Influential Women Highlights Dawni Kalili-Iokia: Championing People-Centered Leadership In The Credit Union Industry



HONOLULU, HI, UNITED STATES, September 16, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Hawaii Law Enforcement Federal Credit Union Chief Operations Officer Draws on More Than 30 Years of Financial Services Experience to Strengthen Operations, Inspire Emerging Leaders, and Advance the Philosophy of "People Helping People"

Honolulu, Hawaii – Dawni Kalili-Iokia, CCUE – WCMS, Chief Operations Officer at Hawaii Law Enforcement Federal Credit Union, has built a distinguished career around operational excellence, lifelong learning, mentorship, and an unwavering belief in the power of people. With more than 30 years of experience in the financial institution industry, she continues to bring a systems-level approach to leadership, overseeing Operations, Specialized Services, Marketing, and IT while ensuring each department works in alignment to support an exceptional member experience.

Dawni's journey into the credit union movement began through her work as a vendor with Velera, where she was first introduced to the philosophy of "people helping people." That philosophy quickly became more than a professional concept. It became a guiding principle that shaped her career and strengthened her commitment to serving members and communities through the credit union industry.

Over the course of her career, Dawni progressed through increasingly responsible positions with PSCU and Hawaiian Financial Federal Credit Union, developing extensive expertise in payments, service delivery, operations, and member-focused solutions. Today, she applies that experience to a broad operational leadership role, bringing different functions together and creating greater

alignment across the organization.

For Dawni, however, success has never been defined solely by professional titles or accomplishments. She attributes much of her success to the mentors and supporters who believed in her potential, sometimes before she was able to recognize it herself.

Among the most influential people in her career was Dyanne Bardi, Dawni's first career mentor. Dyanne taught her the true value of self-worth and personal respect while leading by example. Dawni remains deeply grateful for the influence Dyanne had on her life and career following her passing in 2023.

Other influential figures also played important roles in Dawni's development. Ariel Chun nurtured Dawni's spirit and became an example of what an influential woman can be, while Rene Matsuura helped Dawni recognize and connect the missing pieces of her career. Through genuine leadership and guidance, Rene helped Dawni see her potential and pursue her goals with greater confidence.

Dawni's family has also been a vital source of encouragement. Her sister Shawn and niece Daisha have served as guiding lights during moments when she doubted herself, reminding her that having a difficult day is acceptable—but rising again is essential.

This perspective has shaped Dawni's definition of success. She views success as a "work-in-process" and a daily commitment rather than a destination. For her, success is built through the ups and downs of life, the good days and bad days, continual change, and, most importantly, a genuine love for life and people.

Her commitment to growth is also reflected in her recent educational accomplishments. After many years in the workforce, Dawni returned to school at Pomona College, where she attended the Western Credit Union Management School for three years and earned her Certified Credit Union Executive (CCUE) designation from Western Credit Union Management School. Balancing education with life as an empty nester gave her an opportunity to refocus, strengthen her leadership capabilities, and continue investing in herself.

Dawni considers lifelong learning one of the most important pieces of career advice she has received. She believes knowledge is key and wishes she had embraced that lesson earlier in life. She also emphasizes the importance of meeting people and building relationships, recognizing networking as an essential component of professional and personal growth.

Her advice to young women entering the financial services and credit union industry is equally direct: believe in yourself. Dawni encourages emerging professionals to move forward with confidence in their abilities and power rather than allowing setbacks, stereotypes, or other people's perceptions to define their future.

Originally from Waianae, Dawni understands firsthand how assumptions about someone's background can become barriers. Rather than allowing stereotypes associated with her upbringing to limit her ambitions, she has used her journey as proof that strong leadership and professional success can emerge from any community.

"All things are possible" is central to Dawni's message. She believes individuals ultimately have the power to decide whether they will continue working toward their goals or allow others to discourage them. Her own career serves as an example of the resilience, determination, and self-belief she encourages in others.

Looking ahead, Dawni recognizes that the credit union industry faces significant challenges, particularly surrounding member safety, fraud, and rapid technological change. As bad actors become increasingly sophisticated, protecting members has become a constant priority. At the same time, financial institutions must keep pace with emerging technologies and new software while managing the costs and complexity associated with continual innovation.

Dawni is particularly mindful of the challenges technology presents to older generations. As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly prevalent, determining what is authentic and what is not can become more difficult. For Dawni, technological advancement must therefore be accompanied by education, awareness, and a continued commitment to protecting members.

At the heart of her leadership philosophy are two fundamental values: respect and family. Dawni believes respect should guide interactions across generations and backgrounds. Raised to respect her elders, she continues to carry that principle into her professional life while recognizing the importance of understanding different generational perspectives.

Family remains equally central to who she is. Although she is now an empty nester, with her children and grandchildren no longer living in her home, they remain a driving force behind everything she does. The credit union philosophy of "people helping people" resonates deeply with her because it extends the concept of family and community into the workplace.

Today, Dawni strives not only to lead but also to become for others what her mentors were for her: a source of encouragement, confidence, and light. Her career demonstrates that leadership is not simply about managing departments or achieving organizational goals. It is also about lifting others, continuing to learn, embracing change, and helping people recognize the potential within themselves.

Through more than three decades in financial services, Dawni Kalili-Iokia has built a leadership legacy grounded in resilience, service, education, and humanity. As she continues her work at Hawaii Law Enforcement Federal Credit Union, her focus remains clear: strengthen the organization, protect and serve its members, develop future leaders, and live out the "people helping people" philosophy that first inspired her career.

Learn More about Dawni Kalili-Iokia:

Through her Influential Women profile: https://influentialwomen.com/connect/dawn-kalili-iokia

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