

Carla Lanter Cooper's journey to success started at a very young age. At the age of six, she started piano lessons. By age twelve she was employed, playing the organ for funerals at Eckler Funeral Home in Dry Ridge, and by thirteen, she was the regular organist at her home church, Dry Ridge Christian.

This was no accident. Her parents, Carl and Florence Lanter, were quite intentional in giving her a broad set of skills and experiences. Her mom, for instance, took the initiative to travel to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music to arrange for highly trained music teachers to come to Dry Ridge weekly to provide lessons for Carla and other local students. Quality, work ethic, opportunities, and "college" -- as neither of her parents had had the opportunity -- were consistent themes throughout Carla's childhood.

Following her graduation from Grant County High School in 1968, Carla elected to build on her already expansive music training and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Classical Organ Performance. Unfortunately, she discovered very quickly that if she wanted to make a living, she would have to enter another line of work. So, armed with her classical organ degree, she entered the corporate world. It was a hard sell. Human Resource directors didn't really perceive any correlation between "classical organ" and "corporate success."

Carla, however, did become a major corporate success, and as she looks back she believes her success was, indeed, largely due to the skills she learned as a musician. In music, she acquired the patience and discipline required to wade through an unknown piece that was most likely beyond her skill level. She learned the importance of first being mechanically and technically proficient before adding her own artistic interpretation. She learned how to focus, how to memorize, how to perform in sync with others, and how to be comfortable, alone, in front of an audience. Most importantly, she learned how to learn quickly. These skills became her strengths.

Carla's first corporate job was with Baldwin in Cincinnati, before joining Procter & Gamble for eight years. Along the way, whether it was sales, marketing, or leadership, Carla willingly embraced the wisdom and instruction shared by her supervisors - even if they were pointing out her shortcomings. She learned how to win and how to fail. If someone said, "You need to learn 'this'," she immersed herself in the subject.

Her career eventually led to twelve years with Coca-Cola USA where she served in several high-level management positions, ending as Vice President, Customer Marketing (1997-2000). She then moved to the Kellogg Company where she served as President of Natural and Frozen Foods Division, including Eggo, Worthington, and Kashi brands (2000-2003); and finally to PepsiCo, Inc., where she was Senior Vice President for Quaker, Tropicana, Gatorade Sales (2003-2009), with annual sales of \$10 billion. She left Pepsi, planning to retire, but was asked to re-enter the corporate world as CEO of Daymon Worldwide, a global leader in building successful retailer brands with \$1.2 billion in annual sales. She has served as Chair of the national Women's Foodservice Forum, Chair of the International Foodservice Manufacturers Association, and as a Board Trustee for the Culinary Institute of America. She has remained an active member of the Board of Directors for Ruth's Chris Hospitality Group. She has lived all over the United States, and her experiences have taken her all over the world.

Mrs. Cooper, however, sums up her career by acknowledging two important lessons. "First, I learned the incredible importance of developing personal relationships with others built on trust. Without that, I could not have achieved what I did. Those relationships are not only fulfilling personally, but they lead to opportunities to explore and grow. Second, I learned it is not about you; it is always about other people. As a leader, your job is to take the blame and to create an environment where your employees have the opportunity to be successful. This lesson changed my entire approach to leadership." She hopes to be remembered as one who led with class and grace.

Mrs. Cooper currently resides between La Quinta, California, and Asheville, North Carolina. She is recently widowed; her beloved husband, Steve, passed away February 4, 2019, after 41 years of marriage. In addition to her continued involvement with various professional boards and councils, Carla's first love, music, remains a strong foundation in her life.