

BY ROBERT REISS

# Kathy Cloninger



**K**athy Cloninger has been CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA since 2003 and has made major changes to the organization as it approaches its centennial. Because such a high percentage of local girls participate in local chapters, contributing writer and “CEO Show” host Robert Reiss, and his Scout daughter Molly, sat down with Cloninger to talk about leadership, character, and the future.

## What does the Girl Scout brand mean to you as CEO?

Our brand more than anything really is about girls. We are proud of our almost 100-year-old legacy. We are an icon but misunderstood.

## Misunderstood?

I don't care if it's local Rotary clubs or business groups, what do you think they say when I ask what they think of when they think of Girl Scouts?

## Cookies?

They go immediately to Girl Scout cookies. And while we are proud of

this incredible marketing accomplishment, it is not the brand of girl scouting. We are about leadership, we are about building girls who grow up to be courageous and confident, who are grounded in our Girl Scout Law, and who ultimately then act to make this country a better place.

## It's a technology-based world. How are you addressing that?

Technology is where girls live. We want to know, Molly, what kind of Facebook pages are you on, and how you interact with YouTube and who is twittering whom. We have to be

squarely part of that digital world. At the same time, we value girls being able to know each other and to have real face-to-face, to develop friendships that are not over the Net. It's finding that.

## How do you build leadership?

The building block for leadership is self-confidence. Girls absolutely need to know who they are, so that they can stand up proud. That links to skill building and having an opportunity to really try a lot of things, to fail at some but succeed at many. Then there is courage, what we look at as the social arena. Do I have the courage to stand up to my friends, to stand up to adults and really to follow what I believe and what I say versus succumbing to peer pressure? I think there is something that really happens when girls stand in a circle, say the Girl Scout Promise and Law, and know that they are saying it with millions of their sisters.

## Is leadership different for men and women?

Women bring a different kind of holistic leadership style to the table. Our own original research reveals that girls don't like the notion of command and control. What really resonates for them about leadership is being able to work with people to make a difference in the world.

## What else did your research show?

Boys are more motivated to power and money, and girls are more motivated to altruistic outcome of their leadership experience. So it's a shame that only seven percent of CFOs in this country are women. But what I do know is that we need both men and women working together to make the country stronger. ■