



# 23 QUESTIONS FOR CHAMBERLAIN'S NEW CEO

The first female CEO to lead one of our industry's major companies

*Editor's note: Our March 30 issue of the D+AS Insider contained a brief story about JoAnna Sohovich, the new CEO at the Chamberlain Group, Inc. (CGI). That story was placed at the very bottom of the newsletter, while the cover story and the major feature stories of that issue were placed at the top. However, we were stunned to see that the Chamberlain CEO story attracted 1,500 more clicks than any story in that issue.*

*Why was it so popular? Perhaps it's because she is the first female to run one of our industry's major companies. Or perhaps it's because Chamberlain has a strong presence in virtually every market throughout North America and has over 4,000 employees worldwide today.*

*Since you clearly cared about that story, we contacted Chamberlain's new CEO to set up a face-to-face interview. Due to her busy schedule, it took about three months to get a slot on her calendar. But on July 25, we finally sat down and discussed a wide range of issues.*

*Hint: "Connectivity" is clearly a major theme. Read on and see if you agree.*

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**1. As you enter the garage door world, you're stepping into a culture that has been dominated by male leaders in every major company in the industry. In what way(s) have you found advantages to female leadership of a company?**

I have been in nothing but male-dominated industries for my entire life—just look at my college experience and my first job as a U.S. Navy officer. I am not spouting platitudes when I say that I honestly don't notice anymore. I certainly wouldn't have listed our industry as male dominated.

That being said, as a woman leader, I find it easy to stand out and be remembered! I also think that my naval background, my gender, and my motherhood help me feel more comfortable approaching fellow teammates with empathy as well as professionalism.

It wasn't always that way ... when I became pregnant with my son I was terrified that people would view me as less professional or less dedicated to my career. It was a huge epiphany when one of my teammates told me that becoming a mother was the best thing I could have done as a leader at work.



**2. Your background includes experience as an officer in the U.S. Navy. As you have transitioned to the business and corporate world, in what ways have you found your military experience to be helpful in leading a company?**

There are a lot of parallels between leading in the military and leading in the business world, but a strength that I am particularly proud of is the ability to lead diverse teams to deliver success as a team. Due to my military experience, I have been able to step into

unfamiliar situations with unknown people and lead them to success as a cohesive team.

In the military, you can't choose who gets assigned to your unit. While I have more leeway in selecting, developing, and retaining the right talent in the civilian world, I can say that my background allows me to recognize talent beyond what is delivered by "central casting" and put that talent in the right roles so that they are acknowledged members of the success equation.

**3. In what ways have you found your military experience NOT applicable to the corporate world?**

Choice. The military is paternalistic in "helping" people to select their specialties, job assignments, locations, transfers, etc.

It took me several years after I got out to determine what I wanted to do (beyond just what I was good at) and how to accomplish that. That was a new challenge that I didn't experience in the military, but by gaining that skill later, I can help young people struggling with those decisions today, and I can offer my journey to those I mentor.

**4. Most of your executive leadership experience comes from the post-2000 era. As you consider how a CEO's job has changed over the past several decades, what stands out in your mind as a crucial new skill needed by today's CEOs?**

I've read several articles bemoaning the fact that today's leaders in business and politics no longer have military experience. While I don't think that every leader must have military experience, I do think that learning to lead through adversity is a valuable skill to have.

If military service is no longer a common background for that skill, and assuming that people won't voluntarily choose adversity, I often wonder what will shape the toughness and grit of our next generation leaders.

**5. What would be a good example of the adversity you experienced in the Navy?**

There's no greater adversity than "Plebe Summer" at the beginning of the Naval Academy. Nothing in my life will ever be harder.

When I was there, they deliberately forced out one-third of the class, with the significant attrition occurring during plebe summer and freshman year. Today, the academy has completely changed the training regimen, realizing that they went to great lengths to

attract the best talent in the country only to make one-third of them fail.

So now, they work to make every student successful rather than make them fail, and the attrition is much lower. It works in the business world, too. I'll tell you that there are no more loyal people than the people you helped make successful.

**6. In the business world, some people rise to leadership positions faster than others do. Your rise is certainly remarkable. If you had to point to one or two key personal attributes that have been responsible for your rise through the ranks, what would that attribute(s) be?**

First, I always tried to give my current role 100 percent of my focus ... rather than get distracted by the next potential role. That can be a recipe for much anguish and negative perceptions, to say the least.

Second, my excitement to learn new businesses, industries, and technologies helped. Lastly, my (and my family's) willingness to relocate when asked to take the next step was instrumental. I could not have accomplished what I have without my husband's and son's unqualified support.

It's an emotional moment for me when my 9-year-old tells me that he is proud of me.

**7. The press release that announced your hiring indicates that you were hired because of your "IoT and technology experience." Can you elaborate on that?**

I have Connected Building experience from leading Honeywell's Commercial Building Automation business, Connected Home and Building experience from leading Honeywell's Security & Communications business, and Connected Factory experience from leading Stanley Black & Decker's industrial businesses. The combined experience gives me an understanding of systems, solutions, and connectivity that is grounded in end-user value ... well beyond a stand-alone product.

**8. The release also cites your "track record of delivering innovative products." Which of those innovative products are you most proud of delivering?**

Sometimes with connected systems and software (especially when they are disruptive technologies), it takes a few years to see the fruits of your labor. I felt an incredible

sense of pride when I was allowed to tour the central plant for MGM properties in Las Vegas. I saw my former team's combined building-automation products (including technology and software acquisitions) working to successfully run one of the most complex automation environments in a LEED-certified set of buildings.

Complex control and comfort, balanced with environmental stewardship, is an inspiring blend of innovation and corporate responsibility.

**9. As you considered the Chamberlain job, what were the job's top three aspects that appealed to you?**

For me, values are core. CGI's company values resonated with my values, the values I learned from my parents and pass along to my son.

Second, we have strong brands. LiftMaster and Chamberlain are examples of our brands here in North America. When I tell people where I work, it makes me proud that they know our brands and that they are meaningful in their lives.

Third, technology. As the leading garage door opener manufacturer, we quickly became a go-to company for home connectivity. There is a significant opportunity to keep the momentum for innovation moving in our industry.

**10. Your release cites LiftMaster's "connectivity strategy." How would you summarize that strategy?**

I would summarize it by referencing our corporate vision: Giving the power of access and knowledge.

**11. Which LiftMaster product category has shown the greatest increase in the last five years?**

We see a significant opportunity in both the perimeter access and connectivity spaces. As people around the world become more and more connected, we see great value in providing both access and knowledge to our customers through MyQ and LiftMaster Cloud internet-enabled devices.

**12. Considering the full range of Chamberlain products, which category of products will be a primary target for innovation?**

While we look to build innovations to solve needs for all of our customers, there is a clear opportunity to drive innovation with technology in our connected home and connected building solutions.

**13. You obviously feel that integrated home electronics is the certain wave of the future. What are the key reasons driving that conviction?**

Integrated home products have transitioned from a very expensive, very complex, professionally installed system to a user-led plug-n-play world. The hectic world we live in drives a need for simple, safe, secure ways to be connected; the ease of smartphone and internet-enabled connectivity makes connecting what matters most a natural step.

**14. You've now had several months to get acquainted with the door and access systems industry. In what ways have you found this industry to be different from your previous experience?**

One of the greatest opportunities that exists in this industry is to connect our customers, literally and figuratively, with our solutions. We literally give them the tools to monitor and control their most critical access points, thereby enhancing functionality for families and businesses alike while also giving peace of mind.

Figuratively, we foster a connection with our products in the sense that they are used at multiple times throughout each day by offering solutions that interface in a reliable way so that our customers are never locked in or out—stopped in their paths.

That's the significant difference in this industry—our customers interact with our products many times every day—as they open their garages to leave their homes, as they drive out of their communities, enter their workplaces, etc. Because of the frequency of interactions with our solutions, we have an opportunity to build strong connections with our end users. We are there to keep them moving throughout their world.

**15. In what ways have you found this industry to be very similar to your previous experience?**

It doesn't matter what industry you're in ... relationships with your partners, suppliers, customers, dealers, and, in particular, your team, are the driving force for success. In my first 100 days, I made it a priority to meet

and to interact with as many of the people as possible whom our business relies upon. Without them, our company would not be successful, and it's a formula that transcends industry.

**16. As you try to keep your eyes focused on the big picture, what are the key elements of that picture?**

I always start with what I believe: my values. I am most successful when my life is in alignment with my values. And I'm most unhappy when a particular situation or person is conflicting with my values.

Next, I build a strategy that puts the customer first, taking into account our competitive advantages and talent base. CGI is very fortunate to be a private, family-owned business rooted in a system of values that informs everything we do.

It's easy to get sucked into the vortex of email, meetings, and travel, but when I want to see the "big picture," I always return to values and a customer-centric approach.

**17. Craig Duchossois also cited your "values" as a key reason why you were selected. What are your top values that prepared you well for this job?**

Integrity. It's so central to every single business decision we make. It was a huge part of my education at the Naval Academy, and if it's something you dutifully exercise, it simplifies your decision-making process by giving you a basic framework. Do the right thing because it's the right thing to do.

Quality and Excellence. After safety, quality is our biggest priority. Our customers and users depend on the quality of our products to safely secure their property. Our dealers stake their reputations on the performance of the things we engineer and manufacture. As market leaders, we have no choice but to achieve the highest levels of quality in everything we do.

Good Corporate Citizenship. We also have a huge opportunity to live our values in ways that don't directly affect our bottom line. Personally, I try to conduct as much business as I can digitally, without making hard copies. It's a little thing, sure, but in order to be a good steward of the earth, it's imperative to apply this value in everything we do.

We want to be partners of the community and show that our values mean more than manufacturing consumer durables. They mean having the *right* team composed of the *right* people representing CGI and what we stand for.

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People. Treating people with dignity and respect, leveraging individual strengths, driving personal and professional development, celebrating differences, and assuming good intent are all core to my values. The people you surround yourself with truly make all the difference in your success and happiness.

**18. What's the root source of your drive to treat people "with dignity and respect"?**

My family always treated people with dignity and respect. Even if we were angry with someone, we modulated our behavior and dealt with those issues directly.

That could have all changed [for me] at the Naval Academy, where hazing was commonplace. When I became an upperclassman, I made a conscious decision to be a different kind of leader and to treat people with dignity and respect. That has carried throughout my business experience as well.

**19. If you had one message that you wanted every LiftMaster employee to remember, what would that be?**

As CEO of CGI, I believe in the concept of One Team. There is nothing that I would tell a LiftMaster employee that doesn't also apply to somebody working in CGI finance or in package design for our DIY brand, Chamberlain. We are One Team at CGI working to drive our vision: giving the power of access and knowledge.

**20. What is the most important message you would like to convey to LiftMaster dealers in North America?**

Our LiftMaster dealers, as well as our Chamberlain retail partners, have done an outstanding job of helping us pair our leading technology with homeowners and business owners for decades. They helped us bring to market a lot of "firsts," such as safety eyes and battery backup. I would like to start my important message with "Thank you" and "Let's do it again!"

**21. If you had to point to one product category that too many dealers are ignoring (to their own detriment), what would that product category be?**

I would love for more dealers to talk to end users about our connected products. Before I came to CGI, I had no idea that MyQ existed

## Profile: JoAnna Sohovich

Birth year	1971
Birthplace	Albuquerque, New Mexico
Parents	Her father was an Air National Guard reservist who later earned a college degree in business and became an engineer with General Electric. Her mother stayed at home to raise the kids.
Siblings	She is the youngest of three. Her brother and sister are several years older.
High school activities	Captain of the cross-country team, a varsity swimmer, and a member of the national speech and debate team
College major	Economics, with a minor in Spanish and general engineering
Years as Navy officer	1993-1998
Naval achievement	She was the only naval officer to receive the 1996 annual National Image Meritorious Service Award.
Naval stations	The U.S. Naval Submarine base in Point Loma, Calif., then later deployed to the Persian Gulf aboard the USS Essex, an amphibious assault ship
Graduate school	M.B.A. Santa Clara University, 2003
Certifications	Six Sigma Master Black Belt for improvement in quality processes
Husband	They met at the Naval Academy but didn't start dating until they were both stationed in San Diego. They eloped one Friday in August 1996. He holds two master's degrees and is a stay-at-home dad for their 9-year-old son.
Some previous positions	Global President of Stanley Black & Decker's Engineered Fastening, Global President of Stanley Black & Decker's Industrial & Automotive Repair, President of Honeywell Security & Communications
Favorite sports team	Navy football

and that I could connect to my GDO via an application to both monitor open/close status and grant people access remotely without giving out my keypad code. While there are so many more applications that MyQ also addresses, those are pretty universal to most homeowners in the USA.

**22. If you could get all LiftMaster dealers to adopt one new skill (besides selling more LiftMaster products), what would that be?**

With thousands of LiftMaster dealers across the country and beyond, I am proud to say that many talented and respected individuals represent our brand. A strong focus for CGI is to gain a deep understanding of our end users' needs and to develop solutions that create value in their lives and for their businesses and communities. Our LiftMaster dealers can support that effort through their daily connections with customers.

**23. I understand that Chamberlain is soon moving its headquarters to a new building. What's happening there and why?**

Since I joined CGI, one of my primary messages to the organization has been the importance of operating as One Team. Right now, our global headquarters is spread among four different locations around Elmhurst. By early 2017, we will have everyone under the same roof, which is a major win for our company. Now we can look forward to having colleagues who might not otherwise see each other share a space on a daily basis.

The building itself is designed to promote open and collaborative work. This is such a positive change for our company, and the forward-facing, modern look and feel of our future home is a nice analog of CGI's move into a more technology-centric market space.

Also, consistent with CGI's commitment to sustainability and environmental stewardship, we are looking to achieve the highest level of LEED certification possible. As excited as we are for how well the building will suit our functional needs, it's also very exciting to have a place that we can all be proud of! ■