



WOMEN EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP | QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

3rd QUARTER 2026

"Find out who you are and do it on purpose."

– Dolly Parton



FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Cindy Kushner
WEL Founder & President

Two Icons. One Legacy.

We lost two icons within the last month—**Dolly Parton and Gloria Steinem**—two extraordinary women who used their talents, their voices, and their influence for the good of others.

We honor these two women who looked completely different on the surface, yet spent their lifetimes building the same foundation for humanity: a world rooted in **equality, respect, dignity, and unapologetic self-confidence**.

Gloria was the sharp, strategic intellectual of the feminist movement. Dolly was the glittering, storytelling icon of American music. Together, they represent the brilliant duality of how we advance human dignity.

And remarkably, their paths crossed decades ago.

In 1987, *Ms. Magazine* named Dolly Parton one of its Women of the Year. *Ms.* was co-founded by Gloria Steinem, who personally wrote about Dolly and recognized something in her that many others had overlooked: her unique power to use her talent, her independence, and even the very things others underestimated about her to empower herself and others.

It reflected something these two women understood long before many others did: **there is more than one way to advance equality and human dignity.**

Gloria showed us how to challenge and dismantle the structures that hold people back.

Dolly showed us how to use authenticity, talent, economic independence, and generosity to create new possibilities.

One helped map the terrain of equality, while the other sang the anthem of freedom. But both understood something fundamental: **when people believe in their own worth, they become far more capable of changing the world around them.**

Because of Gloria Steinem and Dolly Parton, millions of people walk into rooms today with their heads held a little higher, speak a little louder, and believe a little more deeply that their voices and their stories matter.

They taught us that respect is non-negotiable. That confidence is a source of strength. That authenticity is powerful. And that perhaps the ultimate measure of success is not simply what we achieve for ourselves, but what we do to lift others along the way.

We thank them. We honor them. And we carry their fire forward.

That is the foundation of WEL.

"If you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain." —Dolly Parton

"Feminism is fundamentally about self respect and respect for others. It's not saying women are more important, just not less important." —Gloria Steinem

I leave you with inspiring thoughts for the quarter at the end of this newsletter with my new column, "Cindy's Spark: Words to Lead By", timeless wisdom for leaders worth pondering each quarter.



OUTLOOK ON PROGRESS!

The CEO Effect: How Women at the Top Transform the Entire Boardroom.

When a woman takes the helm as CEO, she doesn't just break a glass ceiling—she shatters it for everyone else in the pipeline. That is the resounding conclusion of the

recent **2026 CWDI Report: Women CEOs – Opening Doors to Boards and C-Suites**, published by the Washington, D.C.-based Corporate Women Directors International.

Examining 3,222 blue-chip companies worldwide, CWDI found that while women hold only 6.7% of CEO positions globally, companies led by women are dramatic accelerators for gender parity:

- **The Boardroom Surge:** Under women CEOs, women occupy an average of **38.3%** of board seats—far outstripping the 28.9% global average.
- **The Multiplier Transition: When a woman directly succeeded a male CEO, average board diversity skyrocketed from 34.5% under the predecessor to 56.1%.**
- **C-Suite Impact:** This gravitational pull extends right into senior management, where women-led firms average 36.8% female executive officer representation (nearly double the 21% global norm).

The Business Case: “The data is clear: women CEOs aren’t just symbolic figures; they are the engines of structural change.” said Irene Natisidad, CWDO chair. “They create a pipeline of talent. And numerous global studies show this leadership style is also linked to higher returns and better risk management.”

The Takeaway & Call to Action for WEL Community.

Progress at the top and progress in the boardroom are inextricably linked. As leaders in our respective industries, we cannot afford to look at board seats and executive suites in isolation—it’s incumbent upon us to actively support qualified women in our ecosystem. Mentoring, sponsoring, and accelerating women into the C-suite is the most powerful systemic mechanism we have to secure valuable boardroom seats.

Source: Corporate Women Directors International



Please Join Us in WELcoming the Following Member to the WEL Community!

NEWEST FLORIDA DIAMOND MEMBER:



Jacqui Hartnett, CEO
Starmark International

WEL DESERVED APPLAUSE

If you have received a promotion, award, or other celebration-worthy recognition, we want to be among the first to congratulate and celebrate YOU!

Please email Admin@WELFlorida.org if you would like to be featured in our newsletter or social media.



**LESS THAN ONE WEEK UNTIL OUR MOST
POWERFUL EVENT OF THE YEAR—HERE'S TO
KICKING OFF YOUR FALL STRONG!**

[Make Your Reservations](#)

MEET OUR PANEL OF DISTINGUISHED LEADERS



Sharena Ali
CEO
Cinch Home Services



Babette Hankey
President & CEO
Aspire Health Partners



Jacqui Hartnett
CEO
Starmark International



**Moderator
Melanie Dickinson**
President & Publisher the South
Florida Business Journal



2026 WEL SIGNATURE EVENT

INNOVATE, INSPIRE, LEAD: WOMEN SHAPING THE NEW WORKPLACE

SEPT 29TH | LAUDERDALE YACHT CLUB

Register Now for an Engaging and Empowering
MUST-ATTEND CEO PANEL EVENT!

WEL'S 2026 SIGNATURE EVENT
INNOVATE, INSPIRE, LEAD:
WOMEN SHAPING THE NEW WORKPLACE



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SEPT 29TH | LAUDERDALE YACHT CLUB | 5:30-8:00 PM

TAMPA NETWORKING EVENT
THE POWER OF REINVENTION
OCTOBER 20, 2026 | 5:30 PM
OXFORD EXCHANGE, TAMPA



Tampa Leadership Community—if you're contemplating your next amazing chapter after building a successful career—this one's for you!

Join us for a powerful evening of connection and networking, and hear inspiring remarks from Lisa Haynes to empower *your* next chapter.

Whether you're eyeing a leadership move, considering a pivot, planning your retirement, or simply feeling called to something more, reinvention doesn't mean starting over. It means building on everything you've already accomplished.

Lisa Haynes knows this—and has lived it—firsthand. With 30+ years of executive leadership experience across industries—including roles as a CFO and nonprofit executive—she's navigated her own reinventions and now shares her practical GOT THIS framework, from her book *You've Got This: Reinvention with Intention*, to help you embrace change with confidence, leverage the value of your experience, and take intentional steps toward a meaningful next chapter.

We look forward to connecting with you on October 20th and invite you to bring a guest who could use this inspiration!



[Make Your Reservations](#)

And be sure to check out all the events open to our WEL community through our Strategic Alliances with Athena Alliance, Florida Women on Boards, and Leaderboard.



We look forward to connecting with you at an event soon!

INSIDE OUR COMMITTEES

Expanding the WEL Ecosystem: Creating Connections That Matter

Anila Nicklos, Committee Chair and Board Member - WEL Florida



At WEL, leadership does not happen in isolation. It is strengthened through meaningful relationships, shared knowledge, and a community that opens doors.

The WEL Ecosystem Committee was created to extend the value of WEL membership beyond our organizational boundaries. By cultivating partnerships with select leadership groups, professional communities, and complementary resources, we build direct pathways to elevate our members' professional journeys.

Our focus is intentional. Every relationship we explore starts with one core question: *How does this create meaningful value for WEL members?* Through these strategic connections, members gain broader access to executive and board development, influential networks, thought leadership, and high-visibility growth opportunities.

In doing so, the Ecosystem Committee brings WEL's mission—**Advocate. Educate. Connect.**—to life at scale. We are building a dynamic ecosystem where accomplished women leaders connect, contribute, and create possibilities for one another. When we strengthen the ecosystem around our members, we expand what is possible for all of us.

PARTNERS & SPONSORS SPOTLIGHT

WEL's annual Signature event is the highlight of the year, and we're delighted and honored to receive the support of corporate sponsors. We'd like to highlight our two Signature sponsors this year: Amzak Capital Management and Berger Singerman.

For an insider glimpse into the benefits for corporations of sponsoring organizations like ours, we connected with Michelle Williams, COO of the Machining Division and Director of Engineering at Amzak Capital Management, and Jessica Pavlik, Chief Strategy and Executive Officer of Berger Singerman.

Michelle, thanks for joining us today. We'd love to know what value sponsoring a group like WEL brings to your company?

Private investment is a relationship business. The introductions that matter tend to come from people who know a firm's reputation firsthand rather than from a pitch, and WEL is one of the few places in South Florida where that many senior executives are in the same room with a genuine interest in knowing one another. Sponsoring the organization keeps Amzak present in that community and in regular conversation with leaders across industries we would otherwise only read about. The cross-sector perspective alone — how operators in real estate, professional services, and manufacturing are reading this market — is worth the commitment.



Let's stay with Amzak for a moment. How does supporting WEL connect to your company's own mission or purpose?

Amzak invests on a long horizon, and long-horizon capital depends on the strength of the businesses and the business community around it. South Florida's growth over the past decade has been substantial, but growth of that speed only holds if the region's leadership grows with it. WEL is doing that work directly — developing and connecting the women who run companies here — which makes supporting it consistent with how Amzak thinks about building lasting value: back the people and the institutions that compound over time.



Switching gears, Jessica, beyond Berger Singerman, what impact do you see your sponsorship having on the broader community of executive women across Florida?

Organizations like WEL create important opportunities for executive women across Florida to connect, exchange ideas and build relationships with peers. We are proud to support a community that brings accomplished women together and helps strengthen those connections across industries and throughout the state.

Corporations have to be intentional with their marketing and sponsorship investments. Michelle, what would you tell another company weighing a 2027 sponsorship or partnership with WEL?

Look at who actually shows up. WEL's membership is senior, engaged, and unusually generous with its time, and the programming is built around real professional exchange rather than logo placement. A company that treats the sponsorship as a relationship rather than a line item will get considerably more out of it than the dollar figure suggests. Our advice would be to attend an event first and see the room for yourself — the decision tends to make itself.

Finally, Jessica, let's close our short Q&A with you. Berger Singerman holds both Signature Event sponsor and Annual Partner status. What does that level of visibility with WEL mean for your firm?

Our continued partnership with WEL reflects the value we place on building long-term relationships within Florida's business community. Being both an Annual Partner and Signature Event sponsor allows us to support WEL's mission and programming throughout the year while building lasting relationships with its members.

If you haven't already purchased tickets to our 2026 Signature event, please do so. We want to thank all our sponsors for their generous support and we look forward to seeing our sponsors and their guests at the private reception prior to the Signature event for a chance to meet with our moderator and panelists!

To support WEL as a Signature event sponsor or as an annual partner, please contact us at admin@wel florida.org. We look forward to working with you.



Thoughts to ponder...

- One perspective: Think beyond your own narrow concerns. There's a whole big universe out there, much of which you know almost nothing about. Specific factors drive everything that happens, even if you cannot see most of them. Keep that in mind before assuming and acting as if it's all about you. **Seek to learn all you can, to understand and experience more each day.** At the same time, continue to remain humbled by the enormity of all that's beyond your comprehension. Before casting judgment, remember that you probably don't have all the facts. When acting on assumptions, consider the limited knowledge on which they're based. **You have one perspective, and it has much value. Yet there are countless others that also have great value.** Move energetically forward based on what you know and on all that matters to you. In so doing, **seek to respect what matters to all those around you as well.** ~ Ralph Marston

- Logic will get you from A to B. **Imagination will take you everywhere.** ~ Albert Einstein
- **People of accomplishment rarely sit back and let things happen to them. They go out and happen to things.** ~ Leonardo da Vinci

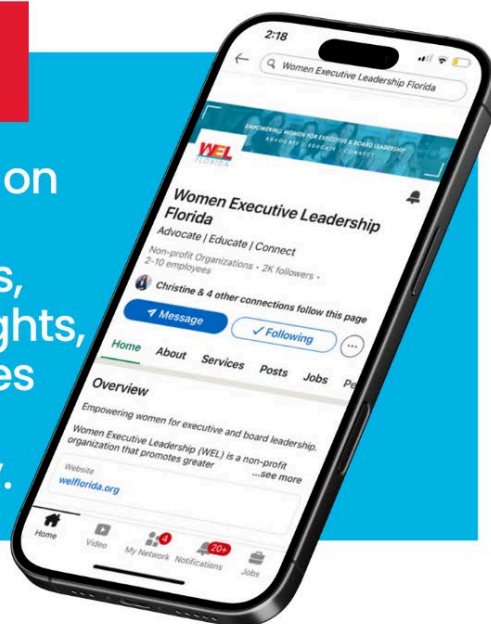
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LEARN MORE ABOUT MEMBERSHIP - CLICK HERE

LET'S GET SOCIAL!

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To enjoy the latest on leadership events, member spotlights, community highlights, and other resources to elevate your leadership journey.



THANK YOU TO OUR ANNUAL PARTNERS

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MARSH

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