

TRANSCRIPT: **ROXANNE ORSAK** **INTERVIEW**

Roxanne Orsak · Executive Vice President of HEB

TRANSCRIPT

An interview with Mrs. Roxanne Orsak, Executive Vice President of HEB. Orsak is a 1988 graduate from Texas A&M and an inducted member of the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry.

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Could you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your career?

My name is Roxanne Orsak. I'm Class of '88. After graduating from Texas A&M, I went to work for HEB. I started in the store management training program, it's about a year-long program that trains you in every aspect of how you operate an actual store, a retail store. And from there, my career grew. And I began to run areas of the store and over a five-year period, then was able to run my own store. In that time, I also stopped for a little while and went to the University of Southern California to, into the Food Industry Management program to kind of broaden my knowledge of the food industry. And came back and spent another several years in store operations, supervising stores, and doing some marketing and advertising. And about within nine years, was asked to go into marketing and did that. I ran our photo business for the company. And so, when you run the photo business, it was the, basically the head of marketing the buyer, and I ran the photo plant operations that we had at HEB. I was basically a small business owner inside of HEB where I got to learn every detail of managing a business from one end to the other. Probably one of the best experiences I had. From there I was asked to run our cosmetics business, then to run our drug store business, and then ultimately to run our general merchandise business. And then I put those altogether, and we decided that I would run all those businesses. And a phenomenal experience for me as well. Then I left and went to Harvard for a while, into an executive management training program. And then from there, came back and have been – started what we call our HEB Plus stores, which are a large format, big, huge stores. We now have 25 of those open in the state, and we're growing three to four a year. And then I began to work in format development, developing different formats for HEB, for different types of customers all over the state. And so, I still run the drug and general merchandise business, but also work on a format for our company. That's kind of where my career is, and I've been here for 22 years.

Why did you choose to study agricultural economics?

You know, I grew up on a small farm in a small town. And I was in the FFA in high school, and I had a fantastic ag teacher who kind of gave me some guidance. And I really didn't know what I wanted to do, but I did know I needed to go to college, and I did know I wanted a career somewhere in, in agriculture because that's what I knew, and I really had a passion for it. And so, when I came here, I actually started out in Ag Education and quickly learned within weeks that that wasn't really my passion. My passion was agriculture but more business related. So, I moved over into the Ag Economics Department, and I can tell you was absolutely phenomenal because I got, I got the business that I wanted, the business sense that I needed, but I also got it all agriculturally based and that was really what I was looking for. And that's why I joined Ag Economics, and really appreciated the education that I got.

What activities at Texas A&M most influenced your career?

You know, I think a few things about A&M that influenced me the most is one, there's a phenomenal work ethic at Texas A&M, not just from the professors but from the students, especially in the ag area. You find that a lot of the students are from smaller areas of the state,

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and they grew up with a great work ethic. And that's what I continued to evolve with at A&M, which was a huge influence for me. The other thing is a number of professors that really kind took me under their wing and help guide me, which was a great influence for me as well. And then just the camaraderie of, of just being in a great place where everybody respects each other and has admiration for what you do and respect you as an individual. I think those were the big influences for me.

What advice do you have for a student unsure of career decisions?

You know, what I would say is think about, as a student and you're getting ready to go out into the workforce, what is your passion? If you enjoy people and you want to be around lots of people, then think about where you can do that and influence people the most. If you think about my industry, which is in retail, you know a single HEB store, for example, can employ over 500 people. You can influence people from age 16 to age 75. So, you have a lot of influence there. Think about what your passion is. I always tell folks that if you're not having fun, then stop doing it because work will turn into a grind, and it won't be fun anymore. Find what your passion is. Connect the company that is most significant to you in terms of your personal passion and your own ethics and your own morals and beliefs. Is that the company that you want to work for? Are you proud to say where you work? And if you can't be, then don't choose that company. And always be cautious. One of my biggest lessons learned was that I, I went to work for a company that offered me the lowest pay of all the entry-level jobs that were out there at the time, but I have to tell you, it was the best decision I ever made because I went to work for a privately held company who takes great care of their people, great care in the community, and has the ethics that I wanted and has allowed me to have humongous success in this company.

What advice do you have for students looking to match your own success?

You know, I think, there's kind of a few things that I look for is one, do you have a passion for the business that you, that you're in? Are you really curious about it? Are you always studying to learn new ways to improve your business or what your competition is doing or what other people are thinking about? What is your customer asking you to do? You know, do you have that level of curiosity? Then use that curiosity. Challenge the system. Take big risk and, and push beyond what, what you would think you're comfortable doing. We have plenty of people who are great managers who stay within their comfort zone. If you want to advance in your career, push outside of that comfort zone. Try things that you're not sure will actually work. I find that the more mistakes I make, the more learning I have out of it, and the better I can grow and the better I can help my company. And when you, when you study and you plan effectively, those mistakes are good learnings. And so, take those kind of risk, push out of your comfort zone, and be curious. But at the end of the day, take care of the people that you work with.

How have you managed to balance time for family, work, and other commitments?

Well you know, I, I worked through college. Obviously, I had to, and I actually had two jobs. I worked on campus 20 hours a week, and then I went home most weekends, and I worked for my boyfriend, who's now my husband. But he owned an auctioneering business, and all his auctions were held on Sunday. So, I worked pretty much every Sunday I could with him as well. I had to work my way through college. I had no source of income to be able to, my parents couldn't help me through college, so I had to do it. And you just prioritize what's really important. And where do you spend your time and you learn to be really efficient with your time. And as you know, my career grew, and my husband and I, raising two children, you learn to prioritize and there's a time when you need to come first, to make sure that you're healthy. And you've got to focus on your health and your well-being because if you're not healthy, you can't support everyone else around you. And there's time when other people come first as well, but you constantly reprioritize. But always make sure out of a 24 hour day, you take a couple of hours for yourself to make sure that you're eating right, you're exercising, and your focused on you as a human being because then it allows those other 22 hours to focus on everyone else. And it's a huge thing I think a lot of, whether their students or our businesspeople, lose sense of is their own personal well-being and that's when stress builds, that's when anxiety builds. So, watch that work-life balance in terms of make sure you take the time for yourself.

What are your thoughts on being selected to the Tyrus R. Timm Honor Registry?

You know, this is a phenomenal – an award that I, I clearly didn't expect. The folks that are in this registry are very impressive. Dr. McGrann, who I worked for when I was here 22 years ago, is in this Registry. And just to hear the stories of those who have been inducted, you know, is pretty phenomenal. And I'm very honored by it and very humbled. I realize that, you know, I grew up in rural America, in small-town Texas and to see what A&M can do to help young folks, like I was helped 20 years ago, and to grow the way that I've been able to grow is, is what this award is all about. And I'm very honored to be here.

Is there anything else that you would like to tell A&M students?

You know, what I'd say to the students of A&M is stay curious. Ask lots of questions. When you're interviewing for a job, interview the company that you're interviewing as hard as they're interviewing you. Make sure that you're going with a company that has your ethics, that has your morals, that has your beliefs. And make sure that you're focused on what your passion is because then there is no work, it's just fun and excitement. And so, think about that and remember that maybe the highest paying offer isn't always the best.

Thanks for listening

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