When Katrina Helmkamp (’87, KSM ’92) was a Boston Consulting Group partner and vice president, she thought she had the best strategy job in the world. She liked the variety and global nature of the work. She enjoyed teaming with high-caliber colleagues to solve problems for impressive clients. But after 12 years, she realized something was missing.

“I was getting tired of being the adviser, versus the owner of the results,” she says. “I would ask long-term clients how they applied our strategy, because I was interested in how it gets implemented and how that turns into results.”

One of those clients was residential and commercial services company ServiceMaster, which offered Helmkamp ownership over her strategy work as president of their Terminix pest control business in 2005. Helmkamp jumped at the chance to move into a leadership role and never regretted it.

Over the past 17 years, Helmkamp has led numerous global companies to launch new products and services and drive innovation and growth. Today, she’s CEO of relocation services company Cartus and has served in operating roles longer than she was a consultant.

“It’s about understanding customer needs well enough to find a problem that needs to be solved and understanding the economics to figure out if the solution will work in the marketplace and be profitable,” she says.

**TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

After working her way to group president at ServiceMaster, Helmkamp moved to Whirlpool in 2007, where she became vice president of global refrigeration. In 2010, she accepted her first CEO role with consumer sewing machine company SVP Worldwide.

In 2015, IDEX Corporation, a global manufacturer of specialty, mission-critical components, noticed Helmkamp’s successful management of global businesses and asked her to serve on its board of directors, a role she still holds. In 2016, she became CEO of Lenox Corporation, where she served until 2018, when Cartus recruited her to lead a technology and process transformation to improve digital delivery and capture both efficiencies and market share in its relocation services.

Driving growth through innovative technology requires agile product development and design, notes Helmkamp. Her team focuses on providing a single source of information for everything relating to a client’s relocation process. Building and testing a software product quickly and adapting it to customers’ needs is crucial.

“You need to get it into the hands of the people who will use it and then get their feedback,” she explains. “That way you keep iterating and making it better.”

**A FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE**

Helmkamp draws from her engineering education every day, whether she’s collaborating in teams, breaking down problems to find solutions, or determining how to optimize within constraints.

“What I’ve enjoyed most in my operating roles is finding opportunities to improve both efficiency and innovation,” she says. “With that industrial engineering background, I almost can’t help it.”

In fact, Helmkamp’s Northwestern experience—from working with the late professor Gilbert Krulee to meeting her husband, James Zydiak (PhD ’89)—shaped her life and positioned her for success.

“Industrial engineering is great grounding for a career in business, whether it’s working in a manufacturing plant or an office,” she says. “Those skills you develop are applicable to many roles.”

SARA LANGEN