



Celebrating Volunteer Appreciation Week 2012

Excerpts from Lidia Soto-Harmon, CEO, Remarks 100th Anniversary Annual Meeting, April 14th 2012



It is amazing to be part of an organization so steeped in tradition. Juliette Low said, “Ours is a circle of friends, united by ideals”. When you combine the fun and friendship with the ideals of service and leadership you help build girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.

And we know that Girl Scouting works.

Our Girl Scout Research Institute interviewed over 4,000 women, half of them Girl Scout alumnae, on the long term impact of participating in Girl Scouting. This study says that adults who grew up as Girl Scouts had:

- a stronger sense of self,
- a more positive outlook on service and volunteerism,
- and more confidence to take on advanced training and degrees.

Girl Scouting exposes us to nature, provides us with a safe space to try new things, and encourages each of us to set higher goals and aspirations. When I meet women business owners they always tell me that their first entrepreneurial experience was selling Girl Scout cookies. Actually 80% of women business owners in the United States today were Girl Scouts.

And when you look at the women who serve in our nation's Congress more than 69% of them grew up as Girl Scouts too. Senator Barbara Mikulski was recently honored as the longest serving woman in Congress (she has served 35 years) and she carries a copy of the

Girl Scout Promise in her purse. And we know that every woman who has ever served as Secretary of State - Madeleine Albright, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Clinton - are all proud Girl Scouts.

INCLUSION

Girl Scouting builds character through a tradition of **inclusion**. We are an organization open to serving all girls and are not deterred when the task is challenging. Today, we engage girls regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or ability, we give them an opportunity to develop spiritually, physically and emotionally.

With our committed volunteers, our knowledgeable staff and our caring, open hearted girls, we lead the country on this issue. Recently at our “Keys to Leadership” inclusion conference, we learned ballroom dancing from a presenter in a wheel chair. It’s about shattering the outdated concepts of what we can do, and who we bring along to do it with.

I was also deeply touched when a troop of young Latinas from Manassas, Virginia, visited our Board of Directors meeting in February. One of the girls said that - if it were not for Girl Scouting, she would be on the streets by now. As she said this, her fellow Girl Scouts began to cry, the whole board of directors started crying. I cried too. She told us that six years ago she attended a Girl Scout conference for Latinas called “*Encuentro de Chicas Latinas*” and it changed her life. She joined the troop of *chicas* and was now working toward a college education – because of her fellow Girl Scouts and her troop leaders, encouraging her to “dream big” all these years.

So how do the individual elements, the Girl Scouting traditions, lead us to achieve our mission? Let me share a few of the places I have seen Girl Scout magic happen.

CAMPING

Girl Scouting builds courage through the tradition of **camping**. Girls learn about themselves and make lasting friendships while living in balance with nature. Though I didn’t grow up camping, I get to go camping one week each year at Camp CEO. Now I know we talk

about that a lot, but for me, I look forward to the opportunity to bond with girls and women leaders and to appreciate the beauty nature at our camps.

On the trails, sleeping in the woods at night, I am challenged to be courageous and bold - unafraid of the dark, of the latrine or the woodland creatures. But when I am in the dining hall and around a camp fire, I feel like I'm home. Sharing a meal or singing with my camp family. It is the best of both worlds: challenging and comforting at the same time.

Imagine a future where even more girls would be given this opportunity; to become courageous and independent while connected to a community of support.

GIRL-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

Girl Scouting builds confidence in girls because of the **girl-adult partnership**. We support the development of adults, because OUR confidence and joy is what makes Girl Scouting possible. If we have been given the confidence to lead, then we can step aside and let the girls take charge. If we have been encouraged to speak our minds, then we can encourage girls to advocate for what they believe in. If we have been taught to value collaboration, then we show the way for future leaders.

Growing up in Latin America, I witnessed first hand the struggles of families and children that were less fortunate. And it had a big impact on me, at age twelve, when I would see a girl my age who didn't have the things that I had or didn't have the future before her that I thought I did. I felt a great weight. The weight was partially gratitude; I was definitely grateful for all I had been given, but more so, the weight was a sense **of responsibility**. To whom much is given, much is required.

When I came to Girl Scouts, I was captivated by the shared sense of responsibility. It is built into the very foundation of our organization. Being friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong; helping people at all times – straight from the Promise and the Law. Girl Scouting constantly reminds us to open our arms wide to every girl.

We further the mission of leadership in each girl program we run. Just as Juliette Gordon Low encouraged girls to prepare for future roles as professional women and for active citizenship, we help young women become leaders in every industry. We teach them that the world is open to them and that *we need them* to make their mark.

We introduced girls to skills such as entrepreneurship through the cookie program, sustainability in the Environmental Leadership Institute, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Math through the 'Girl Scout Day at the National Air and Space Museum'. We are coaching the future leaders in these fields. Think of the contributions *past* Girl Scouts have made already. With their respect for nature, sensitivity to others, optimism for a greater world and their un-stifled brilliance. They are just what the world needs.

But our work is not done.

We have been doing this for over 100 years now, and yet:

- Today Women only hold 17% of seats in Congress. In the history of Congress we have only elected 277 women to the 12,000 men.
- Only 3% of fortune 500 companies have women as chief executives
- In 2010, women were still earning only 81% of our male counterparts' salaries.

Our world could use a little more of the collaborative leadership, the compassionate voices, the concerned wisdom that resides in our girls and young women.

And yet, even if we *were* equally represented at every table, that simply isn't enough anymore. We cannot continue telling girls they can have it all until we create the holistic support to **help** them follow their dreams while living a balanced life.

There are probably quite a few of us in the room who were told we could have-it-all. But "having it all" (typically for women) means doing it all yourself: running the PTA, managing your service unit, leading a troop, volunteering with your house of worship, starting your own business, completing your education, organizing the household while being a full-time community member, wife and mother.

We must make volunteering easier so that adult volunteers can *enjoy* being a part of girls' lives. We must involve **whole families**, so that everything doesn't rest on the shoulders of one mom. We must model the wellness, the wholeness, we hope to see our girls embody one day.

In the meantime, you can tell me about all the emails and forms and time and money and passion and stress and tears that might come from volunteering. And I will tell you about all the fun and joy and bravery and fellowship and community and *change* that comes from being a part of the Girl Scout Movement. And you and I will both know that **it is worth it**. Our *girls* are worth it.

We are not the debate team, or cheerleading, or piano lessons. We expose girls to a wide range of skills and pleasures in life. We help them experience achievement through earned awards but we also help them learn how to relax through team building activities and nature. We help them grow through service and personal challenges, but we also give them silliness and fun through songs, sleepovers and pizza parties. We promise to continue "enhancing their professional portfolios" while teaching them to try new things and to discover their own sense of joy.

Juliette Gordon Low said, "*The work of today is the history of tomorrow and we are its makers.*" We have effected great change for 100 years. And yet, we have great changes still to make.

If you think the task is too big and wonder can we do it, I have three words in Spanish for you to learn: "Si se puede." It can be done. Can you say it?

Si Se puede! <*audience echos - Si Se puede!*>

It can be done.

Together we can make a difference and... our work starts today.
Thank you very much!

Thank you to our Volunteers!
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