

Barbara Humpton's trek to the C-suite

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Throughout her life and career, [Barbara Humpton](#) has an overarching goal that would probably surprise you: to become a grandmother.

Her resume, stocked with senior roles in science and technology, belies a life goal centered on family, not business. After all, she has worked at IBM Federal Systems, Booz Allen Hamilton Inc., [Lockheed Martin Corp.](#) and now sits in the CEO's chair at Siemens Government Technologies. She led the tech consulting business with the Justice and Homeland Security departments for Booz and helped the biometrics and border and transportation security programs for Lockheed, including the FBI's next-generation identification and the Transportation Security Administration's ID credentials — hardly your 9-to-5 sorts of feats.



The daughter of math professors, Barbara Humpton fully expected to follow in their footsteps...until industry came knocking.

“I just never have been one to say I’m working toward this or that,” Humpton said. “I’ve been trying to do the most challenging things in front of me and what needs to be done and, boy, it’s been amazing how the right opportunities have presented themselves.”

Humpton’s aspirations were admittedly much simpler in her younger days. “If things had gone their normal course, I would have become a math professor like my parents,” she said. When IBM came to recruit at [Wake Forest University](#), Humpton took a job for one reason: “I actually thought, maybe I’ll be a better math professor if I had some experience working,” she said.

That changed quickly as she settled into the role. She ended up spending the next decade at IBM Federal Systems through its sale to Loral Corp.

“I thought I was going off to college to get ready to go to graduate school in mathematics,” Humpton said. “Then, I had this first taste of what it’s like to work in this industry and never looked back.”

It wasn’t the first time Humpton started off expecting one thing, then was pulled in an entirely different direction. As a junior in high school, she applied to travel abroad, anticipating a fun jaunt to Germany or Switzerland.

She found herself trekking to South Africa, instead, in the final days of apartheid, no less. “I was a junior in high school and took my very first plane trip — and it was 18 hours to Johannesburg,” Humpton said. “National Geographic that summer wrote a cover story on the riots in Johannesburg. This was definitely not going to be easy.”

By semester’s end, she returned “full of enthusiasm for the great big world.” It was “one of the most fabulous experiences of my life,” she said.

In the end, Johannesburg just opened a door. Humpton has since traveled to every continent, including Antarctica — which she said is the most beautiful place she’s ever been.

“It’s like sailing through the Alps,” Humpton said. “If you could flood the Alps and take a cruise ship in. It’s spectacular, mountaintop after mountaintop covered with snow and ice — truly unspoiled nature.”

These may have been pleasure cruises, but there has been plenty of business payoff as well. Her travels have taught her an important lesson about understanding different cultures — a helpful skill for someone who has run in as many corporate circles as Humpton has. “The foreign travel experience and learning to live in another culture and be comfortable there, and be effective there, has translated well into business,” she said.

Her latest expedition has been to her CEO role last month, less than a year after being named chief operating officer of Arlington-based Siemens Government Technologies, a big part of a U.S. base that generated \$22 billion last year.

And she said she still hasn't abandoned her first intended stop on her long, varied professional itinerary — teaching at a college like her parents before her.

“If I had the opportunity to go be a math professor after I finish doing these things in industry,” she said, “I think I'd jump at the chance.”

As for that overarching life goal of hers Well, the countdown for that is on for November, when Humpton's daughter is due with her first grandbaby.

Closer look

- **Education:** Bachelor's in mathematics, [Wake Forest University](#)
- **Past experience:** Vice president at Lockheed Martin and Booz Allen Hamilton
- **Residence:** D.C.
- **First job:** Papergirl in Lexington, Virginia, for the Richmond Times-Dispatch

James Bach covers federal contracting.