

Inside Out Leadership

How Professional Development Leads to Personal Growth

When Jackie Sacks started working at Round Top Mercantile in Round Top, Texas, as a teenager, she never anticipated she would eventually become co-owner of the business.

“I had aspirations to become an agriculture teacher,” Sacks says. “I worked at the store through high school and college, and I worked my way up the ranks. I spent time stocking products and learning how things worked, like how to fix PVC pipe.”

Once she arrived at college, Sacks discovered how much she enjoyed her business-related classes. She also realized her appreciation for her customers. It was at that point that Sacks’ perspective shifted, and she saw the potential of building a career at Round Top Mercantile. She returned to the store after earning her degree and became more involved in the daily operations, including inventory management and bookkeeping.

“To this day, I still wear many hats at the store,” Sacks says. “I enjoy the interactions with customers, but I also enjoy being behind the scenes, maintaining the daily ebb and flow.”

Building a Stronger Foundation

Over the course of about 10 years, Sacks identified ways to grow Round Top Mercantile. She helped lead a store expansion that added more than 11,000 square feet to the store. She also further developed the paint department, and she manages the store’s connected grocery operation. Sacks serves in a human resources capacity, too, managing more than 20 employees across both the hardware and grocery businesses.

While she was busy finding new ways to expand the business, she sought additional opportunities to build on her knowledge and skills. In 2016, Sacks was named an NRHA Young Retailer of the Year honoree for her achievements in the business. Then in 2017, she attended the NRHA STIHL Foundations of Leadership Conference, which brought together retailers from across the industry to learn leadership lessons and business best practices from industry veterans and experts. Sacks says both experiences provided her the connections and the learning opportunities she was looking for.

“These programs are directed to the independent retailer, and they offer tools that have helped me train our diverse employee base,” she says. “I have become more confident and more aggressive at keeping things running at a good pace. I am a successful woman in what is traditionally seen as a man’s industry. When I can show a customer that I do know what I’m talking about and I can help them, their faces are priceless.”

Sacks says that her experiences in leadership development have helped her become a more thoughtful leader in her business, approaching management and decision-making more cautiously than she has in the past.

“I used to have such a knee-jerk reaction that sometimes it cost me a customer or an employee’s morale. Before, if I witnessed an employee making a mistake, I would correct them on the spot, in front of their peers,” she says. “I learned that our employees are more comfortable going to the back office without anyone else listening in. There isn’t always a need for in-the-moment correction, and the need to listen to both sides of a situation or hear out the issues is critical.”



“My goal now is to increase the confidence in my employees that I support their decisions made in my absence. I want them to know I will back them up.”

—Jackie Sacks,
Round Top Mercantile

Making a Community Impact

Sacks’ industry-specific skills have also helped her be more effective in her leadership roles in the community. Sacks has volunteered in the Round Top community for as long as she has lived in town, about 12 years. But her experience at Round Top Mercantile and in leadership development programs has led her to think differently about how her involvement can impact her business and her personal development.

Sacks currently serves as vice president of the local school district parents’ club, after serving for three years as the group’s president. She is also a member of the district’s education foundation, serves as a council member and event coordinator at her church and volunteers for her community’s Oktoberfest event and biannual craft show.

“It’s important to me to volunteer,” she says. “We can’t always give monetarily, but I can give as much time as my schedule allows.”

Sacks says being involved in the community helps create connections with customers and with other businesses, which in turn can boost business. She says she’s also developed more confidence to discuss tough issues



In between managing operations at **Round Top Mercantile** and volunteering at various events, **Jackie** and her husband **Michael** raise two young daughters.

with employees and customers and to bargain with vendors.

“The more you’re involved, the more connections you have and ideas you generate,” she says. “You can more easily find a food vendor for your next store event or come up with something new to attract customers.”

Through the education foundation, Sacks helped coordinate a school supply drive with the local Lions Club, which was hosted at Round Top Mercantile. The school bus parked on the property, and community members could drop off supplies and stop into the store to shop.

As a co-owner of Round Top Mercantile, Sacks understands that she has reached the top of the ladder. Her current role is now focused on supporting her employees and developing them into successful managers who she can trust with everyday operations.

“A good customer and successful businessman once told me, ‘You must be able to manage your business from the moon,’” she says. “My goal now is to increase the confidence in my employees that I support their decisions made in my absence. I want them to know I will back them up.” ➡

NRHA Foundations of Leadership

Through the NRHA Foundations of Leadership online course and the NRHA STIHL Foundations of Leadership Conference, retailers gain insight into their own leadership styles and how to become effective managers. Learn more at nrha.org/rli.

