

**AT THE HELM**

**Cindi Bigelow**

*President, Bigelow Tea, Fairfield, Conn.*

**Generation of family ownership:** Third.

**Company revenue (2007):** More than \$110 million.

**Number of employees:** 330.

**Years with the company:** 22.

**First job at this company:** Cost accountant. My father thought I should understand how the costing worked in the company from the ground up.

**At what age?** I joined the company when I was 26. I worked for Joseph E. Seagram and Sons and then I obtained my MBA from Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. I joined Bigelow Tea after graduating from Kellogg.

**Most memorable thing I learned from my father:** Be kind to people. He's a gentle, good man who's interested in everyone.

**Most memorable thing I learned from my mother:** Be a good communicator and don't shy away from controversy.

**Best thing about this job:** I'm able to make a difference in the lives of our employees and in the people in our community—not to mention that I get to take care of the consumer by serving them a phenomenal cup of tea every day.

**Worst thing about this job:** I'm responsible for the livelihood of 330 families, which is a tremendous responsibility.

**One of our greatest successes:** That after 63 years in the business we are still 100% family-owned and are

now the No. 1 specialty tea company in the U.S.

**Quote from our company's mission statement:** Our company has been and always will be based upon strong ethical business practices and is dedicated to only the highest standard of behavior in all areas.

**Artwork on my office wall:** A one-of-a-kind photo of a cup of Constant Comment tea surrounded by orang-



es by Peter Baker, a Fairfield, Conn., photographer.

**One of my greatest accomplishments:** Improving the executive team's working relationship. Eight years ago I started to work closely with this group of strong individuals and, to be honest, they were not the most effective at working together. During meetings, I could feel the polarizing thought process. But over time, as I worked with them, they slowly

started to appreciate each other. It took time—they needed to know that I saw and appreciated each of their strengths, but that I also wanted and needed to hear from many different perspectives in order to ensure that our final plan (whatever it might be) had the greatest chance for success. As their trust and confidence increased, they started functioning more and more like a well-oiled machine. Today, they are truly a shining example of a powerful and effective team. I am extremely proud of watching that develop over the years.

**Best thing about working in a family business:** The tight-knit working environment you can create.

**Worst thing about working in a family business:** The tight-knit working environment you can create.

**Advice I'd give someone wishing to enter this business:** Know there is nothing you can do, other than put in the time, to speed up the process of learning how to lead.

**Philanthropic causes our family supports:** Our local causes include Mercy Learning Center, Cardinal Shehan Center, Fairfield Senior Center, Fairfield YMCA, Center for Women and Families, Wakeman's Boys & Girls Club, Grasmere Eldercare Center. Also, in 2003 we bought and restored the Charleston Tea Plantation in Wadmalaw Island, S.C., to preserve a piece of history. It's the only tea plantation in North America and is open to the public.

**Book I think every family business leader should read:** *Soar with Your Strengths*, by Donald O. Clifton and Paula Nelson.

**Words I live by:** "Live every day to the fullest and always thrive to be better than you were yesterday."

— As told to Patricia Olsen