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Like Mother, Like Daughter? Lauren Herring IMPACTS the Family Business

June 9, 2011

What makes some organizations thrive, while others struggle? Strong leaders often make all the difference. I recently had the opportunity to speak with Lauren Herring, 32, President and CEO of [IMPACT Group](#), a global talent development and career management firm with special expertise in relocation and outplacement.

Lauren's mother, Laura Herring, a psychologist by training, founded the company in 1988. The elder Herring noticed that many people in her counseling practice were distressed by corporate relocations. So she started a company to assist corporate clients in the complete relocation process, from finding jobs for spouses to schools for the kids and everything associated with "fitting in." And while the company continues to enjoy a solid record of success, its potential for growth is stronger than ever, particularly given a recent report in the [Financial Times](#).



Today, IMPACT Group generates over \$15 million in revenue with 100 full-time employees in 22 countries. As the only child of an entrepreneurial and "pioneering" mother, Lauren Herring did not initially plan to join the family business, but when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001, she jumped in to help. She started off doing project work, and from 2005 to 2007 drove the company's exponential international growth. In 2007, she led the successful integration of an outplacement firm IMPACT acquired, a move that doubled the company's size. With her mother now retired and serving as Chairwoman of the Board of Directors, Lauren is solely responsible for IMPACT's continued growth.

I asked Lauren what organizational practices and leadership tools she's implemented since taking over as CEO in 2009. Here's what she said:

Lauren Herring:

As in any leadership transition, there were some significant changes in terms of my leadership style versus hers, as one might expect. I mean, she is a pioneering entrepreneur, and really a phenomenal salesperson, and a very inspirational leader. I think people really viewed her as representing the soul of the company. [But] I want the company to be more than just about me. And I can't possibly work hard enough as the company grows and takes on more product lines, and more geographic capabilities — it can't all be about me. So I think that's one of the things I

worked really hard on: to build up others within the organization so they can take on more and more leadership roles as well.

I also added more structure to the organization. I want [employees] to work on what they need to do according to the business goals and the strategy, not what they think is on my mind today.

Q: Are you aware of anything IMPACT Group does that is different from the norm in a typical corporation?

LH: For the size of organization that we are, we're probably more virtual than the majority of companies, by a significant margin. Many of our leadership positions are not based in our headquarters. We have a large group [of people] that work from home [and] a tremendous amount of just telecommuting or flexible work arrangements in general. And our delivery methodology, we've been very virtual from the very beginning. Even in the '80s, we were doing telephone counseling, for example, rather than face-to-face for some of our work.

We also have a significant 'adjunct pool,' which is what we call a group of flexible workers that we pay on an hourly basis. So when our business spikes, we can utilize that talent, and when it's lower, we can manage our fixed costs. Many of those people are independent contractors who might have a small business of working with different organizations, doing their own consulting. These people have tremendously broad skills as well. So some of them, in addition to providing career counseling, might also have experience in consulting around leadership development. At different times, we've had that group up to about 300 people.

Q: How do you hire people?

LH: I'm going to hire, first and foremost, for cultural fit. I believe there are a lot of people out there that could probably do whatever job I'm looking for, but it's got to be the right fit. We're a company that is mission driven around making a positive impact on peoples' lives. And we want to make a profit doing it. So I look for people with passion, integrity, who strive for excellence and a handful of other competencies that are really important [such as] innovation, flexibility and managing your own career.

Q: So with employees all over the place, how do you yourself imprint your leadership across the organization?

LH: That's a great question, and I think about it a lot because I've really tried to make this a company that is about being more than any one of us. And at the same time, as a leader, clearly I'm visible as well. And so I really have worked tremendously over the last several years on facilitating strong communication and dialogue with the teams. I do that in a variety of ways – newsletters, webinars, 'coffee talks,' and a quarterly all-hands meeting. A lot of it just comes down to what I expect from my leaders and my team. I want a collaborative culture. I want to break down siloes.

The first couple years, I spent a lot of focus on how I can be the kind of leader that they need me to be. And over the last six months, I have switched that around a little bit, and recognized, you know what? I think I'm doing a lot of the work here, probably like a lot of women. I'm putting myself out there all the time. I need to do more to expect them to meet me halfway a lot of times. Communication is a two-way street.

So what's next for this impactful leader? Lauren says she is continuing to learn and evolve in her leadership style. Considering the progress that she's already made – growing the business by 700 percent in 10 years – I'd say she's one woman to watch.

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