
Where Are They Now?

Linda Weber attended Miami University and interned with Kroger the Summer of '85. Fast forward to today and she is the Vice President of Supply, Manufacture, & Finance Technology. Read our interview to see Linda's journey.

B: Brandon Sandlin (interviewer) L: Linda Weber

B: Hello, Linda! Thank you for joining me from home! What's been your favorite thing about working from home so far?

L: For me it has been the opportunity to examine how I was interacting with my teams, to look at what the associates needed me to do differently to keep the Kroger culture alive and well. The most fun I have had is starting weekly informal meetings on Friday afternoons. I share any company and department updates and open it up to questions or topics the team wants to discuss.



B: That's great to hear! What a great way to keep everyone connected and on the same page! I'm glad we're able to stay engaged and participate in things like this even while we are at home. Our Summer intern class has adjusted so well to this new work environment and I'm happy we are able to connect with associates like you that have once been in our shoes. I learned that you interned with Kroger in 1985, what was your role then?

L: I was originally brought in to do mainframe programming. At that point they put everyone in to a several week class. I discussed with my manager one my second day that it didn't feel like a good return on investment as I was only planning to stay for 15 weeks. He agreed and has me checkout the "new" personal computers in a lab (which was really a re-purposed closet). I then spent the summer training individuals on word processing and the use of spreadsheets.

B: That's such a unique start! I wonder what would have happened had you not spoken up. Of course, you stayed beyond the 15 weeks which is great! What made you want to stay with Kroger?

L: The recruiter at the time, Jim Rhein, and I spoke, and he told me he planned to make me an offer, but it was on the condition that I went back to school and interviewed. I asked him for his reasoning, and he stated he wanted me to choose Kroger over other options. He then stated he didn't want me walking into his office a few years from that point and resign because I wanted to explore my options. I did what he asked. When I sat down with my dad as my deadline for letting Jim know my answer drew near, my dad asked, "what does your gut tell you?". My reply was "Kroger feels like home". The Kroger associates made that summer interesting and fun and the work was challenging and afforded me a lot of learning opportunities. Those qualities have never changed, and the past 35 years have flown by.

B: That's fantastic! I guess you really should always follow your gut! Albeit challenging, I'm glad your work paid off! What would you say was the most valuable thing you learned that Summer that is still applicable today?

L: The day I started there were also several other interns and several college grads who were starting. It seemed like every Monday a new group was starting because we were growing the department at such a fast pace. We were all young, energetic, and came from different schools and different degrees. I quickly learned the value of listening and discussing different viewpoints for better outcomes. Also, Kroger associates always find a way to help each other so that we are all working with the best interest of the company at the center of what we work on.

B: That's so true, I love having the opportunity to understand new perspectives! As you said earlier, the past 35 years have flown by. Where are you now? Can you tell me more about your current role?

L: My teams support the supply chain, manufacturing, and accounting and finance departments. We have a lot going on. We're in the process of modernizing the way we do replenishment/buying, managing our inventory across the company, replacing an accounting system that predates my internship, standing up new tools for more effective interactions with our suppliers (consumer products but also even suppliers of equipment and supplies we need to run our facilities), working across all of Kroger Technology and Digital to coordinate the work to support the Ocado facilities that will begin opening in 2021, and we're leading a lot of work to make our Pickup processes for the store associates more effective. We're making sure we have the products our customers want when they want them and how they want to shop. We're also working with Manufacturing on a strategy to modernize their systems!

B: Wow! You really do have a lot going on! You are an incredible success story from the internship program, as you are now in a VP role. Can you tell us more about your career progression and what steps you took along the way?

L: When I started after college, I took a role in what was then called Store Systems (Associate Technology in today's world). I learned and supported all the operational needs of running a store, the Pharmacy, and Front-End and Payments. I was fortunate to take a role in Retail Operations and be part of the original group of associates working on Key Retailing which re-engineered a lot of the business processes. My background on the technology side helped me identify things we could easily automate and streamline. I returned to KTD after a couple of years and spent a large portion of the time supporting the Merchandising departments, everything from Pharmacy to Promotion Plans, Price Strategies, Fred Meyer Jewelry, as well as the Convenience Store divisions. About two years ago I was offered my current position and have had the opportunity to learn a new area for me so I'm still learning about all the great areas of the company! I think the key message is the opportunity to learn new areas are always available, there's never a reason to become bored!

B: You have certainly gained a lot of experience over the years! For our current interns who have hopes of moving up the corporate ladder, what would you tell them?

L: I think my advice would have several facets:

1. To stay curious. Even if you don't have direct responsibility for something being discussed, care. Kroger has many components that make up the whole, take the time to learn and understand how the pieces fit together. It's also important to understand the customer shifts, our competitors, and in technology where the solutions are heading. Don't let your knowledge or your skills (technical and leadership) get stale.
2. Committing and delivering while being a leader you would want to work alongside, or said another way, be the associate you would want to work with. People may not

remember what you said but they will remember if you delivered on your commitments and if the interaction was positive. You own the perception you leave with people.

3. Sometimes the best course is the less direct course. Some of the best educational periods I have experienced were when I took chances and took a lateral move or a move to a special assignment.
4. Being positive is a choice. So is being negative. I choose to be positive as it makes my own days more enjoyable and I can better influence and lead when I'm in the right frame of mind.

B: Great Advice! I will certainly be using these as I begin my career. Thank you for participating and sharing where you are now with our Summer interns!