



WOMEN AT THE TABLE
EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP FORUM

Women leaders embrace rapid change in technology to guide their organizations

Women leaders of all industries are at the frontlines of new technology and the changes that trickle down from it through the levels of their organizations.

Buffalo Business First and Phillips Lytle LLP invited women leaders in healthcare, manufacturing and nonprofit sectors to talk about their insights and strategies involving artificial intelligence and emergent technologies.



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They shared their experiences using AI as tools for innovation, but also as a force to reshape their organizations, operate, make decisions, and better serve customers, employees and communities.

They also addressed the challenges that persist in leadership, particularly those facing women, beyond fast-evolving technology.

Panelists were:

- Kathleen Donaldson, Director, Clinical Navigation Center, Catholic Health
- Elizabeth Galanis, President and COO, Sealing Devices Inc.
- Morgan Hardy, CEO, Leadership Buffalo

The discussion was moderated by Anna Mercado Clark, Partner and Chief Information Security Officer, Phillips Lytle LLP.

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

Donaldson, a board-certified informatics nurse, translates complex clinical information into scalable technology and solutions that empower providers and improve patient experience.

She heads Catholic Health's Clinical Navigation Center and offers system-wide strategies to improve patient access, care and coordination. The effort requires leadership strategies that will help her teams embrace these tools where there might be hesitation or distrust, especially given that their organization is central to patient well-being and health.

Her strategy begins with utilizing transformational vision and bringing end users to the forefront to determine solutions they would like to see, so there is immediate buy-in, she said. The focus moves to

workflow, safety concerns and the patients, all guided by the Catholic Health tagline, The Right Way to Care, she said.

The organization uses predictive analytics, which makes predictions about what is next based on patterns observed from a large set of data.

"Behind the scenes, people did not realize that they were actually using AI and predictive analytics all along. We were pushing information out to the providers and to the nurses and alerting them of things that they would not normally be able to do in a quick and timely fashion without searching through charts," Donaldson said.

The effort resulted in reducing the time it takes for documentation of patient encounters from 10 to 15 minutes to one minute.

"What that did was allow our providers to have more time with our patients and not be so concerned about digging through the charts and doing all of that. It is really bringing them to the forefront and having that trust level with them," Donaldson said.

The organization also uses predictive analytics to address length of stay. For example, it used six years' worth of data to determine those patients who typically are discharged from the hospital to home care.

"Why is that important? You can start the authorization process days earlier with the insurance companies, so that the person is not waiting for a home care start or a subacute bed, not sitting in the hospital waiting for the authorization to come," she said.

Hardy heads Leadership Buffalo with a focus on listening, assessment, collaboration, and intentional impact to nurture leaders

toward meaningful change to the greater Buffalo community.

She likes to say, "Even though we are moving into a world with larger technology it is still people that's driving that innovation."

However, leaders will be left behind if they don't recognize AI's many benefits, Hardy said. Yet she understands the reluctance of those who feel it will cause an eventual loss of writing ability, logical reasoning and other high-level intellectual skills.

She feared that loss herself, until she realized AI can cut down on time it takes to do certain tasks. And who could not use a little more time in the day?

"AI does not replace the need for ethical decision making, emotional intelligence and critical skills. It really gives you an opportunity to marry them," she said. "You are still able to hold those things as valuable while also using a tool that is helping you to enhance them."

AI is coming, whether you like it or not, so embrace it, learn it and lean into it, Hardy said.

"There is no feeling like when you are looking at that job description, you had the ability to learn and educate yourself and be up on the latest trends, and you chose not to," Hardy said. "Then you really are left behind."

Galanis, a third-generation leader of family-owned Sealing Devices, said artificial intelligence is used as a tool to quickly and accurately send products through the factory and fulfill orders.

"It is really just getting the information that you really want in a much faster way," she said.

THE PANELISTS:



KATHLEEN DONALDSON
Director, Clinical Navigation Center
Catholic Health



ELIZABETH GALANIS
President and COO
Sealing Devices Inc.



MORGAN HARDY
CEO
Leadership Buffalo

THE MODERATOR:



ANNA MERCADO CLARK
Partner and Chief Information Security
Officer
Phillips Lytle LLP.



AI also has created new job categories because of the efficiencies it presents, she said.

“The data is so much faster that I do not need five people to do that job anymore, but now we need more continuous improvement people, more quality people,” she said.

Her company is keen on keeping its workers updated on AI and other new developments in manufacturing. Employees are encouraged to advance their skills in Sealing Devices’ in-house training center or go back to school so they can move to another level at work.

AI will never replace Sealing Devices’ employees, Galanis said. If there is reason to eliminate jobs in one area, those workers will be given a different, temporary job elsewhere in the company.

“I am constantly telling people if you are a good worker and you want to continue, you will always have a job, it may be a different job, but you will have something to do until business picks up,” Galanis said. “We are constantly letting people know that getting laid off as a good worker just doesn’t happen



in our company. That is just a culture thing that we have always been doing. AI will never change that.”

TAKING A GENDER NEUTRAL APPROACH

Each of the panelists rose as leaders in industries that across the ages have been shaped by traditional leadership structures.

Galanis said she approached the situation by bringing her self-assurance and skills, developed over the course of several career moves, to the table in order to be heard, trusted and recognized as a leader. It is all in your mindset, she said.

She sought out situations where she could rise as a leader. Prior to joining the family business Galanis took her degree in sports management to work in the male-dominated professional sports sector. She was in sales and at times the only woman in the room selling products to men. She has coached teams and headed parent-teacher associations.

“What has always gotten me respect is that I do not come in and say, ‘I am a mom of two boys. I am a woman and I need this and I need that,’” Galanis said. “I have never thought of myself as a female in a male-dominated space. I never put myself in that position. I am not one of these people that ever thinks about woman, man, gender, color. I take that out of the equation. I just think everybody brings to the forefront what they can bring.”

She said she hires good, qualified people at Sealing Devices and brings them together in a collaborative way, never dictating or micromanaging, but letting them perform their roles in the company.

Leadership is not defined by position and title, but sustained credibility and character, Hardy said.

“When I am working with leaders, when we are developing and redefining curriculum with Leadership Buffalo, I am helping people understand that it is not just about title, it is not just about how far you have climbed or how far you have gone, but it is really what you possess inside that will continue to make opportunities and open up those doors for you,” she said.

Among lessons learned on her way to leadership is that consistency is what counts.

“You do not have to be the loudest person in the room all the time, especially when you are in some of those dominated roles or rooms,” she said. “You might feel you should have spoken up more or asked that question, but I have learned that it comes through the influence and integrity that you are carrying on a regular basis.”

Another valuable lesson: leaders need to allow individuals coming into a new role or accepting a new opportunity to apply their unique selves to the task.

“One of the most limiting things that we can do is say to someone, ‘Those are big shoes to fill,’ because then you have already put limitations on them,” Hardy said. “When those things have been said to me, I think I was not born to fill somebody else’s shoes. I look at the imprints they have left behind as a roadmap.”

Donaldson is in a unique position of bridging two disciplines: nursing, typically dominated by women, and technology, men. It requires a balancing act of understanding the technology and application for patient care.

She recalled that recently she was among men reviewing equipment to be considered for virtual nursing to be adopted by Catholic Health, and she was told that she was “just caring too much.”

“I said, ‘We have patients to take care of. I agree with you on a technical perspective, but from a clinical or an operational perspective that does not make sense, and so we have to balance that,’” she said. “Healthcare might be a little bit more difficult because you are doing that and you are dealing with people.”

Her advice to women in similar situations: Speak up for what you believe in.

“Do it in a very respectful way by sharing the information, giving real-life examples and trying not to be confrontational about it. In the beginning I was very bold and confrontational. I did project management for the longest time, and I thought I could come in and just be a dictator. But that is not how it works,” Donaldson said. “I have learned over the years to be very mindful, to read the room and be very respectful while also getting my point across. That goes a long way, and people respect you more so for doing that.”

MISTAKES AS OPPORTUNITIES

The path to leadership is scattered with mistakes, the panelists said, but they have acknowledged them, fixed them and moved beyond them while retaining the respect of their colleagues. So, how do they do it?

Recognize that a mistake has been made as soon as possible and gather the strongest people you have to solve it, Galanis said.

“You have to acknowledge when something is not going the way it used to or the way you want it to,” she said. “Sometimes it is a result of a bad decision of an individual person, but sometimes it is just the nature of what is going on, like the pandemic and natural disasters or supply chain issues. Really, it is acknowledging quickly when you know something is not going right.”

Donaldson agrees.

At Catholic Health, mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn from and not to be penalized for. The health system has what it called the Great Catch program, which makes staff more willing to bring mistakes forward, Donaldson said.

Then gather your team to help figure out what was missed and how to fix it.

“Just be upfront and honest with yourself and your team. That really goes a very long way, not only with your team, but with everyone else involved,” she said.

A GOOD READ

Hardy said she is particularly inspired by this quote from writer Stephen Covey, “Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.” The quote comes from his book “The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness.”



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Shining a light on women leaders. That's The Phillips Lytle Way.

Phillips Lytle was proud to present the 2026 Women at the Table Executive Leadership Forum, where accomplished women leaders shared their insights on artificial intelligence, driving innovation, improving operations and navigating disruption in an increasingly digital world.

Celebrating highly respected women from across industries as they offered real-world perspectives on leadership, resilience and innovation has been inspirational and illuminating.



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ONE CANALSIDE, 125 MAIN STREET, BUFFALO, NY 14203 (716) 847-8400

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