

# delve

MAR 2022 V24

*Cover Photo: Indeed by Dauphin  
HumanDesign Group*

**Celebrating  
Women in the  
Industry**

**Trailblazers  
Of Design  
Spotlight**

**Women in the  
Public Sector**



# INDEED

**A Chair Designed for the Comfort of  
Socially Responsible Humans**

*With Dauphin HumanDesign Group*

Rise.



The chair Elevated.

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SEATING

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Susan Mulholland discusses the many significant achievements of women in the industry.



**COVER STORY:** Dauphin's new Indeed swivel chair brings a light touch to any workspace



A collection of stories and articles, celebrating women in our industry.

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## editor's note

Dear Reader,

We are celebrating Women's History Month by highlighting women's stories from across the industry.

From seasoned trailblazers, to brand new hires, there are unique and extraordinary women that help make our industry so dynamic, exciting and innovative.

We celebrate those that have come before, and those that are working every day to build the history of tomorrow.

We invite you to dive in, and reach out to those whose stories inspire you!

Enjoy!

*Do you have an idea for an article in Delve? We want to hear from you! Send us an email at:*

*industrynews@myresourcelibrary.com.*



**THE  
MY RESOURCE LIBRARY  
FAMILY**



March 8th is International Women's Day. This global holiday is celebrated annually to commemorate the cultural, political, and socioeconomic achievements of women in all facets of life. If you have read my past articles, you know that I have written a lot about the well-known and the not so well known women in interior design who have throughout our collective history made our profession better. But in this article I want to focus more on the present and what women in our profession face on a daily basis.

Today, our profession is filled with both men and women interior designers who have been elevating the art of design to higher and higher levels of purpose and sophistication. The battle of defining what we do as designers is still real and although the general public is aware of our profession through design TV and social media, there is still the idea that interior designers are really just decorators. But those of us who work and are a part of the day to day processes know better. This is why I want to talk about the women who are working in the profession now and what they have been through, whether they have only started working in the profession or have been working in the profession for decades. The struggles we face for recognition and compensation are real. Our profession has made some progress to recognize this, but are we really doing enough to secure the next generation of women interior designers? This is the premise of what celebrating International Women's Day is all about—moving our selves closer to being on equal footing with our male counterparts.

The effort of the global community to emphasize the part women play outside of the home environment and away from the shadow of their male counterparts is twofold; the first is to help women to remember what we are capable of and two to help the next generation see that where we have been and how far we have come. There is still work to be done for all women in every work sector, interior design as a profession is no exception.

Our profession has always had a strong female presence. Our history is filled with women who have designed and created some of the most iconic furniture, textiles, and buildings we have today. But for all of the women who are known for their design talents there are many more who collectively created great design but were not given the recognition they deserved. Some of these women worked alongside men who took credit for the work these women did, and unfortunately society silently accepts this practice.



**By Susan Mulholland**

*Susan Mulholland studied interior design at Northern Arizona University and is an NCIDQ certificate holder. She has 30 years of interior design experience in commercial design. Her experience in the industry covers a large variety of projects that focus on workplace, healthcare, and hospitality. Her design studio Mulholland Art & Design Commercial Interiors is in Tucson, Arizona, where she has been helping clients for the past 20 years.*

*[Connect with Susan Mulholland on her website.](#)*

Interior design is not been strictly woman's profession like most people think. There are many men who have been credited for some of the most iconic interior design achievements that we recognize today. In fact, the use of the description *interior architecture* is really a way to differentiate the idea of strictly decorating from design for interiors because of the connotation that interior design or decoration is a woman's profession.

The design profession has always used competition as an opportunity to give their ideas a stage to be seen by the world. Many women designers as well as men have competed in design competitions for decades. The work is what is important and it, in theory, should not matter if a male team or a female team created the best design. The designer or team of designers who are capable of creating new and exciting designs know that they are not limited by what others are doing but are inspired by it. This is what good competition is about and why we celebrate it with design awards every year.

But what happens after the design competitions are over. When we go back to our design studios and work on everyday projects? The pressure to create is still there and so is the competition. Design teams are competing every day for clients and projects with large budgets with premier exposure. When the design team is comprised of only women; it is heralded as a great achievement if they happen to land a prestigious project. But when the team is comprised of a mix of men and women, women tend to be left behind and the men on the team take the credit. Our involvement in the project may be significant, but the recognition we receive from our peers, especially outside of our industry, is not.

This lack of recognition or support can come directly from the team dynamics and the work culture that is present in the design studio. If the design studio is male dominated then women who work there need to be more than just strong, they need to be confident enough to speak up when they are not given the credit that is due. This is still, after all of the decades of celebrating the strength of women, the hardest for any woman to do- regardless of what our profession is. Until women receive the same type of praise or until men are not singled out ahead of women for similar jobs or achievements- this pattern will continue. The role of society and what is accepted both globally and personally needs to change.

When designers are tasked with the challenges of creation, they work with just ideas. Starting with nothing and ending up with something is what all art and design is about. But adding the complexity of ownership and whose idea was the best especially in high stakes industries like commercial architecture and real estate, everyone wants to be known for the idea that worked or got the highest recognition. Design competitions and awards aside, the right to claim ownership of that design idea is also at stake. This is where the lack of compensation manifests itself in

our profession. No matter how many design awards a woman may have they are still not justly compensated for their work.

Many women in our profession are struggling to be compensated for the work they do daily. When the global community looks at the accomplishments of women they are also bringing awareness to the fact that although our lives have gotten better we are still not on the same economical level as men. Interior design has a strong female presence but not when it comes to wages. Female interior designers are still paid less than their male counterparts and although that debate is sometimes based on knowledge and experience, the bottom line is, if everything is comparable women are still making \$0.84 for every \$1.00 a man makes in our profession.

The future of our profession will not survive if women are not paid equally. Many professions, including female athletes are fighting to have wages that are fair, but no matter how hard we fight, if our society and our own profession doesn't value what we do, we never will.

So how do we make that happen? The strong sense of solidarity and pride that comes from celebrating women needs to go beyond just one day or month every year. Laws that are passed on behalf of equality will not change the perception of interior design by the general public. Every designer who works in our profession needs to be valued; not just for their talents but for their efforts to move our profession from the early days of decoration to what it is now: providing interiors spaces that really do affect our lives in positive ways through practice and education.

Recognition and fair wage compensation are only two of the issues facing women today. We have not given up the other responsibilities that our mothers and grandmothers have had just yet. The women in the household may be the only person able to work and provide the necessities to support their families. They actively seek jobs that allow that flexibility. But there are many interior designers, faced with the choice of working as a designer or moving on to a much better paying job to support their families have left this profession permanently. This is not ending anytime soon. Our profession needs to collectively work harder to educate our clients that our fees are our livelihood. Our world revolves around the exchange of money for goods and services that provide value to our daily lives. Interior design is one profession whose sole purpose is to provide a better quality of life for everyone by creating spaces that enhance, help, and support the daily activities of living. Without our design skills, our world would be a less happier place. Let us value ourselves and our profession by continuing the fight. Equality is more than just acknowledgement; it's an action oriented movement that focuses on the skills and competence of the individual regardless of their gender. This is why celebrating and acknowledging women is so important. The more we show the world what we are capable of with grace and dignity, the more equal we become.

# 6 MRL FAVORITES PRODUCTS FROM ACROSS THE LIBRARY

The following products represent 6 of our favorite products currently on My Resource Library. The products are listed in no particular order. Can you guess the theme?

## **RISE LOUNGE**

ALLSTEEL

Rise re-conceives modular seating with a collection of multi-level soft shapes and versatile worksurfaces that adapts as easily as the user. Because Rise movable pieces act like building blocks, there's no right or wrong way to design and configure the perfect solution for solo or teamwork



## **STORE**

MAGNUSON GROUP

Painted steel workspace utility cart with one fixed shelf, a strap handle for portability, and an optional magazine caddy that can be hung on either side and side shelf. Anthracite Grey strap. Magazine caddy or optional shelf can be a contrasting paint color.



## **RUCKUS WORKTABLES**

KI 4-EDUCATION & HEALTHCARE  
FURNITURE

Ruckus worktables are flexible, mobile and durable. Multiple sizes support a variety of learning space layouts and group dynamics. Backed by a 15-year warranty and tested to support up to 2000 pounds, Ruckus worktables with industrial-grade locking casters meet the rigorous demands of makerspaces, media centers, science and chemistry labs and general classrooms.



## **THINK NOOK**

HASKELL

The Think Nook by Haskell provides choice, flexibility and focus in any environment. The perfect place for innovation and ideation.

## **MANEUVER COLLABORATIVE TABLES**

NATIONAL

Be productive and flexible with Maneuver. The Maneuver collaborative collection offers a facilitator desk as well as worksurface shapes and bases that easily accommodate group learning and individual comfort. Designed to be used for gathering and interacting, Maneuver offers flexible solutions that are focused on solving needs.



## **V-SERIES TABLESCREEN**

EAGAN VISUAL

Egan V-Series TableScreens™ are available in frosted glass, magnet-compatible EVS™ on steel, natural cork and tackable fabrics for the ultimate in customization. Very easy to install with the removable cross clamp or edge clamp systems, or semi-permanent surface mount.





MADE-TO-ORDER  
POWER DISTRIBUTION





**By Michelle Warren**

*Michelle Warren is President of Catalyst Consulting Group, a firm specializing in providing strategic solutions to the commercial furniture industry to enhance their sales, positioning, and distribution.*

*With 25 years of industry experience on the dealer and manufacturer side of the industry, Michelle has been recognized as an innovator in selling to the Federal Government, State/ Local Government, Higher Education and Cooperative Purchasing. Her expertise includes: sales strategies, strategic planning, 3-5 year road mapping, targeted marketing plans, distribution development, hiring reps, and training for reps and/or dealers.*

*Michelle is known as a “serial networker” in the furniture industry and enjoys meeting people and making connections happen. If you’re interested in connecting - reach out at:*

*[Michelle@strategic-catalyst.com](mailto:Michelle@strategic-catalyst.com),  
connect on [LinkedIn](#) or visit  
[www.strategic-catalyst.com](http://www.strategic-catalyst.com) to  
learn more about her work.*



**Women In The  
Public Sector:  
Interview with  
Barbara (Isaacs) Alvarez**

As we focus on Women in Business & Women in Leadership in this issue of Delve, I wanted to take the opportunity to introduce you to some women in Public Sector. Once I started down this road, it became clear to me very quickly that there are quite a few spectacular women in this vertical market so consider this just the first of the women I will be introducing you to in my monthly articles.

The first woman I would like to introduce you to is Barbara (Isaacs) Alvarez. Barbara has been in and around the commercial furniture industry for over 34 years. She has built a fabulous career and a network she uses for her business development efforts. As I try to recall when I met Barbara I honestly do not know as I feel like I have known her forever. Recently she married one of my favorite people and a mentor of mine which just makes everything seem right in the world! If you are in the Federal side of the furniture industry you have probably heard her name or, at least, the company she works with Akima which is an Alaska Native Corporation.

I hope you enjoy our conversation.

**Michelle:** You have been in and around the commercial furniture industry for some time. How did you get started in the industry and in the Federal space?

**Barbara:** I started in the commercial industry as a sales assistant/project manager at Knoll in NYC in the late 80's. Knoll is one of the largest office furniture manufacturers in the world. It was an amazing experience and the perfect way to start off one's career – lots of glitz and glitter in the Big Apple!

I eventually came back to the DC area where I grew up. I continued in the same industry as a project manager at a Knoll dealer but eventually found my way to a Public Sector focused company - ANADAC. I became an Owner's Representative for the Government doing project management and contracting support. I did that role for over a decade which also included a stint owning my own single person consulting business.

In 2007 I found an incredible opportunity at the Akima family of companies that focused on Public Sector sales. I never thought I would be in sales, but this opportunity combined all of my PM and contracting support experience into a role perfect for solving a government wide procurement challenge for outfitting office space with Furniture, Fixtures & Equipment (FF&E) on time and within budget. I've been at Akima in sales for just shy of 15 years.

**Michelle:** Wow, what a great career in the industry. At what point did you know that Federal could be a career vs just a job for you?

**Barbara:** I've been in the FF&E industry now for over 34 years. At the 5-year mark, when I took the position with ANADAC my focus turned to public sector and has been since. During that decade of Owner's Rep, was probably the point that I saw a long-term opportunity supporting Public Sector requirements, which has ultimately consumed most of my career. There was a big hole in the procurement process of office furniture for Federal agencies and at ANADAC I had a unique liaison position between different sides of GSA [PBS/IWAC (then NFC)] Federal Agencies, and the manufacturers and dealers. It was an amazing opportunity to make many connections both in the Government but also in the commercial industry. I could see that this "procurement hole" was not going away and that with my input into the process on each new project I could make a difference in the timely completion for the outfitting of new office space.

**Michelle:** Your time at ANADAC definitely appears to have set you up for much success. You are seen as a successful woman in Public Sector, what are the key influential people or factors that supported your success?

**Barbara:** When I first started my sales role at the Akima family of companies almost 15 years ago my doubts outweighed my beliefs in myself. I had limited sales experience and worried quite a lot about meeting goals. There were two main things I struggled with constantly for years – meeting sales goals and having enough sales support operationally.

**Sales goals:** I quickly improved on my networking group and within that group I found a few mentors. Some of which were even responsible for talking me into the Akima job in the first place. They coached me on so many things from sales to operations and still do.

**Even during my best years surpassing the \$130m mark in sales I still worried about the pipeline for the next year. I guess that's just something that is innate to sales – never being comfortable with today?**

**Sales Support:** My first year was relatively calm but then my sales rocketed. My amazing networking group believed in the turnkey office outfitting solution our company provided. There were so many warm leads into Federal Agencies. Our solution is so in need that my win rate was most likely 90% if I just got that first face-to-face meeting with the client.

My company didn't have the infrastructure to support so many deals though and I wound up working years of 18-hour days. It wasn't until about 5 years ago that the operation side caught up to my sales and things got under control. Through the leadership of that newly installed General Manager Scott Mackie at Akima I was able to calm down to an 8–10-hour day.

It has been a long tough road to navigate corporate culture, sales goals and operational support but having excellent mentors and friends that let me vent definitely helped with my success and sanity.

**Michelle:** Thanks for touching on the importance of mentors and networking. Two things I am also very passionate about as you know. As you look back at your career and what brought you here today and to the Federal world, were there any unexpected twists or turns that developed that helped you to learn along the way?

**Barbara:** About 8-10 years ago my then boss felt the corporate culture and goals were changing and he jumped ship. He felt the commission plans were going to change for the extreme worse. He created quite a disturbance and brought many employees with him to a new company. He tried to persuade me to go but through good peer/mentor advice and "bird in the hand" mentality I stayed. Things changed a bit but not as drastically as he predicted, and I've been very happy since.

**Michelle:** I think that story speaks to your resilience and your leadership vs follower mentality. I know a lot of people would have left to follow, but your decision to stay, which I am sure you worked through with your mentors, has paid off for your career.

As I look at our industry, it appears that Public Sector is favorable to women. How do you see the opportunity for women in the Federal side of our industry?

**Barbara:** The Government has recognized that women can play a key role in business. They created the 8m / WOSB program which helps encourage women to start a business.

"The Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contract Program provides equal access to federal contracting opportunities for women-owned small businesses (WOSB) and economically disadvantaged women-owned small businesses (EDWOSBs). The program allows contracting officers to set aside specific federal contracts for certified WOSBs and EDWOSBs."

I also see a lot of women succeeding as Government employees in very high positions. I believe that your work can speak for you but it's also critical to learn to navigate and accept there are politics that often interlace the office. Believing in yourself is half the battle. With that confidence often comes promotion.

I've dealt with my fair share of the glass ceiling and have found ways to shatter it without much force. I want to share this experience because I've given this advice many times over the years. In 1991 I was making \$21,500 in NYC as a Sales Assistant. I went after a PM job that I knew paid \$35k. This job was

previously held by a gentleman retiring. The company couldn't see that much of a bump and offered \$27k. I accepted but insisted that I get a review in 6 months and if exceed expectations I get the raise to \$35k. Results speak volumes and within 6 months I was earning the appropriate salary. Always try to negotiate a 6-month review for more if the original offer is not to your liking and then work your ass off.

**Michelle:** As a woman owned small business and new entrepreneur, I love to hear these stories! You are right on with having the belief in yourself. You cannot let negative self-talk or what others say hold you back. I believe that believing you can do something is more than half the battle. There are still a lot of glass ceilings to break in our industry and we need strong women to do that.

**Michelle:** Knowing that, what is one piece of advice you have for women wanting to develop a career in Public Sector?

**Barbara:** I have two.....

**1.** I found great success in starting on the commercial side first. Learning the project implementation first gave me great insight on how best to serve my federal customers when my focus turned 100% to the public sector.

**2.** The other bit of advice is patience. When I worked in NYC, business deals would happen at light speed. Coming back to DC and working in the Public Sector was like hitting a brick wall. One deal took me ten years to close in DC!

**Michelle:** Both great points of advice.

Thank you so much for spending time with us to share your story and insights. One last question that I need to know as an avid reader: What one book would you recommend for a woman who is pursuing a career in Public Sector?

**Barbara:** One of my favorite books of all time is the Katharine Graham autobiography. There is a lot in this book about dealing with the Federal Government but it's also about a woman's keen instincts in survival in a man's world. Couldn't put it down.

**Friends, I hope you have enjoyed learning more about Barbara and her insight on a career in Public Sector. I have already ordered the book so perhaps you will see some book reviews in this column coming soon!**



**BARBARA (ISAACS) ALVAREZ**

*Sales and Account Manager for the Akima family of companies.*

Although at the Akima level, my main focus is still on Talu (subsidiary to Akima). Talu's mission is to provide a turnkey outfitting solution to our many Federal clients. Our solution includes combining all of the following under one simple contract - Furniture, Audio Visual, IT, Security, Project Management, Transition Planning, Moves, Document Scanning and much much more.

**Connect with Barbara on LinkedIn [HERE](#).**



# INDEED

## A Chair Designed for the Comfort of Socially Responsible Humans

*With Dauphin HumanDesign Group*

Dauphin HumanDesign Group is an international company with a series of brands to provide workplaces with the best product solutions. HumanDesign is at the core of our daily processes in finding solutions to improve your place, better your people, and embrace the culture of your space. Our three brands: Dauphin, Trend Office, and Bosse, provide solutions for various niche markets; our Dauphin brand offers a range of seating solutions that promote people's well-being in an enhanced space while improving their productivity and performance in office, labs, educational, and recreational spaces.

Many employees have spent more than a year working from home and have come to appreciate having an ergonomic

office chair in their improvised home office. Now that the national obligation to work from home has ended—and we have redefined workspaces to adapt to a "new normal"—more and more people are looking for enhanced solutions that provide comfort, flexibility, and easy operation and mobility.

Our product lines embrace the desired European aesthetic while adhering to the contract market's highest quality standards. Each product is designed as a collection, giving clients the ability to choose the specifications and options that suit their space. The Indeed Chair perfectly fits within Dauphin's aesthetic philosophy while also meeting the unique needs of the modern workplace.

## INDEED

Dauphin's new Indeed swivel chair not only satisfies the highest ergonomic standards but—with its refined, lightweight construction and slender design—brings a light touch to any workspace, be it in the office, at home, or in hybrid environments. Thanks to its fully sustainable production process and eco-friendly materials, it also meets the highest standards for environmental awareness.

Satisfy the aspirations of a new generation with one thing above all else: lightness! Its slender, subtle design makes it a real team player when combined with lots of different interiors. Its ERGONOMIC features make it easy for you to adapt in an agile way to the individual needs of active daily life. Our manufacturing process conserves resources to align efforts towards more sustainable futures practically and innovatively. Indeed brings a new lightness to any workspace.

Starting with the clever design idea from Dauphin designer Rüdiger Schaack, the in-house development and production right through to logistics, with Indeed the focus is very much on sustainability and lightness. Its clean look makes it a fine companion in the office, and its smart light design makes it a real lightweight that is very easy to operate. With its elegantly crafted backrest, combined with a visually understated mechanism and clearly defined ergonomic operating elements, Indeed embraces minimal use of materials and maximum function; because of its extremely sophisticated ergonomic features, have awarded Indeed with the renowned "Tested & Recommended" seal of quality from Aktion Gesunder Rücken (AGR).

Indeed is easy to dismantle and assemble and can therefore be transported in boxes which save space and reduce CO2 emissions. From the plastic and foam materials through to the upholstery, the materials for the desk chair – which is manufactured in Germany – all come from the local region, within a radius of no more than 60 kilometres of the Dauphin plant in Offenhausen, Middle Franconia; Indeed is then distributed to our international partners.

Great attention was also paid attention to sustainability when it came to choosing the upholstery material for Indeed; for example, the Tonal cover fabric, which is available in many colors, is 99 percent made from recycled PET bottles. Depending on the version – with a mesh or upholstered backrest – this means that up to 14 recycled PET bottles can be found in an Indeed. Other fabric options are also eco-friendly.



*"I love you to pieces."*

SUSTAINABILITY FOR  
SOCIALY RESPONSIBLE HUMANS

- 99% made from polyethylene terephthalate [PET] bottles
- 60% packaging volume
- 20% lighter
- 2 min set-up time



- 3D-Move -even more dynamic
- Wide backrest opening angle up to 128°
- Syncro-Evolution® mechanism with lateral infinite spring force adjustment and synchronised movement lockable in four positions
- Including seat-depth adjustment (2.36 in)



Indeed not only satisfies the highest ergonomic standards, but thanks to its refined lightweight construction and smart design is a highly flexible companion – in the office and also when working from home.



Indeed is noted for having an elegantly shaped backrest and slender silhouette.



A clever construction, ergonomically sophisticated features, a smart design and eco-friendly materials make Dauphin's Indeed swivel chair the sustainable lightweight that meets the aspirations of a new generation.

Since 1969, Dauphin HumanDesign Group has strived to be at the forefront of the furniture manufacturing industry in delivering high-quality, innovative solutions for the workplace. The Coronavirus pandemic has been an eye-opener in all aspects of our lives, contesting not only the way we do business but our purpose in the market beyond providing high-quality contract furniture. Amid the pandemic, we recognize the need to acknowledge the impact that our company has on people's lives—physically, emotionally, and psychologically—, in how the workplace mediates experiences: our daily activities, how we connect with others, the relationships we nurture, and the wellbeing of our community at large.

As a global company—with more than 1,000 employees—we have a social responsibility to foster a company culture that goes beyond diversity into embracing inclusion and racial/gender equality and nurturing a multitude of perspectives. Amid unprecedented challenges, this new year 2022, Dauphin decided to organize a team that amplifies heterogeneous voices to provide the market with a progressive interactive and long-lasting positive experience. We are embarking on a transformative process of giving women a well-deserved seat at the table in decision-making, a place where these women belong and lead the company into the future.

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## **REPRESENTATION MATTERS: WHAT IS YOUR SUPERPOWER?**

Women leaders are tenacious, nurturing, and resilient; they inspire a better future for all. Yet, representation is still lacking in a male-dominated society where women's engagement in decision-making is still low. As any system of oppression, race and gender inequalities are by design. It is hard to imagine possibilities in positions of power when we can't see ourselves reflected in those who hold power. Thus, to contest the status quo, we need to be willing to amplify representation for all women and girls worldwide by sharing power equally at all levels and building a sense of belonging.

Today, in celebration of Women's Day, we introduce Dauphin America's Women Leadership Team. They represent the many other inspiring women that, day to day, contribute to the success of Dauphin HumanDesign Group.



**Chris Monaco [She/Her]**  
Customer Service Manager  
**The Investigator**  
SUPERPOWER: Ultrasensorial  
excavation

***“Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes.”***

**- Ruth Bader Ginsburg**

Chris Monaco has been working with Dauphin in their Customer Service department since 1996. After working as a representative for the company for six years, Dauphin offered her a managing position; since then, Chris has thrived in leading her team to provide high-quality service for our clients. When a problem arises, Chris will ensure someone addresses it -whether it directly impacts Customer Service or not because she genuinely cares about the experience our clients receive. Her eye for detail is not to be taken lightly- if there is a spelling error, Chris will find it!



Carol Wickoren [She/Her]  
Regional Sales Manager  
**The Tranquilizer**  
SUPERPOWER: Unruffled Exertion

*“Taking one step forward and two steps back is not failure... it's doing the Cha Cha.”*

- Anonymous

Carol Wickoren has been in the commercial furniture industry for 30 years and has vast experience on both the manufacturer and dealer sides. Over the years, she has held various roles, including business owner, sales representative, sales trainer, and multiple sales leadership positions. Carol has been with Dauphin for 12 years; she can stay calm in the midst of a storm. Her inquisitive mind and attention to detail guide her through finding solutions to complex everyday challenges.



Catalina Velez [She/Her]  
Regional Sales Manager for LATAM  
**The Positivity Whisperer**  
SUPERPOWER: Hope Inducement

*“Success is never given; it is earned.”*

- Anonymous

In 2003, when Catalina moved from Colombia to the U.S., Dauphin was her first job. Since then, she has held many titles - starting in production and working through planning, customer service, and sales. Catalina works directly with the company's partners and vendors overseas, coordinating logistics, training sales representatives, connecting with customers, events and presentations planning and execution, and seeking new partnership opportunities. For some time, she was the designated camera operator as she has the steadiest hands in the industry. If you have a question, rest assured that Catalina has an answer.



Dayana Escalante-Navia [She/Her]  
Chief Operating Officer (COO)  
**The Synergist**  
SUPERPOWER: Energy Optimization

*“An environment that is not safe to disagree is not an environment focused on growth – it's an environment focused on control.”*

- Wendi Jade

With over 20 years of experience in the architecture and construction fields, Dayana Escalante-Navia has been focusing her career on the production and manufacturing of custom furniture. She has a multi-faceted background and is highly skilled at providing clear, detailed, and precise directions to all team members to enhance productivity and overall company performance. Dayana wears many hats, managing different business components simultaneously and ensuring that our team quickly resolves unforeseen issues and meets deadlines on time.





Gigi Polo [She/Her/They]  
Design Director  
**The Dreamer**  
SUPERPOWER: Imaginative  
Resiliency

*“There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?”*

**- George Bernard Shaw**

Gigi Polo joined Dauphin full-time in August 2021 and has quickly made considerable strides in elevating the Dauphin brand. She is a designer, filmmaker, educator, and researcher. She launched her studio—Myellow Boots—in 2005, working as a design consultant for the past 20 years in the non-profit sector and for companies such as Conde Nast and Hearst. She is a Part-Time Associate Teaching Professor at Parsons, The New School for Design; her academic research lies at the intersection between education, cognitive neuroscience, and social justice within the context of art and design.



Kaneez Darbar [She/Her]  
Vice-President (VP) Sales  
**The Resolute**  
SUPERPOWER: Transformative  
Growth

*“If your dreams don't scare you, they are not big enough.”*

**- Anonymous**

Having started her career at Dauphin three decades ago, Kaneez Darbar has a passion for providing efficient solutions for workspaces. Motivated by Dauphin's philosophy of providing efficient solutions that cater to people's wellbeing in the workplace, Kaneez has been a force on the East Coast; she has established a wealth of long-lasting relationships with our clients. Her specialty includes developing sales strategies, presentations to clients, motivating and inspiring her team to meet sales targets that match the company's goals.

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**By Ashley Blevins**

*Ashley Blevins is the Director of Sales for **GMI Companies** who is a manufacturer of the brands Ghent, Waddell, and Vividboard. After spending over a decade in marketing, specializing in dealer relations, Ashley has been responsible for expanding the national sales footprint for the GMI family of brands.*

*Ashley is a certified presenter of CEU's and travels the nation providing presentations that train and educate dealers, architects, and designers on skills to educate their clients and close the sale*

*Ashley has found her passion in serving customers by providing value, earning trust, and turning customers into partners. Her philosophy for marketing and sales revolves around embracing change, trial and error, thinking strategically and using data to drive your next move. In her free time, you can find her enjoying the country air with her family or waving her Terrible Towel on Sundays.*



# Where Are the Women?

Over the last two months we have talked about the implications from the Global pandemic on our industry. Challenges with supply chain, inventory, freight, and staffing continue to be evolving. Labor continues to be the driving force for successful companies. Companies that attract and retain talent are winning against their competitors. It's a worker's market and TALENT WINS... Most of the time.

As we celebrated International Women's Day on March 8th and throughout the month, it's time to celebrate Women in our industries. In the interiors industry, women make up 54% of the workforce, a percentage to be proud of. And, it's noticeable when walking into a dealership or design firm. Day in and day out, we see a good mix of women throughout many skill sets, design, sales, and administrative. Where we lack is female leaders in the C-Suite, only 4% of that 54% make it there. Where are all the Women in leadership? Where are all the women in architecture? Where are all the women in manufacturing?

Did you know that only 25% of architects are women? The question we need to understand is WHY? With nearly half of all architecture students being women, why are so many leaving the industry after graduation? This stat alone is staggering and worth exploring. **After talking to various architects across the country, the most common leading indicators can be broken down into three categories:**

1. Salary Gaps
2. Flexibility
3. Lack of Female Mentors

The US gender gap is holding steady showing that women earn 84% of what men earn. In the architecture world, that number drops down to 80% of what men earned for the same certifications, experience, and skills. While salary is not the

only reason 25% of the women attending school for architecture eventually leave, it is one of the largest pieces to the puzzle. Women eventually start experiencing this gap and simply realize there are other careers better suited for their goals professionally and personally.

The next word should have a neon light surrounding, **FLEXIBILITY**. The Covid pandemic had an adverse impact on women leaving the workforce. **1 in 3 women** have considered leaving the workplace over the last year as a result. Overall, women have lost 5.3 million jobs during the pandemic, and more than 2 million have left the workforce due to lack of childcare. Let's compare some numbers, 5.3 million women left the workplace compared to men at 1.8 million throughout the last two years. This impact to women in the workplace will be noticed for some time, maybe even decades. Some reporting the pandemic has set women back 20 years! When we look inward throughout the architectural, manufacturing, and interiors world, how will that continue to impact our industries?

One architect set the stage for some of the opportunities this part of the industry is chasing. "The challenge I see lays in the fact that women are still the ones that try to do it 'all', they are trying to keep up on everything at home, taking care of/coordinating childcare while also being the high performing employee they want to be. What is startling to me, is that you see females leaving the profession once they have kids and then if they get back into the profession after their children are older, they have lost out on some valuable years and growth. Things like salary gap and overall lack of flexibility are keeping our bright and wonderful females from moving to the next level. Women are having to choose between being a leader at work or the mother they want to be... It's hard to do both in this profession."

This outlook may be the number one reason we have so few women mentors in architecture. Women traditionally take on the family and household duties far more than men. Women simply need flexibility to help offset the number of hours many professions require. In the architecture world, flexibility is still behind with many firms operating as they did 20 years ago. Long workdays, a boys club mentality and the term flexibility being a word that is used but not respected. At the end of the day, why would a women stay in a job that is so demanding, makes them choose between their family or career while making far less than her counterparts? Until we wrap our hands around these leading indicators, women in Architecture will continue to leave the industry in staggering numbers.

In manufacturing, women only make up about 30% of the 15.8 million people employed with only 1 in 4 manufacturing leaders being women. With labor being at the forefront of what every manufacturer is investing in and looking to solve for, a solution for childcare, flexibility and getting women into the workforce



will continue to be important as we pull out of the pandemic. **To recruit more women, we need to focus on improving these main areas:**

- 1. Educate against the stigmas**
- 2. Flexibility**
  - a. Childcare**
  - b. Flexible Hours**
- 3. Female Mentors**

Starting in the mid-80's, a multi-generational push for a college education began. How many Millennials grew up being told to go into manufacturing and skilled labor? College was the expected course for success and quite honestly still is. To recruit more women into manufacturing, first we need to educate women about the opportunities. I spoke with Marianne Mulford LeSage, CEO of Amcase located in High Point North Carolina. Marianne, has the honor of leading this woman owned business in one of the furniture manufacturing hubs in our industry. She shared her own thoughts on this stigma, "Manufacturing isn't what it use to be; the dirty, physically demanding and dangerous jobs many still believe they are. Today, manufacturing is high-tech, safe and clean. Look at CNC machinery, these skilled jobs take attention to detail and problem solving, skills women generally possess. These types of opportunities are endless and we need to educate against the stigmas."

Bringing a diverse landscape of workers into manufacturing and educating women about the opportunities is a first step. Manufacturers can start by working with local high schools to educate against the old stigmas and shed light into the future manufac

**INDUSTRY  
HOT TOPICS**

turing has to offer. We also need to look inward; it needs to start with each of us changing our own mindsets on what a career in manufacturing looks like. We can all change this stigma through our own conversations with family, friends, colleagues and the younger generations.

Flexibility continues to ring high on what is keeping women out of manufacturing. Many women must choose between working or staying home to support their family as childcare costs continue to rise. Even with children in school, normal working hours are not feasible. Flexible manufacturing schedules need to be at the forefront of giving women options to have both a career and safe and affordable options for childcare. This is the easiest barrier for entry as school schedules and childcare costs are going to be a nationwide problem, we as a country need to address. When chatting with other manufacturers across the country, I've heard solutions to this problem. Some adopting different shifts and different hours for full-time and part time solutions. Another interesting idea was pairing teams up for shifts that worked for the team members personal schedules. Start times alter from 6 am all the way up to 10 am which allowed for start times after school drop off and vice versa for the end of day schedules. Part time solutions are also becoming more accommodating for working parents to address this nationwide issue.

And finally, just like in the architecture world, we need to nurture women in manufacturing, help them accomplish their goals and mentor and bring others along with us. Women by nature are more empathetic and can build strong tight knit cultures. Marianne Mulford LeSage is proud of the empathetic workforce and



culture they have in place at Amcase. Why? "Because when you foster nurturing and empathetic leaders in your organization it creates a diverse network of ideas that solve problems and make working through a global pandemic simply easier to manage. At Amcase, we weren't alone during the journey, we were in it together." Marianne and Amcase understood throughout the pandemic the valuable contributions women bring to the organization. They know TALENT WINS regardless of gender.



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*Anna Castelli Ferrieri  
and Giulio Castelli*

# TRAILBLAZERS OF DESIGN: ANNA CASTELLI FERRIERI OF KARTELL

One of the first women to graduate in architecture at the Milan Polytechnic. One of the protagonists of the extraordinary Italian design season after World War II. The first Italian designer to see her pieces exhibited in the largest contemporary museums around the world. The figure of Anna Castelli Ferrieri is a hymn to female creativity, a great charisma at the service of design that has brought innovation first of all to the family company, Kartell, to establish itself internationally.

Pragmatic and aware architect and designer, Anna Castelli has held prestigious positions (such as the presidency of the Association for Italian Design, the first woman to hold this position, and university teaching), becoming a reference figure for the whole world of project.

It was 1972 when Anna Castelli Ferrieri posed in front of the window of the bookstore of the Moma - Museum of Modern Art in New York where her Modular furniture was exhibited as soon as it entered the permanent collection of the Ameri-

can Museum, a best and long seller of the brand still present in the catalog of the company after almost fifty years thanks to the ability to renew itself with new finishes, colors and materials that are always different, including the latest Bio and Recycled version.

Born with the name "furniture 4970/84", the Componibili by Anna Castelli Ferrieri have revolutionized design for the new peculiar creative approach that combines design with plastic materials and today they continue to innovate following the design path of Kartell. The Bio Componibili are in fact made using a sustainable material, TUV certified that has obtained the maximum score of 4 stars, derived from agricultural production waste that does not compete with food for humans and animals.

**Kartell**

# CELEBRATING Women IN OUR INDUSTRY

The Contract Furniture Industry is undeniably full of extraordinary women in every type of role. This industry is all about innovation, vision and creativity, and incredible women have been at the forefront of things since the beginning.

In honor of Women's History Month, we are highlighting some of these amazing women and stories!

We invite you to dive in and celebrate these unique experiences and perspective with us.

- The MRL Team





**CELEBRATING  
WOMEN IN  
THE INDUSTRY**



**Jen Miret**  
Director of Marketing at  
[Bendheim](#)

Jen Miret brings more than 15 years of experience in marketing, communications, and public relations to her role as Director of Marketing at Bendheim – a design-driven, leading supplier of specialty architectural glass systems. She is responsible for leading the company's digital marketing, brand awareness, and media relations. Throughout her tenure at Bendheim, Jen launched the company's first integrated marketing programs and spearheaded a national rebranding campaign to optimize the company's brand identity. She has authored articles for major industry publications, increased glob-

al thought leadership, and directed content development to drive business results. Jen has also successfully collaborated with architectural and design professionals to develop new products. Her encyclopedic knowledge of the architectural glass industry and Bendheim's solutions has helped her bring to market award winning glass collections. She likes to keep abreast of industry trends and challenges to provide Bendheim with expert marketing leadership. A graduate of Ramapo College of New Jersey, Jen lives in New York with her husband and daughter.



**Natasha Garner**  
Marketing and Product  
Innovation PM at  
[Claridge Products](#)

In 2013, I was 22, working a dead-end job, eager to find what made my heart happy. I asked my brother-in-law if there were openings where he worked, Claridge Products. The opportunity was as entry level as you can imagine, and though I did not think markerboards were going to set my soul on fire, it was a step up and I jumped at it. I was in that role a few months and started moving up. My initial path was a support role – aiming to support our sales and marketing teams as best as I could - and as a people pleaser, it was right up my alley!

Fast forward to 2020. Always eager to take on more, I was asked to put my product knowledge to the test and help develop a product line designed to combat Covid. And I absolutely loved it. Every day was a new experience and an opportunity to learn something. At the beginning of this year, I was promoted to Marketing / Product Innovation Project Manager. From analyzing market trends to bringing new product ideas to life, I never could have imagined I would enjoy my day as much as I do now!



**Jenina Garcia Dolce**  
Vice President of  
Business Development at  
[Arnold Collective](#)

"Agility" is Jenina Garcia Dolce's first-choice adjective for the contract furniture industry. Specifically, she values agility when partnering with A & D firms for institutional, corporate and hospitality projects. It's important to be able to think outside of the box efficiently and quickly, as VP of Business Development for Arnold Collective. And of course this same practice is now needed more than ever, between manufacturers and clients.

Jenina is, "continuously impressed with how we have pivoted over the past two years. Our best practices have shifted, but it's still an exciting time, as it pushes us outside of our comfort zones."

A favorite aspect of her role are the professional connections and friendships. "Forward-thinking colleagues have always shared

their time and expertise." Client satisfaction and true collaboration are our top goals. "I always look forward to taking part in the creative process with the designer. Assisting them with sourcing the right options in order to make the client happy, fuels me. Their needs drive the design. Then the cherry on top is visiting the space after installation to see firsthand that those needs were met."

Jenina shares that the industry will continue to pivot as the impacts of the pandemic drive design trends. "This has been a huge opportunity to scale our creative solutions. We are a small company so it's easy for us to be nimble. Agility might be our strongest asset."

**CELEBRATING  
WOMEN IN  
THE INDUSTRY**



**Patricia Cadigan**

VP of Learning  
Environments at  
[Artcobell](#)

Passionate about student success, Patricia Cadigan, M. Ed., connects with school leaders, teachers, and designers of education spaces to transform learning across campuses by creating environments that enhance teaching and learning. Understanding how design, layout, and the configuration of spaces directly impacts student engagement and achievement, she finds it critical to find individualized solutions that fit each school.

Throughout her 28-year career in public education, she has been at the forefront of initiatives that have made a direct impact on teaching and learning. She understands that today's schools are facing myriad factors influencing them to change to meet the demands of their communities. From the

advancements in technology, school choice, safety, and more, these diverse needs require that the industry must come together to provide solutions.

Patricia started at Artcobell in 2018 and recently was appointed Vice President of Learning Environments. She leads outreach to schools, providing upfront inspiration and critical information on planning learning space transformation as well as critical, post-occupancy professional development for teachers. Her cutting-edge ideas and emphasis on creating stimulating learning environments for students and teachers uses evidence-based research to facilitate learning success.



**Marianne Mulford  
LeSage**

CEO at  
[Amcase](#)

I am Marianne Mulford LeSage, CEO of Amcase, Inc., which is a second generation business. I grew up working with my father in his woodshop making all sorts of pieces for our home and family. This fostered my interest in furniture from a young age. I started as the receptionist and moved through the ranks to learn the business and industry. Now, as the CEO, I work closely with all clients to ensure their expectations are met. I also meet with designers to make sure all project specifications are exceeded. One of my joys is being able to walk out onto the production floor to see what Amcase has designed, built and will be shipping out to one of our clients for in-

stallation. Being able to see our work come to fruition is a driving factor for my passion.

Amcase is a modular casework manufacturer known in the industry for our quality products and superior customer service. We pride ourselves on providing solutions for working environments to promote efficient performance. Our work includes patient room furniture, nurse stations, reception areas, and procedure room storage in health-care. We also provide classroom casework, lockers, labs, and many other pieces for a variety educational settings.



**Susan Claus**

Director of Marketing  
[GMI Companies](#)

I have been preparing myself for a seat at the table for as long as I can remember. I won't bore you with my resume from high school and college (Go Buckeyes!) as we all have our accomplishments. After completing my marketing degree, I was unsure on where to go. With a stop at a medical distributor outside Chicago, an e-commerce dealer in Cincinnati, and a short research consultant stint, I earned the opportunity to lead the marketing department for GMI, parent company of our more well-known brands Ghent, VividBoard and Waddell. Through the years you've probably received an email from me (search your inbox for susan.claus@gmi-companies.com), seen or heard me in videos and webinars, or encountered the content my team has developed like our blog and Product Builder configure and quote tool. Outside of managing the day-to-day activi-

ties, I am a member of our senior leadership team developing company strategy, a place I've sat long before being promoted to Director of Marketing. When you look around the table, you'll notice more than half of the room is comprised of women, not so common amongst manufacturing companies. Together we lift each other up, encourage, and collaborate to produce some amazing outcomes (hello record breaking year after year). We've cheered each other on outside of our titles, too. Most recently I was the first representative from our company to participate in the Cincinnati Chamber's WE Lead leadership program. Others have followed my footsteps. Behind these words are so many accomplishments, but there are more to come. Keep your eye on us in 2022 and beyond.



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# DRIVEN TO IMPROVE, DRIVEN TO DEVELOP

## SPOTLIGHT ON ANDI TALLEY

Andi Talley isn't just a big believer in continuous improvement as a means to improve manufacturing processes. She's a big believer in continuous improvement on a human level.

Almost 25 years ago, Andi took a break from college short of a degree, returned home to West Michigan and started building chairs for office furniture maker Herman Miller.

"I've been fortunate enough to be tapped on the shoulder a few times," Andi says. "I was invited to be part of a development program for continuous improvement trainers." Right place, right time. It was the late 1990s, when the lean manufacturing concepts introduced by Toyota were starting to take hold across many industries.

That put her on the path to preach the gospel of continuous improvement – looking for wasted motion, making sure machines and people are being used to their full potential, identifying and fixing small problems before they become big ones.

And in the process, she began to see that, "When it comes to leadership around continuous improvement, it's not about

telling people what to do. It's about helping them think about what's getting in their way and helping them come up with their own ideas to solve the problem. We never want lean manufacturing to be something that's done TO people, it needs to be done WITH people."

She was tapped again, for a trial run as an operations manager. A three-month assignment turned into six, then nine, then became permanent. Says Andi, "I saw I could still do the things I liked – including coaching and developing people – but I could also be more strategic."

And then, in early 2021, a former colleague convinced Andi to join him at a small educational furniture company just down the road. Again – right place, right time.

Says Andi, "Fleetwood Furniture had been doing things the same way for a long time. Their processes were not lean, but there was new leadership and a new direction. I saw the opportunity to help grow the business and use my passion for continuous improvement, coaching and development. And everything about the company, including its purpose, appealed to me."

**CELEBRATING  
WOMEN IN  
THE INDUSTRY**

Fleetwood has been a Christ-centered company since its founding in 1955 and dedicates a significant portion of its profits to mission causes. It is also one of the oldest Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) companies in the United States.

Andi has day-to-day management responsibility for Fleetwood's plant in Holland, MI. She says it feels great to know the team's work is making the day better for students and teachers, and she's discovered multiple benefits of moving to a smaller company.

"I connect on a regular basis with the rest of the Fleetwood leadership team, and we're able to make quick decisions," she says. "And I can proudly say that I know every employee's name – even those who are working temp jobs in the factory – but since I arrived during the pandemic I had to relearn the faces once everyone took their masks off!"

Andi also plays a more active role in the development of her direct reports and the rest of the factory workforce.

"In my previous job, there were lots of different development programs run at the corporate level. Here, I have much more opportunity to influence development and make sure it's relevant for our needs," Andi says. "We've just started a new program for team leaders without direct reports. They may not be people leaders but they're very focused on problem solving. How do we help them lead with influence?"

Andi says some of her own influence can be applied to new product development as well as to improving flow on the factory floor. At Herman Miller, she was a strong advocate for design that would be easier to manufacture and leave less

room for error. Small decisions in design can have a significant impact on the people who are putting a chair together. And in an ESOP company, everyone is paying attention.

*"Being 100% employee owned creates better buy-in from the employees. We're often asked, 'Is the right thing to do for the business?' People are very aware of margins and why we must get the quality right from the beginning," Andi says.*

Supply chain and staffing issues have made it more difficult for Fleetwood to hit its stated goal of hitting confirmed delivery dates at least 99 percent of the time. Andi says she's worked with Human Resources to retain employees by providing better balance for employees through staggered shift times, seasonal hiring and flexible scheduling. Says Andi, "Educational furniture orders peak in the summer, but summer on the shores of Lake Michigan is pretty special so we do everything we can to hit our schedule and limit weekend work."

Although Andi says she is fortunate to have worked for leaders who've encouraged her and provided opportunities for growth, her advice to women looking to move into operations leadership is to take ownership of their own development. "You can't always wait to be tapped, you have to speak up if you're interested," she says.

It comes as no surprise that Andi says her career success comes from building strong relationships. "I've always looked for other women who I can empower," she says. "I want to show them that just about anything is possible."



## **WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: SPOTLIGHT ON BARBARA NOLAN**



As one of eleven children, Barbara was raised in a “no excuses” environment. Barbara’s mother, Theresa, went back to college and law school at the age of 40, after having 11 children, and retired at 75 as a Circuit Court Judge and the first woman to serve as the President of the Prince George’s County Bar Association.

Barbara is the ninth child of the equally successful 11, seven girls and four boys. You can imagine the path her mother paved back then, when pursuing a career of your own as a woman, was frowned upon, let alone raising eleven children while doing it. Barbara’s mother would say, “bite off more than you can chew and chew like hell”. Hard work and perseverance were her cornerstones. No complaining, just “pull your bootstraps up” and move forward. What an amazing woman and incredible role model she still is today.

Barbara graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in Journalism, and of course, she was going to be the next Katie Couric. However, her career took another path. While she was “filling in” as a receptionist for her sister’s

head-hunting firm, she was asked to interview for an open position herself. Thinking this would be good practice for her future journalism interviews, Barbara agreed. Upon returning from the first interview, the company had already called to schedule a second. Again, as a “let’s see what a second interview is like”, she agreed. Within days, the job offer was on the table. The decision was hard, but Barbara was raised to be responsible and self-reliant, so she accepted the job and has never looked back.

She began her career at Lear Melick, a rep firm in the DC/Philly market, as a back-room materials fulfillment and receptionist. It was there that she learned the rep business and began to excel. Running circles around her colleagues, Barbara thought, “I can do this.” When she wanted to go into sales, her boss at the time, Sam Lear, didn’t think she was ready. Not skipping a beat, Barbara began studying for her realtor’s license. When she went to resign from Lear Melick, they immediately put her into sales. Barbara quickly excelled and was calling on the Richmond market, (2 hours south of DC) when Lear Melick decided to close its doors overnight. It was then that she partnered with Karen Kandel and opened Portfolio. Barbara was 24. At that time, there were very few women reps, it was mostly the “good ol’ boys” network. Portfolio, a multi-line rep firm, quickly made a name for itself as solution-driven and service-oriented. During her time at Portfolio, Barbara not only worked hard to build the business, but also became very involved in DIFFA (Design Industry Foundation for AIDS). After three years with Portfolio, Barbara was getting married and decided to move on from the company. When departing Portfolio, she did not take any of the business with her, deciding to let it be and move forward in a positive direction. It was then that she took on a few small lines and began working out of her home.

**Barbara’s determination, perseverance and people skills brought manufacturers knocking on her door. Before long, she was turning them away. As the business grew, she hired team members, and they happened to all be women.**

**CELEBRATING  
WOMEN IN  
THE INDUSTRY**

30 years later, Barbara is Principal of a thriving and well-respected manufacturers rep firm, Nolan Brands. She and her partner, Marie Davis, pride themselves on bringing the very best in class to the market. Marie is Barbara's niece, whom Barbara brought into the industry and groomed for success. The two are often described as carbon copies of one another, tenacious and driven, both having grown up with Theresa, Barbara's mother, and Marie's grandmother, as an incredible influence.

They are blessed to work out of the HALCON showroom in Georgetown, where they are able to share most of their offerings. In addition to DC, Nolan Brands team covers the Great-

er Richmond, Greater Baltimore, and Greater Philly markets. Barbara's successful team continues to be all women. Barbara says there is something about this industry, once you enter, you never leave. She wakes up every morning ready to attack the day and still enjoys the many challenges and strategy of the contract furniture world. Service and customer experience are the pillars of Nolan Brands existence, and most importantly, all manufactures must be equally minded.

Barbara's advice is to work hard, dream, and go for it! Everything is within reach!

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# BRYNA RAPP

**Cofounder and  
Vice President  
of FurnitureLab**



For nearly 30 years, I have served as the VP and Art Director for FurnitureLab. While some companies are founded by visionary people with a grand business plan, our origin story is more humble... My husband and I needed furniture for our first apartment and couldn't afford our champagne taste—we were so young! With training in printmaking (him) and architecture (me), we came up with some simple slab table and chair designs. We cut the pieces ourselves and experimented with silk screening graphics onto the wood before assembling them in our small San Francisco apartment. The resulting furniture was unique and arty and soon found a comfortable home in galleries around the US. People started commissioning screen printed tables and chairs for their homes and businesses, and before long we were busy enough to realize that we were on to something interesting. Over the course of the next decade, we brought my brother into the business and transitioned fully from custom residential furniture to the contract furnishings market, which truly feels like home to us.

Like many family businesses, FurnitureLab has been successful because each member of our team brings unique talents and focus to the enterprise. Given my 30 years as an

architect, I can't help but look for creative ways to make every space more comfortable. Commercial dining environments are no exception. Whether it's a high-back, tufted booth to buffer the din of chatty diners or a patterned table top to add an unexpected pop of color, I love finding ways to make the dining experience more engaging and enjoyable. Sometimes this leads us to create something new, like our smart and adorable table-for-one on wheels to help diners space themselves out during the pandemic.

*I always enjoy working with other architects and designers to help them personalize and customize our products to bring their unique vision to life.*

I appreciate their attention to quality and detail and know our durable furnishings will fit the bill. As a member of the A&D community, I share their understanding of the potential for good design to create comfort and connection. In this way, my background really aids in understanding our customers better.

## CELEBRATING WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

While my partners have focused on the economics of running a successful small business, I've made it a priority to use that success to strengthen our community. Since our founding, we have integrated an ethic of "giving back" into our company culture and processes. We established the FurnitureLab Creative Arts Fund to provide ongoing support for local arts organizations' afterschool and summer enrichment programs. To further assist local kids, our team has an annual tradition of bringing food and funds to our neighborhood food pantry around the holidays.

In 2020, when the pandemic hit, we felt the need to reach beyond our local community as folks were struggling everywhere with basic necessities. We discovered that Feeding America was supporting local food banks across the country and decided to donate \$50 for every informational webinar we host. To date we have donated over \$15,000 to this wonderful non-profit.

Then in 2021 when it became evident that travel and in-person visits would be off the table for quite a while longer, a small group of my colleagues and I brainstormed ways to connect with our clients, something more fun and personal than a Zoom call. We landed on an idea to craft fun, funny, informative product videos. FurnitureLab hired local actors and comedians, a local video production company, a local crew and even a local photographer. Creative work had been on hold for so long we were thrilled to give all of these artists and experts a job and an opportunity to do their thing. This project is in the process of launching and it's been really fun to watch it take shape. If you're reading this, you should check it out!

When we first started FurnitureLab, commercial furniture was overwhelmingly a male-dominated industry. Over time it has been inspiring and heartening to see those numbers shift just a bit. I am proud to say that over the years FurnitureLab has become majority female, so it makes sense that our in-house leaders are often women.

Our most senior sales pro is a woman who leads our recruitment and training process among so many other contributions—too many to name—and often outsells all of her

peers as well. In 2015, we created a dedicated marketing team instead of handling it from the c-suite, and promoted a woman from within to run that whole department. Since then she has guided us all through a rebrand, a new website, dozens of successful product launches, and just keeps the FurnitureLab brand fresh and on everyone's minds. The entire project management team here is female, and they are absolutely amazing at solving customer problems, catching problems before they happen, saving our sanity (and our bottom line) every single day.

We've never gone out of our way to recruit women specifically, it happened organically. And no one here has been promoted based on gender—these colleagues advanced because they are all talented, capable and smart! Everyone always says "representation is important" and I agree—and can't help but wonder if my presence as a co-owner didn't have something to do with all of these great women on our team. It's certainly an honor to think it might.

We're lucky to have such a strong group of collaborators here at FurnitureLab. Everyone on staff has contributed so much to help the company remain nimble over the past few hectic years. And with so many colleagues still working from home, I am also spearheading ways to keep our whole team connected and engaged. We exhausted our capacity for trivia at the start of the pandemic, then moved to reading and discussing a few great books. These days at our weekly team video meetings I've been selecting a random topic for small group discussions. We're laughing a lot and getting to know each other a bit more, which we've learned over time can really make a difference in the quality of our collaboration and communication.

Fortifying our own internal relationships is just as crucial as serving customers and giving back to our community, and it's exciting that we have been able to evolve and meet so many challenges together. We'd love to see a return to more "normal" times, like everyone else in the world, but I know this company has what it takes to overcome any obstacles the future may hold for us, because of our people.





# 4 WAYS TO SUPPORT AND BE SUPPORTED AS A YOUNG, FEMALE LEADER

*By Chelsea King*

## ***From the Perspective of a Young, Female Leader***

“Women are socially conscious leaders that serve to cultivate innovation and initiative for both themselves and others,” wrote Glenn Llopis in a 2011 Forbes article titled “4 Skills that Give Women a Sustainable Advantage Over Men.” It may be for this very reason why the percentage of women in senior management has grown globally to the highest ever recorded, according to a Catalyst, March, 2022 report. But the reality is — developing young, female leaders requires more than thoughtful leadership and a feminine resourcefulness.

As the VP of Design and Marketing for King Business Interiors, leading as a woman allows me to foster collaboration and empower other women to see the vision. King Business Interiors — a best-in-class office furniture and flooring dealer in Columbus, Ohio — was founded by my mother, Darla King, more than 20 years ago. As a women-founded and owned business, advancing female leaders to new heights is part of the legacy my mom has created. But doing so requires a bit of nurturing and here's how:

### **1. Instill and Develop Confidence**

It's no secret, women make great leaders. In a study by Pepperdine University, women in top positions reported beating the industry average in terms of productivity and profitability (Llopis, 2011). The key, however, lies in helping young women envision this for themselves. Because I was raised by a strong, woman leader, my mom has impacted my mindset and outlook to never doubt my ability to lead. Furthermore, she showed me that nothing could get in my way. I realize not all young women grew up being influenced by a “built-in” role model to shield blind spots, but don't let that be a barrier to your path. You can seek guidance from other female leaders, which has also been instrumental for me during my leadership journey. Seeking to find your role model, either within or outside your organization, helps guide you through obstacles and is essential to developing your own leadership aspirations. For existing leaders, aim to be that influential force and confidence boost for other future female leaders — it will truly make a difference!

## 2. Mentor Through Collaboration

Growth and inspiration can come from any direction! A truth of both up-down mentoring and collaboration. Women are natural-born cultivators who seek to establish company cultures where collaboration is not only encouraged but furthers productivity that impacts the bottom line. As a developing leader, remember to play to that natural strength and for those who are nurturing young leaders remember to embrace collaboration. For example, looking to other women has given me space to speak openly, a sounding board for processing and the guidance I've needed to become the leader I am today. Conversely, looking back I realize how impactful mentoring younger female leaders has been to my own development. Not only has it helped increase my own confidence, but it's also heightened my self-awareness of behaviors and feelings that I work to strengthen.

## 3. Invest Time in Developing Leadership Skill Sets

The journey to become a leader requires development of specific skill sets. And as a young leader, growing that confidence and skill set may lie outside of your own organization. For example, I've volunteered in a variety of association committees and boards. Stepping up to lead in those has helped me strengthen soft skills (such as, handling difficult conversations, being influential and advocating for new ideas) in a safe space, while also developing hard skills such as budgets, financials, marketing and other areas of expertise I'm not exposed to in my day-to-day job. This goes for the employer as well as the employee! Support and encourage participation in professional organizations to help your young, female associates practice and hone their leadership skills.



**CHELSEA KING**  
*VP of Marketing & Design at King Business Interiors*

Chelsea King is a commercial workplace adviser at King Business Interiors. King is a second generation family owned business with a strong legacy in Columbus, Ohio. Here, she specializes in leading product selection, managing efficient budgets, and passionately serving as a research liaison.

**Connect with Chelsea on LinkedIn [HERE](#).**

## 4. Establish a Strong Network

Another crucial part of developing or helping to develop female leaders is to understand the power in surrounding oneself with the "right" people — both personally and professionally. "Women see opportunity in everything and everyone: their neighbors, friends, family, business associates, strategic partners, etc.," (Llopis, 2011). Leveraging that very strength is imperative for a young leader's development, as the very foundation of a good business is being open to diverse people and perspectives. And diversity is a lot of things: age, gender, race and sexual orientation, but also ideas, backgrounds, education and skill sets.

Curating inclusive environments is only one side of the coin here. Young leaders should fill their life with those that cheer them on! My mom taught me it can feel lonely at the top, so building a strong support system at home and in the office is essential to your overall well-being. At times you may feel defeated or lost but with the right team of support to build you back up, you can overcome a lot.

"Women in business are masters at fostering impactful relationships that last," (Llopis, 2011). So while competitiveness in business can be the norm, the reality is — women build each other up. Being in a female-dominant industry, I've been inspired by working alongside other women. It's at the heart of this where we'll find the ingredients necessary to nurture and develop our young, female leaders.

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## **WE'VE SEEN THE LIGHT, WE WANT YOUR DESIGN DEPARTMENT TO JOIN THE REVOLUTION** *By Anne Bengé - CEO, Cultura*

"And the next time you have a team or company meeting, and someone suggests, 'Well, all we do is design office spaces... relax....' .... Honest to goodness, at least for us, let them know that is not what you do. What you guys do is help to create a space where scientists and engineers feel inspired and draw every molecule of energy possible, to keep searching for a cure for cancer. You are a product of the environment and people you surround yourself with – we and the patients we serve need all the help they can get." – JMO Lifescience client of Cultura.

This pretty much says it all about the leadership and impact Joelle Beans has in the world of design.

The office furniture dealership has historically been based on a model that incorporated professional designers doing

technical design and salespeople, often without design backgrounds or degrees, pushing, selling and specifying furniture. When a designer is told what to specify in their design by a salesperson, it reduces the design, the business impact and the overall joy in design.

Joelle Beans has literally seen it all and has successfully moved her team and the entire company of Cultura from this old business model of salespeople selling products to a company of creative designers listening, learning, culture mapping and then creating impactful places where people love to work.

Her leadership style is unlike many and in fact, when asked to step up as the VP of Design, Joelle was unsure for many reasons. Certainly, the notion of "what if I stink at this" came



up but also, everyone who becomes a design director quits within 2 years because managing people, fending off salespeople and growing further away from design and creativity lands you in a thankless job that is then easy to quit.

Not Joelle. She has tackled the problem methodically, incorporating the entire team at Cultura. She revamped how work is distributed by focusing on strengths and identifying learning opportunities. She has fundamentally shifted the team from client-based designer assignments to a hybrid model where some assignments and many projects are assigned based on enjoyment and type of work.

Her design team is client facing over 70% of the time which brings with it clean information. Designing to a budget for a client requires extensive knowledge of pricing, quality, manufacturer go-tos, technical integration with AV /IT, you know the drill. All of which results in control of their own schedules, no weekend work, very little punch, or client expectations not being met; ultimately resulting in happy clients and designer job satisfaction.

Shifting a team to being bold, confident, and comfortable in live design is key. A whole lot different than the learning of bracketry, supports and electrical wiring. Mentoring the department into 100% confidence in Live Design has spiked our showroom visit numbers by 500%.

## **5 THINGS TO DO** in order shift your design department:

- 1. Encourage** dealer designers to talk directly with design firm designers bringing higher margin, fewer mistakes, and increased business development due to common language.
- 2. Have a design presence** on the leadership team bringing with it metrics that include showroom traffic, increased productivity, and decreased attrition all due to happy designers.
- 3. Designers are not salespeople** and typically not extroverted so, supporting the learning process with patience and teamwork in order to help designers become comfortable working with clients and designers face to face is key.
- 4. Get rid of timesheets** and let the process be.
- 5. Share in the success** spiffs and bonuses are critical.



### **About Joelle Beans**

Joelle Beans is a graduate of Northern Arizona University and has spent her 20+ years as a dealer designer specifying Haworth. Joelle is the type of designer that likes to really listen to client needs and then analyze everything from a company's culture to an individual's work style so she can deliver the best results possible. As VP of Design, Joelle plays a key role on the Cultura all-women leadership team and continues to advance her department as well as paving the way for the dealership of the future.

**Connect with Joelle on LinkedIn [HERE](#).**

### **About Cultura**

Our mission is to create places where people love to work. We do so by cultivating discussions around our clients' culture that informs our design process and approach to solutions, giving culture a place. We are an engaged team of diverse expertise and backgrounds, that when combined, provides a full range of furniture-based services. We are a living example of what we set out to do everyday; we all love where we work.

In a time of social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion, the intersection and support your business gives is on all levels. Our richly diverse workforce is influential, inventive, impactful and dedicated. We boast a 99% employee engagement rate and #1 Best Places to Work in San Diego 2021, for the small employer category and the 4th largest women owned business/7th largest minority owned business in San Diego (SDBJ).

We inspire positive change, dream ideas into reality, make the experience matter and grow together. #LoveWhereYouWork

**Website: [www.wearecultura.com](http://www.wearecultura.com) | Instagram: [@wearecultura](https://www.instagram.com/wearecultura)**



# NAVIGATING THE UNPREDICTABLE WITH A STRONG SUPPORT NETWORK



BY JULIE HOFFMANN

I recently accepted a new position as the Director of Design for New York and Wisconsin with Henricksen – a leading national contract furniture dealership, and as I reflect back on the trajectory of my career, I can point to both my ability to adapt and pivot in the face of unexpected circumstances, and to the supportive relationships I have formed throughout my journey, that have gotten me to where I am today.

Change is inevitable. Maybe even more importantly, change can be an accelerant. It can push you to do things outside of your comfort zone and take you to places you never even imagined for yourself. Adapting to change started for me even with my entrance into the field of interior design. It all began with a trip to a local residential furniture store. My parents were getting a new living room set, so we visited the showroom and worked with a professional there. I remember being so interested in the process that I took an interior design class through the art department in high school. The class focused on interiors and furniture through history and after that experience, I decided to go to college for interior design.

So how exactly did I go from an interest in space planning living room furniture to a long career in the contract furniture industry? Well, my educational experience at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point (go #Pointers) was filled with diverse experiences and studies that helped me narrow in on what I was passionate about. I did some special projects around historic presentation that involved research and the creation of a photo exhibit. I took a course on store planning. I did two international programs abroad, one in 1992 to England, France, and Belgium, and another in 1995 where I was able to travel to Greece and Turkey. Eventually I took a course on office space planning, which led me to do an internship with a local furniture dealership. That Internship really solidified for me that office space planning is what I liked to do, which was a complete change from why I even started down this educational path.

After graduation I applied and interviewed at a couple furniture dealerships in Southeastern Wisconsin. Eventually I landed my first full time job as an interior designer with a Steelcase dealership in Madison, Wisconsin. After Five years there I made the move to Milwaukee, to yet another Steelcase Dealership.

In 2009, after nine years with that company, I was laid off. This completely unplanned event really changed the course of my career, for the better. I spent seven months searching for a new role, and due to the extensive job-searching experience I acquired during this time I actually ended up landing a job with a national online university in the Career Services Department. This work was extremely rewarding and proved to me that I could do something else, that I had the skills and ability to work in a completely different field.

During this time, I started to realize the value of networking and creating meaningful professional relationships. Not only to help me find new job opportunities, but to expose me to different ideas and guidance as it related to my own professional development. I started to cultivate relationships with people both inside and outside of the design industry.

I worked in career services for about seven months before an opportunity arose to go back to work in my chosen field



## CELEBRATING WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

– commercial interior design. This position was with a local Teknion dealership. I was there for 5 years, was promoted to a senior level designer, and took on some mentorship responsibilities when two junior designers were hired. Through my professional network, I was informed of an opportunity with a national Allsteel dealership and I decided to pursue it. I was hired on as a designer and within three months, a regional design manager opportunity opened up within the organization.

My first instincts were hesitation and uncertainty. I thought I wasn't ready and didn't have enough experience. But at the same time, I knew that you really can't choose when opportunity comes along. I talked with my current manager about the job and got her viewpoint on the opportunity and decided to go for it. I interviewed with a regional sales manager, a national project manager, and then interviewed with the National Director of Design, who would eventually become my manager and mentor. I was offered the position of Regional Design Manager where I supported two different markets: Wisconsin / Minnesota and Illinois / Indiana. 14 people reported to me across those four states. In retrospect, that whole job uniquely prepared me for working in commercial design management during a pandemic. Only two of the people that reported to me during that time were physically located in my Wisconsin office, the rest were spread throughout the region and I only saw them in person once or twice a year.

In my new role, I spent a lot of time learning from my new supervisor. Honestly, she deserves her own article! She worked her way up on the ranks at the company, first as a manager, then a regional manager, and then became the National Director of Design. She was responsible for setting the tone for what we did as designers, as in defining our responsibilities and pushing for more field exposure, rather than just sitting behind the scenes and cranking out furniture drawings and specifications. She believed that good design could have an impact on the world. It was really the first time I was inspired by someone that I worked for and she made me want to do my best work. She helped me see where a career in design could go.

I was also inspired by and learned from the other regional managers on the team. It was exciting to meet women from all different parts of the country and to have this position in common. We had the same struggles and issues, and it was helpful to have a network of people to get together with and solve problems. It was like being born into a group of sisters. Everyone really supported each other.

After a couple years, the company went through a massive restructuring of their organization and my position was eliminated. I was not out of work, but my management role was dissolved and I was strictly doing design work again. This change made me realize that I wanted to stay in leadership and gave me the push to start looking for something different. I leaned on my established network to learn about other openings in the industry and actually two people that I'd previously worked with recommended me to Henricksen. This just goes to show how important it is to maintain and nurture the professional relationships that you make throughout your career journey.

Henricksen was founded by Shirley Henricksen in the 1960s. I love that the company was founded by a female entrepreneur and to this day 72% of Henricksen employees are women. In a way, Shirley serves as mentor to me as well. Her strength and fortitude inspire me in a similar way to the strong women I have met throughout my career.

I will say again, that it was these relationships that I made throughout the course of my career and my ability to pivot in the face of change that landed me here. When I was working as a designer before the recession, I truly never had intentions of going into leadership, but then I lost my job, which took me to working for a different company, which pushed me to take on more responsibility and think about how I could grow as a professional. And I can't emphasize enough how important relationship building can be as you navigate your career. Especially in our industry, because it is so small and you will probably end up working with people more than once throughout your journey.

This year, when I was in the interview process for my new position, I reached out to my former manager and mentor. She spent time with me and talked me through what a director position looked like, and helped me see what I could bring to the role.

My advice to any designers starting out, would be to develop these types of professional relationships. I have a student coming into shadow me this month because I really want to help others figure out where they want to go with their career like my mentors did for me. You really can do so much with interior design. You can be a designer at a dealership, a textile designer, a vendor rep, a carpet designer. A lot of the most successful sales people I know in the industry have a design background. You could work for a manufacturer, you could end up in ownership. There possibilities are endless.



# Henricksen

# WHY CHOOSING THE RIGHT COMPANY

Is As Important  
As Choosing The  
Right Furniture



*By Mindi Faris and Jenifer Halverson, Pacific Office Interiors*

Are you feeling stuck and inflexible with limited options? Do you dread going to work each day because it's going to be just like the day before? Does the message you are sending to the world just not seem authentic to you? Did it ever?

Of course, selecting the wrong office furniture can lead to all of these feelings for the people who go to work in cookie-cutter spaces filled with "big-box" dark brown particle-board office furniture with high, gray cubicle walls and even grayer floors.

But these feelings can also come from selecting the wrong company at which to work ...especially for women. No one wants to be locked into a monotony-filled job that stifles creativity, advancement and fulfillment.

Although there is still far more progress to be made, women have more opportunities than ever in the workplace, and the Interior Design and Contract Furniture industry happens to be one shining example where a high percentage of influential team members are women. Women in C-Level positions are a smaller percentage of leadership teams, but we're making progress there, too.

Like it or not, however, men and women are different, and by and large, we women have a different set of priorities and needs than men do -- some of which take us away from the office -- which makes it all the more difficult for a woman to navigate a career in an industry designed and dominated by men...and all the more important for women to choose their company wisely.

## Two Women's Stories

That's why we decided to write this article.

Mindi Faris: Soon after graduating from San Diego State University's Interior Design program, I interviewed with the owner of Pacific Office Interiors to see if I could pursue my interests in Interior Design. When you're interviewing with someone whose first name is "Free", you get a little bit of a clue about this person's open mindedness. I was fresh in the business -- any business -- and didn't have a lot of priorities at the time except to find a place to learn and grow and build a career for myself.

It worked out well for me: During the last 17 years, I have risen to become the Vice President of Client Engagement, got married, and am raising two beautiful children.

Jenifer Halverson: I am currently the Design Director at Pacific Office Interiors, and I had a very similar path to Mindi's. Single and fresh out of the Interior Design program at California State University Northridge, I interviewed with company president Free Taylor and quickly learned that POI had a perspective on fostering individual employee growth as innovative as their perspectives on office design. There have always been strong women in leadership roles at POI, and they, along with Free, made it clear that the company would not only accommodate but encourage our career growth and aspirations. Sixteen years later, I am also married and a mother of two wonderful boys, and firmly at the helm of my own career.

Together, we are two critical parts of the POI leadership team, and both of us have worked hard to not only design beautiful spaces for our clients, but to design careers and lifestyles for ourselves that are filled with creativity, advancement, and fulfillment.

That's why we'd like to offer our perspective and some important pieces of advice for women who are choosing a career in Interior Design, or are choosing to change course or companies during their careers.

## **Be Clear About Who You Are**

Our clients often say that they understand their own company after working with us better than they ever did before working with us. That's because in order for us to do our job right, we need to fully understand who our client is, their mission, their values, and their personality. If we don't know these things going in, there's no way the solutions we select (this color, that desk, this lamp...any of it) are going to work. So we spend a lot of time at the start of every project asking our clients a long list of questions, many of which our clients might not have considered before.

Similarly when you are choosing where to work, you need to know who YOU are, what you want now, what your goals are tomorrow, and the support you'll need to get there. That may mean asking yourself some questions you hadn't considered before. If the current leadership team isn't on board with your goals, you can't be who you are, and you won't be satisfied.

## **Be Clear About What You Want To Say To The World**

Your office (or hotel, restaurant, lobby, medical office, corporate office, government office, school campus...pretty much any interior or exterior space) says something about you to everyone who walks through your doors. Without seeing your company name, hearing a word, or talking to anyone, your office speaks volumes to every visitor and employee.

So, what does your space say? Does it say that you are forward-looking, creative, idealistic and successful? Or does it say that you're trapped by convention, living in the past, and not welcoming to new ideas and better ways to do things?

Similarly, every woman working in a company strives to express her individuality, her perspective, her talent and her vision...not only for her clients but for herself. A woman's message can express itself through career advancement, meaningful work, family life, good compensation, or all of the above.

## **Prioritize Comfort**

Effective ergonomic design makes staff more productive, increases efficiency, reduces down-time and even helps to reduce legal and medical costs. And these days, ergonomics aren't just about a supportive chair.

Ergonomics includes the abundance of alternative environments and ways of working -- height-adjustable desks, privacy pods, relaxation rooms, cafe-style workspaces, sound masking/absorbing elements, outdoor spaces and indoor pergolas that bring the outside in -- all with the goal of not only making the body healthier with support, activity and variety, but making the mind healthier, too.

The equivalent in your career might be the difference between doing the same thing every day versus having the freedom to change not only your work environment, but your work responsibilities over time. Will the company you are considering support you in your career growth? Will they encourage you to get up and try something different for a while, with cross-training, continued design education and even continued business and marketing education? If your goal is to move up or around within the company, you'll want access to all of these.

## Prioritize Adaptability

One of the big focuses across the industry is building an adaptable space. Office areas with movable walls and reconfigurable furniture allow a company to grow with its space instead of growing out of it.

If a modern office can be reconfigurable, why can't your job? When we each began to work at POI, we were in very junior roles and neither were married with children.

So what was the company response when the babies came?

Easily enough, it was accessible [from the car] workstations outfitted for baby gear, allowing us to tend to our new families without sacrificing our careers. And, when it was necessary to work from home to help with sick children or to volunteer at school, Free and POI again responded with a big Yes. So long as the work was done, the company grew and the clients were happy (and they were VERY happy), WFH was A-OK.

## Design Your Own Hybrid Life

Before COVID turned the whole world upside down, it made the world stop dead in its tracks. At that point, working from home wasn't actually a choice, it was required, and so POI rolled with the times and set up all the required office equip-

ment at home for all the design and administrative staff, allowing us and many others to be at home with children while the children were also learning/working from home.

Now that world is finally learning to live with COVID, this post-COVID business environment is going to be drastically different than it was before. We're finding that employees worldwide don't want to go back to their 5-day a week, 9 to 5 jobs with an hour-long commute each day. Companies are exploring the hybrid office policy, accompanied by flexible office furnishings and dependable technology, allowing the combination of at-work time with work-from-home time. In other words, employees can have it all.

## Having It All With The Right Company

And "having it all" is the ultimate goal, isn't it? Designing a "hybrid life" means being able to pursue your family life as vigorously as pursuing your career. Put in more conventional terms, it's about having a Work-Life balance that is fulfilling in every way.

And it all starts with knowing that choosing your company is maybe the most important decision of all. Know yourself, who you are and where you want to be in the next 5 or 15 years. And if you don't know where you want to be, that's OK, too. The important thing is putting yourself into the right environment no matter what you choose.



## **THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN LEADERS: SPOTLIGHT ON SERENA PANETTA**



*Serena Panetta*

Growing up, my dream as a little girl was to become a professional softball player. Never in my wildest imagination would I have thought that I would end up with a career in marketing for a contract seating and manufacturing company. What started as a summer internship for a Media Studies program led me to realize my real dream job - a professional position as a Marketing Coordinator at Borgo. This is not to say that my role as a Marketing Coordinator does not come with its challenges; however, I believe that without the ability to problem solve and overcome obstacles, one cannot progress and improve. Growing up, my father always told me to never be afraid to make mistakes because mistakes offer us the unique and valuable opportunity to learn.

I believe that everyone can learn from not only one's own mistakes but also the mistakes of others. March is now recognized as the month dedicated to gender equality based on the numerous years of the suppression and the mistreatment of women. I have had the privilege to witness firsthand the strength and resilience of females, not only in the media but also in my personal life, proving that women and girls

are, in fact, brave, influential, and valued members of society. Community groups and not-for-profit organizations work tirelessly every day to not only inspire and empower females, but to encourage others to offer women and girls the opportunities that were once only available to the male gender. From academics to employment salaries, the inequalities between men and women around the world are evident and are, oftentimes, undeniable. That is why all individuals are encouraged to join the conversation in hopes to better spread the word to recognize the desire and need for equality for all humans.

*Entering the profession as a female in a male dominated industry can be quite frightening and oftentimes intimidating; however, I am fortunate to work with a company that believes in workplace equality and acceptance. I am especially thankful to be a part of a team that recognizes my worth as an employee and as a colleague.*

At the time of this publication, I am twenty-four years old and three years post graduation; and yet, I have a lot to be proud of. I have accomplished more than I ever thought was possible for a woman my age and I have learned what it means to contribute to the world economy. From web design to catalog development, my employers have given me the opportunity to lead multiple campaigns, including a three-month long programmatic advertising campaign with My Resource Library. My work at Borgo has helped me to develop my marketing and advertising skills, while enhancing my knowledge of the design, creation, and utilization of furniture. I once thought that the trick to marketing such products was strictly about composition; however, I learned that it is a complex and perfect balance of design, innovation, business, and architecture.

**CELEBRATING  
WOMEN IN  
THE INDUSTRY**

I have always been completely fascinated with the world of art and architecture. From ancient ruins to modern day creations, it is a world that knows no bounds and pushes every envelope in order to innovate and reformulate. In university, I took a course titled, "Wonder and Awe" which focused on how culture, rituals, beliefs, traditions, conventions and practices all intertwine into one. This course taught me that art and architecture have the ability to help us think critically about the life and stories of humanity, both past and present. It is through this critical thought that we can analyze our own actions in order to grow and make our world one of equality, respect, acceptance, and opportunity.

I wake up every morning committed to being the greatest version of myself, and although I recognize that perfection, in its true sense, is not obtainable, my mission is to ensure that every day I work to my full potential. My goal is to recognize the importance of aesthetics while providing up-to-date and user-friendly marketing and educational materials. As a Marketing Coordinator, I am tasked with looking at usual and seemingly ordinary objects, such as a chair, with an unusual and abstract point of view. I must envision the environment that the chair will fit into and analyze how the chair will be best used within the space; therefore, I do my best to create accessible advertisements that not only educate, but also inspire and impress Borgo's customers, sales representatives, and dealers to embrace the concept that creativity is limitless and possibilities are endless.

*Connect with Serena on LinkedIn [HERE](#).*



**IN MEMORIAM:  
SOLVEIG EK**



*Solveig Ek and  
Samantha Ayres,  
NeoCon 2019*

**OUR  
FRIEND  
SOLVEIG**  
In Memoriam: Solveig Ek

Last month our industry lost an invaluable and respected member, Solveig Ek, Director of Marketing and Public Relations of ICF Group and Unika Vaev. My Resource Library has been so fortunate to have worked with such a wonderful lady. Solveig made such an impression with the MRL team members with her enthusiasm and genuineness.

**“As I was preparing MRL for NeoCon East, I reached out to Solveig and Wick [of Unika Vaev] for some furniture needs in our showroom. It was the first time I spoke with Solveig, but it was the start of a wonderful friendship. She helped us in so many ways over the years. My team consistently ranked Solveig as one of our top 5 customers, showing us support and providing us with information. She will be missed by our entire company.”**

**- Jeff, MRL Principal**

“Solveig was one of my favorite manufacturer customers that I’ve worked with in my almost eight years here at MRL. She was always so on top of everything, so organized and attentive, and I truly admired that about her. During our first year of MRL awards, Solveig was at the top of all our minds when trying to decide our most engaged manufacturers. It was such an honor to present the award to her and see her face light up.

So many of us get caught up in the day-to-day emails and phone calls, we sometimes forget that it’s humans on the other end. Humans with lives outside of work, with families and hobbies. Solveig ALWAYS made sure that before we dove into work talk, that she asked how I was, how my week-end was and how the family was doing.

She was truly a bright light on a gloomy day and truly a wonderful person. She will be missed.” - Samantha, MRL Manufacturers Account Manager

Thank you, Solveig, for sharing your light with the MRL team. We send our thoughts and prayers to her family and friends during this difficult time.



*Tonie Rommel, Jack Rommel, and Chris Rommel.*

# Getting to Know Capital Solutions

## REP GROUP FEATURE

**Q: Tell us a little bit about how your rep group got started?**

**A:** Capital Solutions was started in 2010, I left another group earlier in the year and slowly built up our product offerings. Soon after that I was joined by Tonie, and we were able to take on more lines. It's been a lot of fun building something from the ground up. A little over 2 years ago we added a third rep Jack Rommel, what can I say, "It's a Family Affair!"

**Q: How has the company changed over the years?**

**A:** Starting out it is easy to get spread too thin, we focused on our base business which continues to be the commercial

and government channels. Over the last few years because of our growth, we have also added manufacturers that give us a deeper offering in the educational sector. Starting out our lines focused on a particular need for facilities, i.e. chairs or accessories, now we have product and budget options that provide turnkey solutions for the entire space.

**Q: What do you think is the secret to your rep groups longevity and success?**

**A:** Just the basics, hard work, enjoying what we do along with having strong relationships.



**REP GROUP  
FEATURE**

**Q: What makes you most excited about working in the contract design industry?**

**A:** Interacting with others and getting to see a happy customer after a project or transaction. People interact with their work environments so much I don't think we will ever lose this aspect of our industry.

**Q: How do you think your group will evolve over the next 5-10 years?**

**A:** I see us adding another employee or 2 (not a family member) and the addition of a showroom in the near future.

**Q: If you could use just one word to describe your company what would it be?**

**A:** Dedicated



XXXXXX  
XXX

# KEEPING CONNECTED

With the challenges that 2020 brought, it is more important than ever to "Keep Connected" to our clients, friends and colleagues. We have been simply inspired by all of the innovative ways our Rep Group friends have found to do just that! The pandemic hasn't slowed them down one bit, and relationships are still at the center of their strategy.

In the "Keeping Connected" section of Delve Magazine, we will highlight inspirational snapshots of what our Rep Group partners are up to, and how they are finding innovative ways to stay connected to their clients.

We hope you enjoy this new feature, and are inspired as much as we are!



*Aligned Mobile Showroom*

## Aligned

The team from Aligned visited a dealer on their three-day 1,300 mile dealer roadshow! In all, they visited 12 dealers. Day 1 was Fresno, CA. Day 2 was Sacramento, CA. Day 3 was Reno, NV. For this trip, they showcased HAT Collective and Allseating. Having this mobile showroom allows them to present products to dealers and designers at their locations. The response has been awesome from the dealer and design community! They love the fact that they do not have to drive to a brick-and-mortar showroom. Aligned brings the showroom to them!

<https://alignedreps.com/>



*Darcy Silverstein, Anabelle Haelen, Paula Turkowitz, Fiona (dog/mascot) in the Gibson Showroom.*



*Paula and Leah at the latest St. Jude Event this past October*



*Teri Cutler and Jamie Waltuch Gibson Florida team*

## Gibson Interior Products

Gibson Interior Products is a four-generations family-owned independent manufacturer's representative organization operating in New York, New Jersey and Florida. We have more than 75 years of experience in selling commercial office furnishings. The categories we specialize in are furnishing products for corporations, healthcare, education and hospitality.

<https://gibsonoffice.com>



*Maccon in 2021 - Galita Leiderman, Jamie Waltuch, Paula Turkowitz, Leah Pagano, Ken Gibson*

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