



From French Fry Cook to President

“Don’t say ‘no’ ... say, ‘I want to know more.’” — Jan Fields, former president of McDonald’s USA

Jan Fields remembers her first time in a McDonald’s. She was a college student dressed to interview for a “real job” when she stopped in. She had never eaten at the chain before because her hometown didn’t have a franchise. The manager mentioned the restaurant was hiring, so she submitted a job application.

The next day, she learned how difficult it was to make a McDonald’s French fry correctly. Thirty-five years later, she left the company as president of McDonald’s USA.

“When people offer you an opportunity, don’t say ‘no’ right away. Say, ‘I want to know more,’” Fields told business leaders, students and educators at Benson Blackburn’s NextGen Speaker Series. “When you close the door to start with, you didn’t get the opportunity to find out if there was something else behind that door. Take advantage of opportunities.”

By learning more about the job that had walked up to her, rather than turning it down for her original interview and classes, Fields opened a door to a future bigger than she imagined. She never finished college, but she ranked on lists of the most powerful women in business by both Forbes and Fortune magazines. She has served on corporate boards, including Chico’s FAS and Ronald McDonald House Charities. She emphasizes the importance of charitable work to corporate culture.

“That’s one thing companies have to do,” she says, giving a nod to Michael Benson, CEO of Benson Blackburn, who heads up



Michael Benson and Jan Fields



PATRICK TRITTLER

DAVID LEGUS

NextGen. “People have expectations that you should give back to your community. McDonald’s was able to find a way to do that. It’s one of the things I’m most proud of about

McDonald’s, but not a lot of people know about it.”

Fields is not alone in noting Benson Blackburn’s community contribution via NextGen.

Marsh Private Client Services sponsors the series. Its Vice President Business Development Patrick Trittler says, “Jan is an impressive speaker. I loved hearing about her path to success. We are fortunate to live in a community that is home to successful entrepreneurs, innovators, CEOs and business owners,” he says, adding, “NextGen provides a forum for students and community members to hear them tell their stories so we can learn from them.”

David Legus is the managing director of Meristem Family Wealth, also a NextGen sponsor. He echoes the sentiment about the wealth of knowledgeable businesspeople unique to Naples.

“Meristem strongly believes in being a lifelong learning organization, and NextGen is a wonderful representation of this concept. This has become a marquee event in Naples, not only to listen to the speakers, but for the networking and community sponsorship. We are excited to see how this speaker series can evolve and become even more beneficial to the community.”

Fields also says networking with a wide variety of people — people who are different from you — was key to her success.

“Build relationships: That’s number one,” she says. “If you only want people who are in your same club or church, you will not go very far. You learn more from a variety of people. I built relationships with the cleaning people.” ❁

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