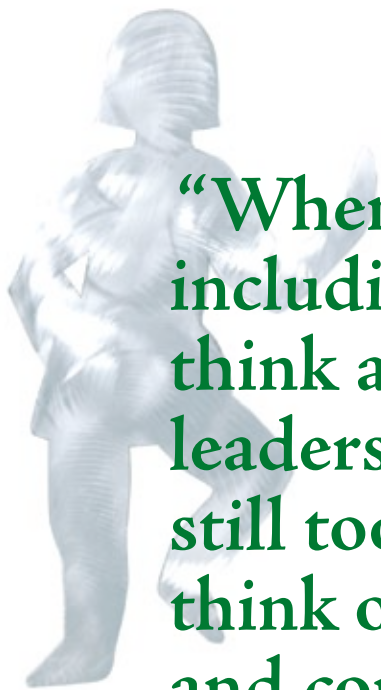
SCOUTING *for* LEADERS

There is a major transformation taking place at Girl Scouts of the USA and it has nothing to do with cookies.

This 95-year-old not-for-profit organization's sweeping efforts to increase its appeal and relevance to 21st-century girls focus on leadership development and provable outcomes that benefit girls, families, and communities. Historically known as a premier leadership development organization, Girl Scouts is remaking itself with a revamped business developmental strategy.



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—CEO Kathy Cloninger

“We have always been about leadership,” says Kathy Cloninger, who became CEO of the not-for-profit organization in late 2003. “Founder Juliette Gordon Low was putting girls in leadership roles even before women had the right to vote. But at this particular time, I think the call to leadership is even greater, and I think that resonates across the movement.”

Fueled by Jim Collins’s book, *Good to Great*, Cloninger asked volunteers, professional staff, and girl members two provocative questions; “What are we most passionate about? and What are we best at?” The answer was leadership development.

“What really came out of that process was (the realization) that Girl Scouts is the premier leadership experience for girls,” Cloninger says.

What is leadership?

The strategic transformation includes a new leadership philosophy, a new definition of leadership, and a new focus on leadership development for girls, volunteers, and staff professionals.

According to preliminary data from a study by the Girl Scout Research Institute, the majority of girls feel they have the qualities and skills to be good leaders, but most don’t aspire to be leaders. That key piece of data is one of the things that is driving this new business model.

“I think we need a new definition of leadership in this country,” Cloninger explains. “When people, including girls, think about leadership, they still too often think of command and control or power and position. Girls in this country need a new definition of leadership so they can relate to it and aspire to it.”

The new definition that Cloninger and her staff have created includes three components:

- knowing oneself and having confidence in one’s ability
- being able to have empathy for and relate well to others and appreciate diversity
- caring enough to make the world better.

“The girls told us they want to be able to make a difference in the world and they want to be active players, but they don’t want to be the kind of leader that they see right now,” says Cloninger. “The reason they don’t aspire to be leaders is that they don’t like traditional models of leadership.”

The new leadership philosophy, which was adopted by the organization’s board of directors, centers on self-confidence, social skills, social intelligence, and service to others. To become leaders, girls need to:

- discover—understand themselves and their values, and use their knowledge and skills to explore the world
- connect—care about, inspire, and team with others locally and globally
- take action—act to make the world a better place.

“We are really excited about being girls’ partners in their quest to change the world,” says Eileen Doyle, vice president

of program development for Girl Scouts. “What we hear loudly and clearly from the girls is that the world is waiting for their new inventions and new ideas. Our leadership message to the girls is to change the world.

“We tell them we can give them the tools and experiences to help them do that but they are going to be the ones to do it and we will be right behind them in their quest,” Doyle continues. “Putting the right words and experiences around that message for this generation of girls is really important.”

Girl power

The learning environment used most often by the Girl Scouts is the team approach.

“Girls learn best in a team setting,” Cloninger explains. “Being together with a group of girls where they have the experience to lead, whether they are 6 years old or 12 years old, can create a great learning experience.”

All of the learning experiences must be fun, relevant, and challenging, according to Doyle.

“Any activity we produce isn’t going to be a learning experience if it is not fun and relevant,” says Doyle. “Girls come to us on their own time. We play a different role in their lives, and we want them to come to us because we matter in their lives. Many of the girls tell us, ‘There are things I can get anywhere, but in Girl Scouts I get a sense of belonging and the shared memories that come with that.’”

Doyle stressed that it’s not just what girls do to gain the leadership skills and knowledge that is important, but also how they do it. All activities at the local, regional, or national level must be girl-led, which means girls have input in designing projects through girl-adult partnerships. At any activity or event, girls must learn by doing, and that experiential learning must include time to practice the action and time to reflect on the outcomes.

“One of the girls’ favorite things is not creating a new book or initiative. It’s the activities they had a part in planning with the help of terrific adults who know how to get them new insights and apply it to what is next in their lives,” says Doyle.

Face-to-face interaction

Although Doyle is working to give Girl Scouts more of a web presence, the girls in the organization admit that technology is not always the best learning tool.

“One of the things we always hear is ‘one of the unique advantages of Girl Scouts is girls, together in real time, in real life sharing their experiences,’” says Doyle. “When girls across the region get together to debate an issue or problem they see in the world, that’s where the uniqueness of Girl Scouts really comes into play.”

One of the challenges Doyle faces when designing programs for the girls in the organization is creating fun and relevant programs for girls of all ages. Girls are looking for

Girl Scout Leadership Development Model Outcomes

Using the three pillars of the leadership philosophy—discover, connect, and take action—the Girl Scouts have created 15 national outcomes to measure the success of their leadership programs and activities.

Discover Outcomes

- Girls develop a strong sense of self.
- Girls develop positive values.
- Girls gain practical life skills.
- Girls seek challenges in the world.
- Girls develop critical thinking.

Connect Outcomes

- Girls develop healthy relationships.
- Girls promote cooperation and team building.
- Girls can resolve conflicts.
- Girls advance diversity in a multicultural world.
- Girls feel connected to their communities, locally and globally.

Take Action Outcomes

- Girls can identify community needs.
- Girls are resourceful problem solvers.
- Girls advocate for themselves and others, locally and globally.
- Girls educate and inspire others to act.
- Girls feel empowered to make a difference in the world.

GIRL SCOUT MISSION:

Girl Scouting builds girls of
courage, confidence,
and **character**, who make the
world a **better place.**

new and exciting programs and activities every year, not just more reading material on the same topics.

“We are really excited about our new line of resources that represents who we are today,” Doyle says. “We use fictional stories and characters for our youngest grade levels—with characters that are larger than life and imaginative stories that are fun and meaningful. Those stories provide a springboard for the real-life adventures that we are inviting girls to have with the activities.”

Girls in the highest grade levels are looking for some challenging activities that will be relevant to the rest of their lives. One of those activities includes becoming an advocate for an important cause—which includes an eight-step process of identifying what they care about, creating a plan of action to support that cause, interviewing local leaders in the community about the cause, and then speaking on the issue.

“These particular skill sets will help them in their college education and also will help them grow their networks,” Doyle explains. “They will help them with where they want to be in the next phase of their lives.”

Much of the programs and events are planned at the local and regional levels, and involve community leaders and local female executives. Summer camps cover myriad topics including robotics, space, computers, and arts and drama.

Camp CEO, which was developed by a Girl Scout council in Phoenix, takes place in Phoenix, Boston, Chicago,

and Washington, D.C. Although each region creates its own portfolio of programs and activities, Camp CEO is built on the premise of recruiting corporate women to spend a week at the residential camp mentoring and talking to the girls about their rise up the corporate ladder.

“We have a lot of partnerships with women’s professional groups,” Cloninger explains. “Women in construction come to Girl Scout camps to help the girls build their own structures, and we have a lot of partnerships with female scientists who are involved in the NASA program. The whole philosophy of women as role models for girls is at the heart of the Girl Scout experience.”

In the fall, the Girl Scouts will unveil the New Girl Scout Leadership Experience, which is a series of themed journeys focused on building specific leadership skills. These journeys—broken out into different age groups—will generally run in six- to eight-week sessions and can be customized by council leaders and their girls. The journeys also come with facilitator guides to help the volunteers map out the skills development.

Adult learning

This strategic business transformation, which began in late 2005 after more than a year of planning, isn’t just about giving the girls a new leadership development program. The volunteers and professional staff also are getting new opportunities to build their leadership skills.

“I have a background in training and development,” Cloninger says. “I have a human resources business emphasis in my degree. I was an ASTD member. One of the first positions I created after I became CEO was chief learning officer.”

This transformation led Cloninger to change the Girl Scout focus from training to learning as part of the mission to build a new learning culture. She hired Angela Airall to lead that change as CLO. With a staff of 14, Airall oversees the adult training at the Edith Macy Conference Center, a corporate conference facility on 400 wooded acres just outside New York City.

“If we are going to be about leadership for girls, we have to reinvent our organization to focus on learning. We have to model leadership for the professional staff in this movement and for the volunteers, who are ultimately the role models for our girls,” Cloninger says.

Adult development had been part of the Girl Scout movement for a long time, but when this transformation began, Cloninger and Airall set out to re-examine adult learning. With the help of a needs assessment with both the professional staff and the volunteers, Cloninger and Airall started to examine what leadership development would look like for this all-girls organization.

“We’re launching a new Executive Coaching Practice for CEOs, building individual leadership capacity. We’re rolling out e-learning throughout the movement to reach 1 million volunteers to build systemic capacity,” says Airall. “We’re leading culture change initiatives through introducing new managerial and leadership behavioral competencies in headquarters which will build staff capacity. Our goal is to ‘Think Big, Pilot Small, and Scale Fast’ as we are marshaling tremendous change and transformation.”

New centers of excellence in talent management, organizational development, and leadership and executive development were created to strategically shape a leadership and learning agenda for more than 1 million volunteers, 400 professional staff, and 100 United States Girl Scout councils.

“We’ve been helping our volunteers to better understand their own inner leadership,” Cloninger explains. “We have developed a relationship with a very authoritative group called the Ashland Institute, which does a lot of work with global women’s groups. They do leadership from the inside out by taking women on very intense leadership journeys to find their own values and strengths that they bring to the world. They help them unleash their potential as women leaders to empower them to work with girls.”

The Girl Scouts have also joined forces with the Leader to Leader Institute and the Oxford Leadership Academy to help build leadership skills among the staff and more than 1 million volunteers.

Results of a survey with members of the senior leadership team showed the need for executive development of leaders, the selection and development of leaders, internal

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marketing of its learning function, client portfolio management, talent pipeline segmentation, transition management, and a leaders-as-teachers philosophy. The survey also found that succession management, leadership development programs, on-the-job and experience-based development, and classroom training were of high importance to the learning culture.

The Girl Scouts also will team up with Noel Tichy, professor of organizational behavior and human resource management at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan and author of many leadership books, including *Judgment*. The executive staff of Girl Scouts and councils will attend one of his sessions on building effective leadership teams.

Future leaders

Although this transformation is still in its infancy, the feedback has been positive.

“When I talk to the girls about our return to a focus on leadership and we start talking about what that really means, their faces just light up,” Cloninger says. “They feel that they have something of value to offer this country right now.”

The success of this transformation can have huge effects on the future workforce and the roles that women will play in the organizational structure of many companies.

“The reason that leadership is so critical right now is that we are not tapping the leadership potential in this country and across the globe,” Cloninger adds. “Women are more than half the population, but when you look at the top leadership positions in this country, less than 5 percent of the Fortune 500 companies are led by women. Less than 20 percent of the elected officials in this country are women.

“Girls need to prepare themselves for leadership because the workforce is going to depend on women to occupy some of those leadership roles in the future,” says Cloninger.

But changing the aspirations of girls is just one half of the equation. One of the reasons that women lack leadership positions in today’s workforce is because of some perceptions that still linger, such as the belief that women are too soft to be leaders or too aggressive as they move up the ranks.

“In the research we have been doing with both boys and girls in this country, both sexes think leadership needs a makeover,” Cloninger says.

The Girl Scout Research Institute is finishing up some research that includes the opinions of boys, girls, and parents on leadership and what is needed. That research should be unveiled in the next three months.

“When the world improves for girls, it improves for everybody,” Doyle says. “In some of the poorest countries in the world, when the status of women and girls improves, life improves for everyone.”

Girls can learn new skills, gain important knowledge, and have the confidence and courage to be leaders, but they still need to see women succeed at the highest levels. They don’t

GSUSA’s LEARNING CREDO

The Center for Leadership and Organizational Excellence needs your leadership to build a learning culture throughout GSUSA. Listed below are the guidelines and behaviors we hope to achieve in partnership with councils.

1. People in the movement at all levels are excited to learn and do so constantly.
2. Learning is available and packaged for almost any legitimate learning need.
3. People are motivated to self-nominate for learning: they seek it out, and do not wait to be asked or for it to be directly offered.

have to look any farther than the Girl Scouts national headquarters in New York. Cloninger—the CEO of a highly visible organization—is the perfect role model for the young girls in this movement and around the world.

“It’s critical for the girls to see me succeed,” Cloninger says. “If Girl Scouts is going to be about leadership, then the girls definitely want to see a female running this organization. But, I also think it is important for the girls to hear me talk about what I have tried that didn’t work because it shows them it’s okay to be vulnerable and admit mistakes. It’s a real opportunity to show them that they can learn from the mistakes they make. Taking risks and trying is sometimes just as important as succeeding.” **T+D**

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