

## PUGET SOUND BUSINESS JOURNAL

### Women of Influence: Michelle Barnet's path to leadership began with folding linens (Video)



Michelle Barnet, president and CEO for Pineapple Hospitality, talks about winning the hearts and minds of employees to get the job done.

[Michelle Barnet](#) is the president and CEO of [Pineapple Hospitality Co.](#), which owns hotels in the Seattle area, Chicago, San Francisco, San Diego and Portland.

She has led the company since its inception in 2010, during which time revenue increased by an impressive 400 percent and the company has gone from 25 to 500 employees. Just this year, the company expects to see 33 percent growth.

In addition to her day job, Barnet has also served as the chairwoman of the Seattle Humane Society's annual auction and sits on the organization's board.

**Growing up did you gravitate toward leadership roles?** Growing up I loved to organize and create. I have always been curious about finding new and better ways to do things. As an example, in college we had a small Greek system. A few friends and I didn't like the existing sorority options, so we set out to charter a new house on campus that is still thriving there today. Leading through building consensus and/or creating new pathways and options has always been my passion.

**Who was the most influential figure in your career?** The most influential person in my life wasn't a person at all. As I look back, the true single influencer on my path was the solid value system that I learned from so many amazing people who took their time over the years to share with me their lessons. I learned from one the value of listening, from another the value of asking the hard questions, from some the value of educated risk taking, and the glory that truly comes from being willing to fail. Mostly I learned from great people over and over, that the right thing is rarely the easy thing to do but truly is the only option. I thank all those that continue to guide and help me to refine my vales as I strive to grow into a better leader.

**What is the most common mistake you see young ambitious professionals make?** Lack of ability to listen. There is a true talent and skill to listening, and I watch many young managers not understand its value. Learning to listen in business is about using all your senses and leaving your own ego out of the process I have found listening is sometimes more powerful and can be much more persuasive in consensus building than talking.

**What surprised you about your first management role?** After graduating from the management training program with Westin Hotels, each candidate was allowed to choose a management role in a department. I chose housekeeping, as I had a great mentor who told me that if you could run a housekeeping department in a large hotel in a highly diverse employment arena like Chicago, you would have the confidence and experience to grow quickly in the industry. So my first true management position was as a housekeeping manager at the Westin Hotel Chicago. What singularly surprised me the most was that you had to earn the respect from subordinates, the title didn't matter. My first lesson in leading by example. I learned quickly that to lead an inner city culturally diverse housekeeping crew, you had to show you could do their job just as well as they could. So I set about learning to clean rooms, (15 per day to standard), fold linens fast and correctly, (not as easy as it sounds), stocking carts and linen closets correctly, etc. It took time and lots of hard work to gain respect, but some of the most beloved people I remember from the beginning of my hospitality career were from managing that group.

**What advice would you give your 18-year-old self?** Dear 18-year-old self, relax and carve out enjoyment time during the journey. Don't rush through it all. Take moments to just sit back, watch, and appreciate the people and experiences happening around you as they are so fleeting. The juxtaposition of you in the world will never be the same in the next moment...appreciate and enjoy. Lastly, have an understanding that the universe is on your side, feel the energy, don't over control or over steer. It all works our just the way it is supposed to, even if it doesn't seem like it at the time.



ANTHONY BOLANTE

Michelle Barnet, a 2017 Women of Influence honoree, is the president and CEO of Pineapple Hospitality and StayPineapple Hotels.

**Michelle Barnet**

**Title:** CEO

**Company:** Pineapple Hospitality Co.

**Born:** Seattle

**Raised:** Bellevue

**Reside:** Sammamish

### **Education**

- Scripps College, Claremont, California 1983-1985
- Bachelor of Science in hotel and restaurant administration, University of Nevada at Las Vegas School of Hotel Management, 1988

### **Career**

- Westin Hotels and Resorts management training program, The Westin Chicago, 1988-1992
- West Coast Hotels, Seattle Washington, Corporate sales 1992-1994
- The Inn at Queen Anne, Seattle, Washington, Managing Director, (one year consulting contract) 1994-1995
- Hospitality Associates, Spokane, Washington, Corporate Director of Sales, New project feasibility Manager 1995-1997.
- Columbia West Properties, Property Manager 1997-1999
- Columbia West Properties, president 1999-present
- Pineapple Hospitality Co., CEO from 2010-present