

# GIRL POWER

## Girl Scouts forge their future from rich tradition

*Founded in 1912, the Girl Scouts of America has been in the business of developing girls into women of purpose and character for nearly a century. With a renewed focus on building young leaders, Girl Scouts has begun a process of renewal that has affected nearly every part of the organization. Girl Scouts CEO Kathy Cloninger recently shared her thoughts on leadership and change with Kiwanis International CEO Rob Parker.*

**Rob Parker (RP): Do you think we are experiencing a leadership gap?**

Kathy Cloninger (KC): Many of the challenges we face are related to issues of character and leadership. At Girl Scouts of the USA, we also believe there's a component of leadership that's gender-based. Yet in almost every industry—from politics to music to media, banking, technology—women occupy fewer than 20 percent of leadership positions, and we think that's to our detriment as a whole. We all know that command-and-control-style leadership isn't totally effective. Many women bring a certain amount of intuition, personal connection and inclusive engagement to their leadership roles that we think adds great value.

**RP: What can Kiwanis do to encourage and offer opportunities for women to grow into the organization's leadership roles?**

KC: Leaders should be willing to openly discuss the obstacles women face and agree that they want to change the dynamic to be more receptive to women. Intentional identification of potential women leaders who can be

mentored and invited into the leadership pipeline is important as well.

**RP: From your experience in a volunteer organization, how effective is a focus on "positional leadership" in building leaders?**

KC: For us, the challenge with focusing on positional leadership is to make sure that the position itself doesn't become the end game. We have found that when you're focused on position you're more likely to think more about traditional power structures, command and control of the stereotypes we think about, especially in Western cultures. And unless you're very intentional about how you lead from the position, we won't get to the kind of leadership we desperately need in this. We'd recommend a more holistic approach that builds the kind of servant leaders that not only fill important positions, but also serve others at all levels.

**RP: How would you describe your leadership style?**

KC: Energetic, compassionate. I care a lot about how the work lives for people and how people are involved in the work

and whether or not they continue to get energy from work. I think people would describe me as inspirational because my leadership stems from my passion for what I'm doing. And I'm lucky enough to have found Girl Scouting, which is in my very core in what I was called to do. So it's easy for me to keep the passion alive. I'm very determined and ambitious for Girl Scouting. I have a big vision about what scouting can do and staying with that vision.

**RP: What qualities do you look for in the people you surround yourself with?**

KC: First there has to be that spark in their eyes in working on women and girl issues. And there has to be a compatibility of values between what's important to them and the Girl Scout Law. Skills are a given, but it's an intuitive fit to have the competence and risk while at the same time bringing the values. I look for people who truly want to be here and have a passion for the cause. We can't teach passion, but we sure can channel it for good.

**RP: What kind of advice would you offer to our volunteers leading other people to inspire and motivate people to do their best?**

KC: Being able to articulate and get people excited about the reason why you're doing what you're doing. Helping people see the bigger picture and the difference they're going to make by giving up their time. And then true engagement—helping people design the work they're going to do, allowing them to improve what they're doing and how they're doing it—creating a community by involving people.



## The Girl Scouts of America

### The Promise

*On my honor,  
I will try:*

*To serve God  
and my country,*

*To help people  
at all times,*

*And to live by  
the Girl Scout Law.*

Girl Scouts of the USA CEO Kathy Cloninger is committed to closing the gap for girls. “Organizations have to be willing to talk about unspoken issues related to gender,” Cloninger says. She recommends these tools to help girls succeed and lead:

**Role models.** Seeing other women succeed helps girls believe they can do it too.

**Clarity.** Many girls have misperceptions about what being a leader is, and that picture doesn’t appeal to them, Cloninger says. Help give girls a clear sense of what leadership means.

**Mentoring.** We can all help girls prepare to deliver when they’re given an opportunity to lead.

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—Kathy Cloninger, CEO, Girl Scouts of America