

## **The Legacy of a Pioneering Leader**

Dr. Lee Smith, colleague and friend, passed away on December 25, 2025 in the Dallas, Texas area.

Lee was born near Dallas and raised her two daughters there, with her husband Vernon, a former Navy boy. Lee's early career began as a licensed cosmetician with her own shop, where she first used her well-respected listening skills with her clientele.

In the early 1970's Lee moved to secretarial work with the IRS, and later Sun Oil, where she eventually became Human Resources Director of Professional Development. While at Sun Oil her life-long passion for continued personal and professional learning sent her back to school. She started with an undergraduate degree in Business, then a Masters in Education and Counseling and finally a Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior and Psychology – of course Summa Cum Laude! For ten years after completing her formal studies Lee maintained a management consultancy in Dallas.

When introduced to the unfolding field of executive coaching in 1995, Lee transitioned wholeheartedly working as an executive coach for the next 30 years. She obtained one of the first international certifications as Master Certified Coach (MCC), from the International Coach Federation (ICF). In addition to coaching, mostly at the "C-Level" in organizations and with individuals, Lee also did considerable writing, teaching, training and lecturing in leadership development.

In 1998 Smith co-founded, with Dr. Jeannine Sandstrom, CoachWorks® International Inc. an executive coaching firm that took them around the world. Smith and Sandstrom believed that professional coaches need a leadership model to coach around, so they co-developed *Legacy Leadership*®, a timeless and highly adaptable business and personal leadership model. This model includes a framework of practices, behaviors, attitudes and values that address every aspect of successful leadership. Using this model, Lee traveled the world, training coaching skills and coaching with executive global leaders.

Lee was also co-author of the coach training body of work including The Coaching Clinic®, The Personal Coaching Styles Inventory®, and Professional Foundations for Masterful Coaches®. For decades now this work has reached thousands nationally and globally. Two published books – *What's Next: Women Discovering Their Dreams in the Prime of Life* with Rena Pederson (2001) and *Legacy Leadership: The Leader's Guide to Lasting Greatness* with Dr. Jeannine Sandstrom (2008; 2017) continue to be used internationally.

A well-respected member of ICF, and considered a pioneer in the field of executive coaching, Lee also had a part in the establishment of the standards, ethics and principles of the profession via her work with ICF. Lee helped develop the Executive Coaching

Summit – a two-day collaborative of experienced coaches whose contributions helped shape core concepts of the profession. The ECS’ 10 years of conferences also birthed The Library of Professional Coaching and *The International Journal of Coaching in Organizations*.

Lee shared her passion about continued personal learning and development as an adjunct professor and lecturer at the University of Texas at Dallas Executive MBA program, University of North Texas, Abilene Christian University and as an Advisory Board Member at Northwest University in Kirkland, Washington. In 2013 Smith became the ACTP Coach Training Program Director for the Executive and Professional Coaching Program at the University of Texas at Dallas until her retirement in 2017.

In her retirement years Lee returned to one of her favorite pastimes. Having learned the art and craft of quilting as a child, she created beautiful quilts lovingly given to friends and family, and organizations that help the needy. A few years after retiring from professional work, Lee returned to the Dallas area from Washington state to be near her family, including her daughters and grandchildren.

Lee is remembered and respected as an insightful pillar of the executive coaching profession, involved in the ground floor of this field through the establishment of standards, ethics and principles of the profession. But perhaps she will be best remembered for her humble attitude about what she did with her life. In her own words, she stated: *“I look at the world as a place for service over self. Being a servant leader is who I am and who I am supposed to be, with spiritual gifts of encouragement and leadership. For this reason I serve as teacher, coach and trusted adviser to others. I do not work for myself, but for a higher calling and purpose, to live and experience the pure joy of seeing others – individuals, communities and organizations - keep learning, keep growing and continuing to succeed.”*