

Home > Features > Profiles in Leadership: Kristen Frohnhoefer

## Profiles in Leadership: Kristen Frohnhoefer

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By Wanda Kenton Smith

Kristen Frohnhoefer, president of Sea Tow Services International, Inc. and the Sea Tow Foundation board of directors, was raised in the family business, but came aboard full time in 2003 after a teaching career. She has worked in virtually all aspects of the business and oversees internal operations.



Besides selection as the 2020 Darlene Briggs Marine Woman of the Year, she was also tapped by *Long Island Business News* to be on their Top 50 Women in Business list, as well as being honored by *Boating Industry's* Women Making Waves and selected as a *Boating Industry* Mover and Shaker finalist. She was recently elected vice president of Marine Marketers of America.

### BI: What have you enjoyed most about your career in the marine industry?

**KF:** I've really enjoyed the friendships I've made and relationships I've developed. More recently, video meetings with people working from home have allowed us all to meet each other's family and pets, to get a peek into their lives outside of work. This change in how we connect with our colleagues has allowed us to strengthen relationships which is one of the positive outcomes from the pandemic.

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I also enjoy that the marine industry is one that works together; even competitors are friendly competitors for the most part. I haven't come across many with an "ego" who think that they are better or more valuable than someone else, which is refreshing. There is recognition that everyone plays a role in success.

Most of us love what we do and love the industry itself. While there may be some job-hopping, once you work in marine you don't tend to switch industries. This creates consistency and a good amount of institutional knowledge.

In the past decade I've also seen the industry become very welcoming to those joining the industry with fresh ideas and skills. I love that we are seeing more diversity in the industry. Women are in more leadership roles than ever and we are seeing individuals of every race and age building their careers here. Continuing to build diversity on all fronts in boating is critical to our continued growth and success.

**BI: How do you stay on top of your game?**

**KF:** I ask lots of questions and am willing to learn. I recognize that I don't know it all... and can't know it all. I try to enable my team members who do have the expertise to take the lead.

I have a desire to understand the topic at hand and will research to find answers to my questions – whether asking a colleague to share their expertise or finding another resource.

I actively look for ways to do a job or task in a more efficient manner. I look for ideas and best practices from teammates, colleagues in the boating industry, as well as from other leaders and other industries. I learn best via in-person/live education and embrace these opportunities.

**BI: What advice do you have for young professionals desiring to launch a career in the boating industry?**

**KF:** Just do it! Get your foot in the door, learn and work your way to your ideal role. You can learn from every sector of the industry, from retailers to manufacturers to service providers. Use that knowledge and experience to grow your career – to find your niche in the industry.

I would also encourage those who are still figuring out what they want to do in life to seek out internship opportunities. Internships are a great way to learn about the different jobs that exist in the industry and what might be a good fit. Plus, if you are successful at your internship, you may get hired or get a great referral.

**BI: What is your mantra or words you live by?**

**KF:** I've been on mission over the past two years to affect change and push my team to open their minds to possibility. My colleagues are tired of hearing me say, "Just because we did it that way in the past does not mean it is how we will do it moving forward!" From this, our team has embraced technology and rethought our internal processes to streamline them for efficiency and effectiveness.

I also make a concerted effort to show gratitude and appreciation. I've tried to say, "thank you" and "good job" and express appreciation for efforts more than ever before.

**BI: What leadership traits do you feel are most needed in the marine industry today... and why?**

**KF:** We must be willing to change and adapt. Customer expectations have changed dramatically in the past decade due to technology and we need to move faster to keep up, which is not always easy. We must be willing to take a hard look at how we have been doing things and be open to moving ahead in a different manner.

**BI: Who are your mentors and what have they taught you?**



**KF:** My mother, Georgia Frohnhoefer, has been my unofficial mentor since a young age. I've worked with her in multiple businesses since I was a child due to my serial-entrepreneur of a father. In my teen years she taught me about accounting, how to purchase inventory, customer service skills and managing a team. When Sea Tow started, I learned even more about customer service, sales and marketing and so much more. Besides skills, what she really taught me was to not doubt myself, to be confident that I can learn anything if I put my mind to it. She has always had an "I can do that!" attitude and that has stuck with me through life.

**BI: Last great business book, webinar or seminar?**

**KF:** I recently participated in a small/medium business leadership summit run by Salesforce including a session by Brian Solis. I liked how he simplified and defined pathways to growth and success: Innovation is doing a new thing, Iteration is doing the same thing better and Disruption is doing new things that make the old ones obsolete. A good thought starter for a team to spark conversation.

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