

MAKING THE Connection TO Career Technical Education

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PART 2

Trailblazing Women of Chippewa Valley Schools CTE

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To understand the value of career and technical education (CTE), it is wise to listen to our alumni. Part 1 of this two-part series (published Nov 5, 2020) shared the story of Alexa Bartold—a remarkable young woman making her way in the field of manufacturing engineering. Today, part 2, introduces you to another CTE trailblazer in a different industry...

Lauren Kindzierski is a trailblazer in Customer Experience, or CX, as it is referred to in the marketing industry. Lauren graduated from Dakota High School in 2004, and today is Vice President of CX Marketing for Hinduja Global Solutions (HGS). Her career path from high school to today is extraordinary, and CTE certainly played an important role in that path.

Taking high school CTE courses in Business, Accounting, and Marketing all helped Lauren to prepare for continuing success at Walsh College. Beyond the technical and career-relevant knowledge she gained from these initial CTE courses, Lauren also built a network of mentors. Lauren says, "I intrinsically loved to build relationships with people, including teachers, who became powerful mentors." Among high school teachers that she cites as important mentors are Paul Sibley (Motivational Psychology teacher; now Executive Director of Secondary Education) who remembers Lauren as, "very mature and always asking good questions"; Gretchen Vermiglio (Accounting teacher, retired); and Nancy Atienza and Anne Seneker (Marketing teachers). Lauren said, "I did a little bit of everything in high school including Student Government, National Honor Society, served as a Student Aide for Mr. Sibley, worked a part time job, and participated in athletics (tennis and cheerleading). I was also a member of the CTE student Marketing organization called DECA and attended the DECA International Competition in Chicago with Ms. Atienza. That was the first time I ever visited a big city! At 18, with the help of Ms. Seneker, I also landed a co-op job at Keller Williams Realty." By 19, Lauren had earned her Real Estate License.

You may have observed already that Lauren was an active participant—if not master orchestrator—of her own educational and career development. You may have also guessed by now that Lauren regards mentors as critically important in that process. And as for "always asking good questions," that is a hallmark trait of critical and creative thinkers. High school was just the beginning, albeit an important one.

At Walsh College, Lauren distinguished herself and graduated as Valedictorian, earning both bachelor's and master's degrees there, and serving as adjunct faculty for two years, guided by her mentor, Dr. Mike Levens. Just as her high school co-op job provided invaluable, practical experience, so too did her college internship at Dialogue Marketing, where she continued to work for several years. Lauren was an early adopter of social media—something that was in its infancy in marketing at the time—and she identified a potential, new sector in the company's business model. She recognized early in her career that digital disruption would be a challenge faced by marketing professionals, and that digital disruption is best answered by digital transformation. As change often is, Lauren's thinking was not



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Lauren Kindzierski (Dakota HS class of 2004) is now VP of CX Marketing for HGS (Hinduja Global Solutions) and resides in Naples, FL with her husband and two children. Lauren loves her work, is clearly outstanding at what she does, and continues to grow her career. How to find work/life balance? Long before Covid-19 imposed work-from-home upon many people, Lauren intentionally and carefully arranged her childcare to allow her to work from home to provide more work/life flexibility.



As a leader in Customer Experience (CX), Lauren Kindzierski is often sought-after to speak at professional conferences and to share her insights about trends in her field. Most recently, in 2020, Lauren was the recipient of the Gulfshore Business 40 Under 40 Award for distinguishing herself in the profession and the community of southwest Florida where she now resides with her husband and two children.

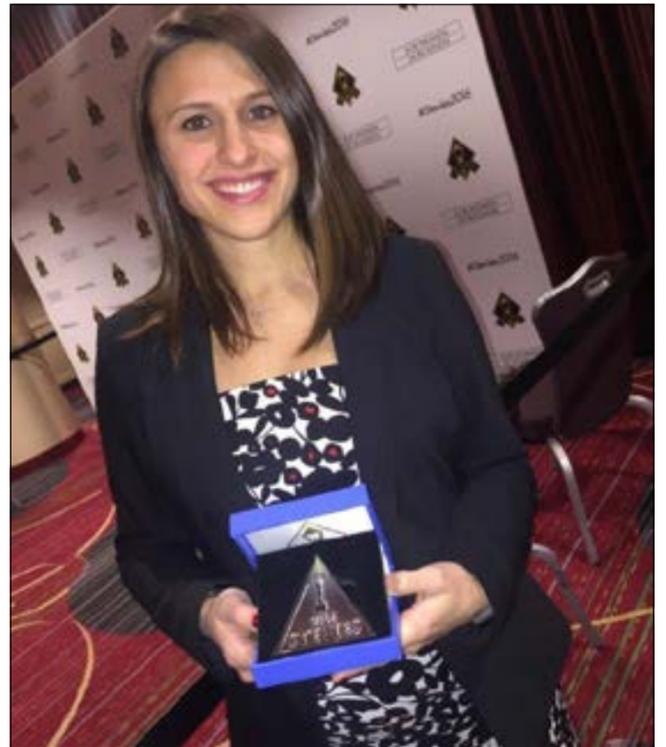
without some resistance, but her enthusiastic persuasiveness paid off in a big way. Peter Schmitt—another of Lauren's mentors—was a Board Member and Chief Strategy Officer at Dialogue Marketing. Lauren says, "Peter challenged me to come up with a plan for my social media idea, and ultimately, he gave me permission to create and drive my own division of the company called Social Lift, Inc. The unit was not an entirely standalone company, but I was given the creative freedom to run it like one."

Lauren's instincts brought her remarkable success that did not go unnoticed. In 2012, Lauren was selected as one of Crain's Detroit Business Magazine's "Top 20 in their Twenties" Award Recipients! Schmitt reported to Crain's that Social Lift became the most profitable unit within the \$31 million dollar company with the expectation that it would continue to be a major source of growth. Lauren knew that her creative vision of social media applied to marketing could specifically target a customer's needs to a client base. Lauren went on to become part owner of Dialogue Marketing and the company was sold a few years later.

Lauren has, and continues to be,

a leader in the field of Customer Experience (CX), a specialty that was in its infancy at the time. CX now involves strategies and tools like big data, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), analytics, automation to help route posts to the right team members, and decoding the voice of the customer in the social media space, among many others.

Lauren is a sought-after speaker and prolific writer in the field of CX. She annually publishes articles on Trends to Watch in CX, and while there isn't room here to fully explain the breadth and scope of her forward-thinking ideas, this author would recommend reading the Fall 2016 article published in Customer Relationship Management entitled 10 Customer Experience Trends to Watch, which looked forward to 2020, and a more recent article published in the Jan 2020 inaugural issue of CX insight where she similarly co-authored The Top Eight Trends Shaping the Future of Customer Experience. (Both articles can be found online.) Here, Lauren and co-author James Waite say, "The difference today—in 2020—is that it is no longer about why it's important to invest in CX initiatives;



Lauren Kindzierski (Dakota HS class of 2004) when she received the 2016 Silver Stevie Award – Women in Business – Executive of the Year. Recipients of this award are nominated by their peers for recognition for being a strong woman leader in business.

rather, the conversation is around how much investment and in which areas should be invested... 'silos data' problems will start to get resolved as customer data platforms (CDPs) become more prevalent, and give CX professionals a 360-degree view of the customer for better personalization and insight into the customer journey."

While the marketing industry overall may not be considered nontraditional for women, like so many industries, at the executive level, women may find themselves in the minority or even alone. Lauren's advice to young women: "Be passionate about what you are pursuing and what you believe in. Seek out mentors to guide you both personally and professionally. Board Rooms—and other situations—may

be all male, but never feel inferior or be afraid; stand confidently and inspire others with your passion."

Quite a journey it has been, and continues to be for both of our trailblazers, Lauren and Alexa. A common thread that I have observed, is the proactive responsibility they take for their own career development: taking advantage of opportunities; engaging in a variety of experiences to discover their passion and then working steadfastly to fully develop it; availing themselves of great mentors; employing future-focused, creative thinking; and ultimately, being unafraid to be who they are. We can all learn from the examples they have forged, and I thank both of our trailblazers for sharing the story of their journeys.

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