



***Patricia Caruso, Director, Michigan Department of Corrections***

Patricia L. Caruso was appointed Director of the Michigan Department of Corrections in July 2003, following a 15 year career with the agency that includes experience as a business manager, warden, regional prison administrator and deputy director.

Director Caruso received a Bachelor of Arts in political science and sociology from Lake Superior State University and a Masters degree in comprehensive occupational education from the University of Michigan.

Active in a number of professional organizations, Director Caruso is vice president of the American Correctional Association (ACA) and president of the Association of State Correctional Administrators. She is a former member of the ACA Commission on Accreditation for Corrections, the ACA Standards Committee and the ACA Program Planning Committee. She is also a past president of the North American Association of Wardens and Superintendents and remains active in a number of other professional correctional organizations.

***What would you tell women who are contemplating taking the next career step and are seriously considering pursuing a CEO position?***

When considering the career step to a CEO position, the first thing one really needs to be clear about is why you are interested in the job. You have to have a burn in you to want that level of responsibility. It can't be about money or enhancing your retirement.

You need to do a self-reflection as to your comfort level. When you are in the number 2 position, you have someone you can go to for advice. When you are number 1, you're it. You have to decide which level you are most comfortable in. Sometimes we seek the top position because someone said we should consider it or because all fingers are pointing at you for that high position. You have to prepare yourself for what that means.

Long ago I was speaking with a fellow warden during a role-playing exercise. The message was that the director's primary job was to make the governor look good. If that was the case, then I was not interested. But the truth is, you have to be sensitive to the politics of the job. Sometimes that's hard for a career employee, but you have to be flexible and diverse enough to handle the politics if you are going to be a CEO.

It's important for women to step forward and seek positions like this. You have to look at life issues and you have to balance life and work or you won't do your job well. We

need women to keep pushing. It's important to get out there and make yourself known and seen. I have not had issues from the gender perspective. But I do recognize that not every state is like that.

One main reason that I am director now is that I invested in myself by becoming actively involved in organizations like AWEC, ACA and NAAWS.

***Why did you decide to step up to a CEO position – were you encouraged or mentored by someone?***

Several people encouraged me to look into moving up to a CEO position. There were a couple of people who said I really ought to look into this. A lot of the top people were taking early retirement and opportunities became available. You have to look at your own situation – are there family issues with small children, or are your kids grown? I moved four hours from home to take the Deputy Director position. My style is that I am not a great #2 person so I looked at this as an interim position. If I had not gotten the top position, I would not have stayed, not because I would have been angry about it, but because it was not the best fit particularly with the personal sacrifice required.

I believe in expanding your world. You have to discern what your priorities are, and invest in yourself, and being active in professional associations helps. It can be hard to get people to see the value of investing in yourself. AWEC is a good place to begin. You also have to be willing to pay our own way, or it's not very important to you. I rose up when my name and reputation became known outside the state of Michigan. Expanding your view beyond your state or jurisdiction will pay benefits.

It's not like going the traditional route toward promotions. There is a lot more to this, and I'm not sure that most people appreciate the difference. Political winds have more to do with it than other things, and you better be tough enough to take it or look elsewhere. You have to reach inside yourself to be sure you have a handle on it. You have to learn these things. You have no concept of the depth of this responsibility until you do it.

***Is there a downside if you make the first cut but are not the chosen candidate for the job? Would you apply again in the future if that position, or a similar one, became available again?***

There is no downside if you are not chosen the first time. Whether I would apply again after not being chosen for the job would depend on the reason why I was not chosen. Oftentimes there is a lot of political influence at work. Sometime it may have to do with commitments. You have to look at the rationale behind the decision.

***What do you, or did you, like best about being a CEO?***

I am comfortable being in the number one position. As director of the department I make decisions that influence the agency. I like having the opportunity to make a difference. I am grateful for that, especially during difficult times. We have endured difficult financial

times since November 2001, and many jobs have disappeared. I love our employees and I am proud of the work we have done.