



Theresa C. Lantz

***Criminal Justice Consultant
Retired, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Correction
Former Warden of correctional institutions***

Theresa Lantz has had a 34-year career in the field of corrections, beginning as a senior correctional officer for the District of Columbia Department of Corrections in Washington, DC. She served in several positions in Washington before becoming a training development specialist for the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections Academy in Boulder, Colorado. Ms. Lantz joined the Connecticut Department of Corrections in 1989 as director of training and staff development. She became a deputy commissioner in 1991, served as warden of several institutions, and was named commissioner of the department in 2003, a position she held until retiring in 2009. Ms. Lantz now serves as a criminal justice consultant to numerous high profile clients nationwide.

Ms. Lantz holds a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice from Westfield State College, graduating magna cum laude, and a Master of Science in criminal justice from Coppin State College. She pursued doctoral studies at Virginia Commonwealth University and University of Connecticut, and has a Public Leadership, Management and Skills Certificate from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

Ms. Lantz has served on the AWEC Board of Directors since 2008. She is a member of several professional associations, including the Association of State Correctional Administrators; Families in Crisis, Inc., and Family ReEntry of Hartford Conn., where she has served as president and member of the board of directors, and the Connecticut Criminal Justice Command Institute, serving as a member of the board of directors and instructor.

She has served as adjunct faculty member for the Tunxis Community College criminal justice program, an expert witness for the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons and a consultant to the Criminal Justice Institute.

Ms. Lantz has received numerous awards and honors, including the Community Partners in Action Recognition Award for Leadership in 2009. She also received the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science, Leadership Service Award; the Visionary Leadership Award from the Criminal Justice Command Institute and the Connecticut Department of Correction's Outstanding Managerial Performance award for several years.

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

Women who are pursuing a CEO position should prepare themselves as much as possible for the next step in their career. Don't be too forward-looking, do the best job you can do every day, no matter what position you are in. Look at the job you want, figure out what it takes to learn that job, develop yourself, use others as role models, teachers and mentors, open yourself up to learning new competencies and shadow/observe as much as you can. Establish good working relationships with your co-workers, subordinates, and boss - they will help you in your journey to performance excellence. I find so many women who won't consider a CEO position because they lack confidence in themselves. We have enough obstacles to overcome; don't let self-doubt be the roadblock to moving ahead. No one is born a leader, your followers designate you as the leader; the position only establishes your authority. Be the leader you would want to follow. Being a leader is not about knowing it all, it's about the ability to influence.

Nurture your compassion and relationships. (One thing I didn't do as well as I needed to was to take care of my physical health. I won't make that mistake again.) I believe women make great commissioners because we have perseverance, tenacity, finesse and good hearts. We don't have to act tough. We know that if our staff believes we care about them, then they will care about their jobs. If we take care of staff, they will take care of the offenders. I believe in "pay it forward," and I encourage women to take the journey to leadership excellence. It takes courage, risk and some sacrifice, but I promise you, it's worth it.

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

I stepped up to the CEO position because I love power, control and authority (pca). My values and motivation are "to do good," and the more pca I have, the wider scope I have to influence change, improvement, progress and lives. I had many mentors throughout my 34 years in this field, and I still have them in retirement. I purposely took jobs, attended training and established collaborative relationships so that I could have learning experiences. I think the first thing a woman has to do if she wants to move ahead is to look internally first, clearly articulate your values and mission in this career (if you can't define them, then no one will know you or follow you), assess your knowledge, skills and abilities, and develop a plan as to how to best meet your goals. Know that the quality of your relationships represents the success of your leadership. Respect is your value, no matter what someone says or does to you, they should never take away your value of respecting yourself and others. Always strive to take the "high road." Be values-driven, let others "be smarter" than you, they make great supporters. Invest in others and they will invest in you.

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?

I never accepted rejection in a position as failure. There are so many reasons why people are selected or not selected for positions. It's part of the professional journey. Learn from it and always keep your attitude positive and your options open. Every position I didn't get resulted in a better one

coming along. We are judged more by how we handle ourselves when we don't get our way or what we want. Don't take it personally (or at least don't let others believe you do), keep doing the best job you can in whatever position you are in. A sure way to never get a position you want, is to act poorly or talk poorly after not being selected. There isn't a woman today in our business who hasn't experienced some form of discrimination. Don't play the victim role; strategize how to be the victor. Move from victim to victor. Be patient with yourself, no negative self talk, and don't talk down or bash others who you think are not equal to you in competency. Don't whine, let others know how much you appreciate them, stay positive, enjoy life, don't give up.

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

I loved being a training director, warden and commissioner. These positions offer tremendous opportunities to influence and do good, in somewhat different avenues. I would have been happy retiring from any one of these positions.

What I loved about being Commissioner was the pca. I had a very clear vision, values and mission direction for the agency. I had wonderful staff, and I surrounded myself with people who were smarter than me. When things got tough, we stood together. I took the political and media hits for staff so they could take the risks (decisions) they needed to in order to be effective in their jobs. The fact is, bad things happen in our business. Learn from them, and never waste the opportunity to be able to improve or change things in response to a bad event. Being Commissioner was not always glamorous, always being "on" 24/7, and the oftentimes ridiculous political antics can wear on you, but it's worth it. Do good government, try to be politically neutral as much as possible. You are the corrections expert, make sure your voice is heard. Keep yourself and your family as priorities.