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**IN THE LEAD**  
By CAROL HYMOWITZ



## Raising Women to Be Leaders


**The Four Sullivan Sisters Learned to Work Early, Aim High and Try Again**  
*February 12, 2007; Page B1*

Denise Sullivan was nine years old and her sister Maggie was eight when they organized their first carnival to raise money for muscular dystrophy. They mobilized friends on their block to build game booths in their backyard in Elberon, N.J. They rode their bikes to other neighborhoods to post signs advertising the carnival and collected used toys for prizes. One year, they raised \$25, charging a penny a game.

"We discovered we liked handling money and liked being in charge," says Maggie.

They have been bouncing business ideas off one another ever since, handling more and more money as they have taken charge of bigger and bigger enterprises. Denise Sullivan Morrison, 52 years old, is president of Campbell USA at **Campbell Soup Co.**, having advanced through a variety of high-octane jobs at Nestlé SA, Nabisco, **Kraft Foods Inc.** and other food giants. Maggie Sullivan Wilderotter, 51, is chairman and CEO of Citizens Communications Co., a \$2 billion telecommunications company.

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1  
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3  
 [Maggie Sullivan Wilderotter talks](#)<sup>4</sup> with

Their two younger sisters also are executives. Colleen Bastkowski, 45, is a regional vice president of sales at **Expedia Inc.**'s Expedia Corporate Travel. Andrea Doelling, 42, a champion horse jumper now devoting time to equestrian competition, most recently was senior vice president of sales at AT&T Wireless.

It is rare for four brothers to achieve such levels of success. The fact that they are sisters is striking. Half of all managers in the U.S. are female, but most are stuck in midlevel staff jobs.



Carol Hymowitz about the role her parents played in encouraging her and three sisters to become leaders.

In senior posts, men outnumber women by almost six to one.

The Sullivan sisters, as they were known growing up, beat these odds, in large part because of their upbringing. Their father, an AT&T Inc. executive, wanted to share everything he knew about business with his girls, including talking to them, while they were still in grade school, about setting profit-margin goals. Their mother taught them that ambition is a part of femininity.

Dennis Sullivan, a Korean War veteran who started his career at New Jersey Bell, expected to raise at least one son. When he had four daughters, he imbued them with his intense work ethic and encouraged them to be independent and determined, and to cultivate big goals. "He didn't have sons to mentor so he was stuck teaching us," says Maggie.

He brought home models of the Princess Trimline phone when it was being developed and talked about marketing. He took the girls to his office decades before the launch of "bring your daughters to work day." And he showed, through his own climb, how getting ahead requires changing jobs frequently to gain broad experience. From New Jersey Bell, he moved to New York Telephone, then to AT&T, back to New York Telephone and AT&T, to Ohio Bell, to AT&T again, and finally to Cincinnati Bell, where he was chief financial officer.

"I tried to inculcate them with what the business world is like -- how products get launched, customers sampled -- and about all the interesting people I met, and how they could be part of that," says Mr. Sullivan. "I'd ask them what their goals were and when they told me, I'd add a few more to their list."

Mr. Sullivan told each of his daughters to read at least one book a week and then write a report about it. He also expected them to get A's in school. When President Kennedy promoted the Royal Canadian Air Force fitness regimen, he woke his family at 6 a.m. to exercise together. " 'Rise and shine,' he'd shout to us and we'd all have to do leg lifts," says Denise.

Connie Sullivan, his wife of 54 years, was equally disciplined. A self-professed perfectionist who still wakes up at 4:30 every morning, she designed her daughters' Halloween costumes by August each year, dressed stylishly and enjoyed decorating her home. But she wasn't a traditional housewife. She became a Realtor when her youngest daughter started school and soon earned a spot in her employer's million-dollar club -- selling \$28,000 homes. "Money was tight then," she says, and she was able to boost her family's income.

The Sullivans expected their daughters to choose activities they liked and to figure out on

Carol Hymowitz talks to Denise Sullivan Morrison about the importance of networking and other career strategies for women.

their own how to excel at them. Aim high, they said, and if you don't get what you want, analyze what went wrong and try again.

When Denise, the eldest sister, didn't make her high-school cheerleading team at 14, she quickly set her sights on becoming a baton twirler in the marching band. A teacher tried to dissuade her, saying she didn't walk gracefully. But Denise talked to her mother and concluded, "I think what the teacher is saying is I'm a little pigeon-toed," recalls Connie Sullivan.

Denise worked to correct the problem by taking long walks. She became captain of the team and the first twirler in her school to perform with a fire-lit baton. Her mother worried she might get hurt, but instead of stopping her, sewed her a fireproof twirling outfit.

Maggie, "the one who was always pushing the envelope," she says, was elected to student government and raised money for community causes. In ninth grade, she was summoned to the principal's office to take a call from the White House. An assistant to President Nixon told her the president appreciated her invitation to a local benefit for Vietnam Veterans but couldn't attend. "Isn't he at least going to pay for the dinner tickets I sent?" Maggie asked. The president's check arrived the next week.

Several years later, when Andrea asked her parents to buy her a horse, her father -- who was being transferred from Cleveland back to New Jersey -- told her to figure out what that would cost. Andrea, who was 13, called horse breeders, trainers and moving companies, and concluded it would be most economical to buy a horse in Ohio and transport it east in a van owned by a Cleveland race track. She showed her father her cost analysis -- and got the horse.

By then, their father was being transferred frequently for work. Colleen attended three high schools and learned to make new friends quickly by developing a unique sense of humor. She created her own stand-up comedy routine. "I learned to not get upset or bothered by change and to be able to adapt to new situations," she says.

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5



Wherever they were, the sisters had to earn their allowance. Every Saturday, each chose a slip of paper from a big glass jar their parents called "the job jar," on which was written a chore: washing and drying the dishes, for example, or shoveling snow. They could negotiate with one another and swap chores, but had to do something. As teenagers, they also found paying jobs.

The teamwork their parents expected at home evolved into a support network, despite their competitiveness with each other at times. "Sure we fought, sometimes like cats and dogs, but we didn't float in the same circles, so we could give each other a different perspective," says Maggie.

When their younger sisters started working, Denise and Maggie encouraged them to take jobs in sales, where

individual performance is quantifiable. Colleen and Andrea both advanced in sales at AT&T and AT&T Wireless. Colleen sought her sisters' advice about her compensation contract when she was hired at Expedia.

"We call ourselves the Network because we each have different skills that we draw on," says Colleen, who calls Andrea every day and usually talks with her older sisters once a week. "Denise is the strategist, Maggie the networker, Andrea the communicator and I'm the competitive one," says Colleen. She started out as a secretary at AT&T. When given a chance in sales, she brought in so many new accounts she was promoted to management.

Denise and Maggie were "the pioneers who paved the way for us," says Andrea. They were among the first generation of women to seek management jobs. Both went to Jesuit colleges -- Denise to Boston College and Maggie to Holy Cross. Both worked part time to help pay their tuition and married soon after they graduated. They chose different business paths: Denise took a sales job at **Procter & Gamble Co.**'s paper-products division in Boston and Maggie accepted an accounting job at a start-up in California. Both were often the only women at business meetings in the late 1970s.

When Denise became the first woman in her P&G division to become pregnant, her boss warned her she would be fired if she didn't return from maternity leave in six weeks. She tried to humor him, saying, "Just pretend I broke a leg and can't walk around the stores for a while."

She never tolerated being held back. When her husband got a job in New York, Denise asked for a transfer within P&G and was told she would have to take a lower-level position -- even though she was leading her division's top sales team. She declined and found a better job at **PepsiCo Inc.** "I learned then to manage my own career -- and that loyalty to people counts more than loyalty to any one company."

Maggie had an easier start in Silicon Valley's start-up culture. She followed her husband, an Air Force pilot, to Sacramento and joined Cable Data, a software company with 300 employees. Founder Bob Matthews went out of his way to advance and retain women, offering Friday night baby-sitting services, free dry cleaning and other perks.

In her 12 years there, Maggie held 14 different jobs, including a stint as manager of regional operations. The job gave her profit-and-loss responsibility, "something a lot of women never get," she says.

Always pushing to expand her business network, Maggie went after a seat on the National Cable Television Association's board. Ten board seats were held by CEOs of the top cable companies, her biggest customers. Two seats were reserved for vendor companies such as Cable Data. Maggie called every vendor to try to get votes -- just as she had done in high school when she called every attorney in her local phone book until she found one willing to hire her as a typist.

She lost her first attempt to get on the board but made a successful bid the following year. Her fellow directors were shocked, she says. "I was a vice president of a tiny company and this was a CEO club," she says.

She and Denise supported one another's decision to keep working after they had children, agreeing they didn't want to quit careers they loved. When Maggie was nine months pregnant with her first child, she jumped on a plane because a customer refused to sign a contract unless she was there in person. When her two sons were young, she and her husband, who bought a vineyard after retiring from the Air Force, agreed he would be the one to stay close to home.

Denise divorced and remarried in her early 30s. She and her second husband, who also has a daughter, blended families and shared parenting. All the while, she analyzed her career moves to see what experience she needed to advance. She kept a chart, recording her tenure in each job, how much money she was responsible for, how many people she supervised and what she had accomplished.

When her husband told her he wanted to run a fruit farm in Bakersfield, Calif., Denise, who had joined Nestlé, told her boss, "The good news is I want to stay at Nestlé and the bad news is I have to move to Bakersfield."

"Where's Bakersfield?" he asked.

She reminded him that Carnation, which Nestlé had just acquired, had an ice-cream plant in Bakersfield. She set up her office there and made it Nestlé's national sales office for frozen/chilled foods.

But it took close to 20 years before Denise became general manager in charge of a business -- and she had to create the business she ran. A top sales executive at Nabisco by then, she wrote a business plan proposing a single-serve line of snacks. Former Nabisco CEO Jim Kilts liked the plan and put Denise in charge of what became known as the Down the Street division. This single-serve snack division is now run by Kraft, which acquired Nabisco.

While Denise preferred the reach of big corporations, Maggie felt less pigeonholed and able to advance faster in smaller companies. "I didn't get stuck in any one area like finance or sales, which would have driven me crazy, and I could skip a few rungs at a time," says Maggie. So, in the late 1990s, she became CEO of Wink, a small start-up that was 10% owned by **Microsoft Corp.** But when Wink was sold, she was recruited by Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer to expand the computer giant's government and educational markets.

She stayed just two years, then in 2004 once again was helped by her contacts to jump to the corner office at Citizens, based in Stamford, Conn. She knew five of Citizens' directors because she had served on a board with them a decade earlier. Since taking charge, she has helped to recruit five women and an African-American to what had been an all-white, all-male board, "so it better reflects our customers," she says.

She and her husband now keep homes on both coasts. The Sullivan sisters all are married to men who accommodate their wives' careers and don't seem threatened by their spouses' achievements or job demands. Denise followed her husband to California, but he followed her back to the East Coast when she joined Nabisco. Colleen's and Andrea's spouses also moved with their wives as promotions took them

around the country. Neither couple has children.

When the sisters are traveling for business, they sometimes stay at each others' homes. Denise is based in New Jersey; Maggie commutes between Connecticut and Northern California, where Colleen also lives; and Andrea is in Denver.

In the workplace, the sisters have had to outperform men, take jobs men didn't want and draw on the perseverance they learned as children. Andrea's chance to be a regional sales manager took her to Birmingham, Ala., when it was AT&T Wireless's worst-performing region. Three prior male managers had failed there. She went on sales calls with employees and purchased a ship captain's bell for the office. "Anytime anyone sold something, they rang the bell -- and even though it seemed hokey at first, it made people feel like winners," she says. In 10 months, the region went from last to first place.

The sisters continue to make their own opportunities, another lesson learned from their parents. When Denise was recruited to Campbell Soup in Camden, N.J., four years ago as head of global sales, she wouldn't sign on until she was assured she would soon be in line to head a big division.

Denise is now in charge of Campbell's \$3 billion soup, sauces and beverage division in the U.S., the company's largest business, and her challenge is to revitalize old brands. She has reshuffled her senior team and is rolling out shopping carts of new products.

Known by some employees for having "an iron fist in a velvet glove," she never ends a meeting until her managers agree on a plan and deadlines. "I want to see volume growth in the next few weeks," she told the head of sales at a recent meeting.

What she really wants is to be CEO of a Fortune 500 company. It is a job just 10 women currently hold and one that would put her a notch ahead of Maggie, one of 23 women heading Fortune 1000 companies. "I've been preparing to run a big company all my life," says Denise.

*Can children be taught to be successful? Share your thoughts with Carol Hymowitz and other readers.*<sup>6</sup>

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