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Gelatine Giant: In 1908 Rose Knox Became The Boss And Revolutionized A Company

WYSKNOVEMBER 18, 2016

Born today on November 18th in 1857, Rose Knox is considered one of America's leading businesswomen. She co-founded Knox Gelatine in the late 1800s and revolutionized the company following her husband's death in 1908. This is her inspiring story.

After marrying in 1883, Rose and Charles Knox settled in Newark, New Jersey where he became one of the highest paid salesmen plying a line of knit goods. Their marriage was a true partnership right from the start as Charles would talk business with his wife. He gave Rose a fixed allowance to run the household and as he did better at work, her take increased. Anything she saved was hers

and if Charles borrowed from her fund, it was treated as a business transaction which would have to be repaid. With strategic frugality, Rose was able to accumulate \$5,000.

Wanting financial independence, the Knox family decided to take Rose's savings and strike out for themselves by purchasing a discontinued gelatine business in Johnstown, NY. Back then, women would make their own gelatine by cooking the shinbones of cows for long hours until they fell apart, then straining the liquid, recooking it and finally clarifying it with egg whites. Charles, with Rose at his side, set out to create a product that was granulated and convenient for easy mixing and ended up becoming the world's leading manufacturer of unflavored gelatine.



Whenever the Club Meets—
the problem of "what to have for refreshments" is very easily and satisfactorily solved by

KNOX
PURE PLAIN
SPARKLING
GELATINE

NUT FRAPPE

1/2 box Knox Sparkling Gelatine 1 pint cream
1/2 cup sugar White of one egg 1 cup chopped nuts
1/2 cup cold water 1 cup pineapple and strawberries

Soak gelatine in cold water five minutes; dissolve over hot water. Add dissolved gelatine to cream and sugar; stir in beaten white of egg. When cold, add pineapple and strawberries chopped in small pieces, and chopped nuts. Serve hot cold in alcohol glasses.

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Rose was an avid cook and developed many recipes in her own kitchen using gelatine. In 1896, many of her recipes were published in booklet form and became a staple give away item in grocery stores (over a million each year). Many of her recipes also appeared in newspapers and magazines under the heading "Mrs. Knox says...." Needless to say, the use of gelatine became very popular.

In 1908, after amassing a highly profitable business collective that included Spim Soap, Ointment and Tonic, a small hardware store and a power company, plus Knox Gelatine, Charles died due to a heart condition.

Rose, devastated by the loss of her husband of 25 years, had friends advise her to "sell everything or find a manager, etc." While it was unthinkable for a woman to be active in business in 1908, she made the decision to take over the reins of the Knox Gelatine Co. In reflecting on her bold move, Rose said, "I

either had to run the business myself or employ a manager. If I did the latter, I figured that by the time my boys came of age the business would belong to the manager.”

The first day that Rose sat behind her husband’s desk she issued a statement that the back door to the plant would be closed permanently. “We are all ladies and gentlemen working together here,” she announced, “and we’ll all come in through the front door.” Before the first day was over, she had also politely “requested” the resignation of one of her husband’s top administrative executives who admitted to her that he absolutely would not work for a woman.

This was the only complaint she ever had about being “bossed” by a woman.

While at the Knox Gelatine helm, Rose made a number of revolutionary changes involving labor relations. In 1913, she instituted a five-day work week along with two weeks’ paid vacation a year and paid sick leave. This was a pioneering move, and something that was completely unheard of before. She also rode out the Great Depression, without having to lay off any employees, by smartly cutting costs. In fact, Knox Gelatine grew at a rate of five percent per year which was no easy feat in those desperate years.

Incredible!

