

delve

MAR 2023 **V36**

Celebrating Women's
History Month

Delving Into the
Public Sector



WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS IN DESIGN

By Stance Healthcare

Cover Image: Resilia by Stance Healthcare, story on page 37



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Mickey Cash of Berco Designs, discusses Berco's commitment to helping women enter leadership roles within their company.



Special-T discusses their well-established tradition of promoting from within whenever possible, and the positive effects this policy has had.



COVER STORY: Stance Healthcare discusses the effect of women trailblazers in design.

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editor's note

Dear reader,
As we celebrate Women's History Month, we want to take a moment to honor the incredible women who make up the contract design industry. From designers and manufacturers to dealers and sales representatives, women have been breaking barriers and shattering glass ceilings in this industry for decades.

This month's issue of Delve Magazine is dedicated to highlighting the stories and experiences of these inspiring women, and to showcase their invaluable contributions to the industry. We'll be sharing stories of leadership, innovation, and creativity, as well as tips and insights for women looking to grow and succeed in this industry.

We believe that by lifting up women and promoting gender equality in the workplace, we can create a more inclusive and equitable industry for everyone.

Have a story for Delve? Let us know at:

industrynews@myresourcelibrary.com.

**THE
MY RESOURCE LIBRARY
FAMILY**

Moving Into the Future

The new way to work for Contract Interior Designers

BY SUSAN MULHOLLAND & NICOLE FARRAGHER

During the next several months, we will explore the many facets of MRL'S software's capabilities, how it works, the benefits it can provide interior designers during an actual project, and testimonials from interior designers, manufacturers, dealers, and clients. And finally, what's coming up next...

Moving into the future-The new way to work for Contract Interior Designers

When was the last time you were in a design library? I mean a library with physical binders with up-to-date information on the furniture you need for a project. My guess is it's been a while. I know long before the pandemic, many design firms consciously decided to eliminate or at least downsize their physical resource library. The reasons ranged from being challenging to maintain, never updating, or the binders being a pain to work with. Some firms felt they needed to align better with their pledge to provide an environmentally friendly workplace focused on sustainability. All of these reasons for eliminating a tried-and-true design tool seemed valid, especially when you think about how much of what interior designers do today is digital.

The physical interior design reference and sample library was the hub of most interior design studios regardless if the studio specialized in commercial or residential design. For many firms, it still is. Furniture manufacturers would effortlessly provide large binders with beautiful photographs of the latest product offerings used to produce the design boards vital to any client design presentation. Did you know you can still do this digitally and only open one website? Keep reading, and let me explain.

Technology, the digital world, and everything our 21st-century life has given us in the first two decades has been amazing! If you started your career as an interior designer in the late seventies or even the eighties, technology certainly has moved at an overwhelming pace. I started my career in the early nineties, and I can tell you that the only "advanced technology" available were fax machines and bulky desktop computers. The Internet has just started making its way into our lives. Interior design and architectural studios were still drawing by hand, but many firms were slowly transitioning to computer-aided drafting. The early days of the digital age did very little for interior designers. Our presentations, drawings, and even our resources for furniture specifications were always in some form of paper.

Since the mid-2000s, technology has been moving beyond the physical world of paper. Our digital world has become the first

place we usually go, whether for work or personal life. As we present our projects today, more interior designers, manufacturers, and clients are now fully comfortable with digital formats.

For all of the convenience of having the world at our fingertips, staying on top of the changes that occur during a project is becoming more frustrating than ever. Since social media and sophisticated manufacturer websites make online searching for new furniture ideas seem easier and less time-consuming unless you consider the time it takes to find all that information and compile it into some document you can then share with multiple people. We still need that connection to people, but how is that connection made when we are so focused on our digital life?

If any of this sounds familiar, it's time to discover what MRL (My Resource Library) is about- simplicity, convenience, making valuable personal connections, and time. All design projects could always use more time. We are always looking at ways to make our projects more efficient. Our project timelines should be spent creating beautiful interiors, not dealing with missing information.

In the next few months, Nicole Farragher and I will be teaming up to present some great examples of how working with MRL has improved the process of sourcing digital information with personal experiences from designers, sales reps, furniture dealers, and clients. We will focus on their experiences using the MRL platform to find solutions to challenges that affect all design projects.

Here is what we will be focusing on as we look at what MRL has to offer:

- Project sourcing from start to finish with updated information on time for everyone involved. This is a major advantage for interior designers to have at their fingertips, being able to control how their project develops without the problems associated with missing or outdated information.
- Communication - how MRL can help lessen the communication gaps when multiple manufacturers, team partners, and furniture dealers are involved. How are our lessons learned from project mishaps solved with the resources available using MRL PRO?
- Human connection - why MRL is the best resource for connecting with your clients, sales team, and manufacturers. This

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feature allows designers to maintain the human aspect of our jobs that many feel lost by giving up a physical library.

- Where do we go from here? What's on the horizon as MRL continues to advance the way interior designers use technology and why it's the best online resource for commercial interiors

Contact Nicole if you have questions or are curious about the platform and how MRO PRO can be used in your projects. We invite you to join us by logging on to MRL and becoming part of the conversation by working together from start to finish.

MRL loves involving as many people in the industry as possible- manufacturers, reps, dealers, and designers. Technology is a great way to connect these industry pillars during busy times. MRL allows instant connection and collaboration. The goal is for everyone to connect and utilize the platform and do so in unity. Projects are a great way to come together and work to assist the client while putting forth a practical and aesthetically pleasing space.

Making project binders, and looking through manufacturers' digital catalogs, keeps our connection to how we used to work before the advancement of technology. MRL offers a virtual library, search engine, and inspirational hub that allows you to create custom projects; everything needed in today's industry is right at your fingertips. Designers, furniture dealers, and sales reps can use MRL from start to finish to work from virtually anywhere.

You can make working with MRL easier, especially if you need to become more familiar with the website or the design process it helps you create. This starts with getting ideas from the inspirational hub to find what's new. The MRL search feature can help you discover new products or manufacturers for what you are looking for without ever leaving the site. Manufacturers continually update their resources so that you will see their latest offerings.

MRL offers several ways interior designers can access the digital tools available. You are asked to create an account when you first enter the website. Start with a basic account if this is your first time using the MRL website. This will get you into the various binders to see the many manufacturers with product resources on the virtual library shelves. I suggest contacting Nicole and setting up a PRO subscription if you have an account. PRO subscriptions are available to interior designers, furniture dealers, sales reps, and manufacturers. You can access the free PRO subscription as an interior designer, but Nicole needs to give you access.

This is where you will find the many features discussed in our following articles. We will also share real-life examples of how MRL has made our job easier.

Stay tuned! Nicole and I have lots more to share about this fantastic resource. Finally, we have a digital tool that understands the demands of commercial interiors!



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.](#)



Nicole Farragher

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Integrating AV Integrators

BY DOUG GREGORY

Changes in the distribution of goods and services in the contract interiors industry continue to shake the ground under the foundations of business plans everywhere. Consider:

- BIFMA calls for the contract furniture market to decline by 8% in 2023
- The combining of Herman Miller and Knoll followed just recently by the acquisition of Kimball by HNI, creating a new #1 and possibly a new #2
- The rise of the contract dealer megadealer with new business models and digitized value propositions
- 2023 will witness more office furniture purchased via the internet than through contract furniture dealers
- The sibling market of CRE – long used to forecast office furniture sales – is experiencing turbulence that has been

building for years with 30-40% of office space available in some markets, and utilization at incredible lows; major city center buildings are being returned to banks on a daily basis

We all look for the sure thing, a can't miss move, the high return in the form of low-hanging fruit. Human nature wants predictable markets, stable capital costs and a never-ending chain of customers clamoring for our services. These are the imagined things we look for to create profitable growth.

2023 is the antithesis of all these imagined indicators. We are at the tail end of a global pandemic that continues to violently shake long-valued behaviors and the way things were. Business models of 2019 are just a data point now, a mirage; they are no longer useful reference points. Little qualifies as a "known" moving forward.

When we spoke of a mythical New Normal a couple of years

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ago, we acted like it would lead to 60x30 desks now being 58x24 or something. Add a locker over there and call it good. No one speaks of a new normal anymore. The only normal now is chaos – and opportunity.

Years ago when I worked at HON Company, the president's office had two images mounted on the wall. Each was an identical Mandarin language symbol. The symbol in one represented "chaos", while the symbol in the other represented "opportunity". In fact, they were the same symbols. In the Mandarin language, the symbols for chaos and opportunity were identical.

What does all of this have to do with technology in the workplace?

Let's consider a few additional data points observed in the market:

- What does the world of work need more: a new chair or demountable wall, or technology-driven productivity tools?
- Steelcase is again actively promoting technology – specifically AV technology – in its press releases, stories and on its web site
- Acquisition and installation costs of interactive displays – a key AV technology for improving worker engagement, equity and productivity – have declined dramatically
- Many key dealers are buying AV integrators, revising their relationships with integrators or are seriously evaluating their integration models

Those throwing out anchors hoping to stay in place and ride out the storms seem to be at serious risk of disruption. Battening down the hatches is not the same as navigating the storms. AV technology appears risky to those without experience in the field, but the level of activity in the product category suggests others are betting on the strategic importance of fully-integrated interiors.

Steelcase's old Architecture – Furniture – Technology story stands out as being as relevant as ever. It looks different in



2023, but space, furnishings and technology are certainly critical components for any employer to consider when building work model support systems. More often than not, integration a key opportunity to demonstrate value – has been left to customers to figure out.

Space can actually be anywhere – from a home office to satellite spaces – but it still needs to be planned and supported with complete integration.

There is no safe harbor in 2023. Calm waters are certainly not in our immediate forecast. We are not always certain where the storms of market conditions or competitive strategies are going to come from, but we can predict we have yet to see the last of them.

Integrating an AV integrator into your business may be a good opportunity. Doing so without a clear strategy may well result in a zero-sum gain.

- What will be your customer story for your integration model?
- How will adding $1 + 1 > 2$?
- What will cause your office furniture teams to incorporate AV into their conversations with clients?
- How will your AV integrator partner gain understanding of work process and planning outside their traditional meeting room applications?
- Who will curate the user experience and keep technowiz-ardry from taking over simple applications?

It took one dealer I spoke with over a decade to get sales to talk AV with their clients, but now 80% of their projects feature more than one category (think furnishings, architectur

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al products, AV technology, flooring, inventory management, etc). Many dealers with AV teams have yet to figure this out. Too many dealers with AV groups are failing to make them work because the capability isn't matched up to their go-to-market strategy. Right idea, poorly executed. The integrator is not integrated.

Clients have too many moving parts to coordinate everything into spaces that work for their teams. They don't want to buy furniture, AV technology, phone booths and acoustical treatments. They want integrated spaces that work. They want professionals to think through integration with them, to lead the process and to deliver results.

This image is what most people envision when thinking through AV technology. However, an estimated 80% of all AV technology applications do not require the skills, services or overhead of an AV integrator. Simplicity is now more normal for implementing interactive display applications now due to improvements in the technology itself.

Space has now become a service. In the era of distributed work environments, clients view space not as a fixture, but as a service. The idea of owning buildings is suddenly so 2019; the idea of investing into spaces with 10-year plans is just a memory. Who knows what work is going to look like in 2 years, let alone 10? Ideas, solutions and programs need to be incredibly agile, or they will have difficulty making it out of Finance review. Service is always agile, flexible, adaptable and focused on the customer.

Office spaces are the final frontier in supporting agile businesses. CRE was the last girder holding up the framework of offices we supplied in our sleep, but now CRE itself is being forced to learn to be agile. The furnishings and AV technology inside those spaces must change just as quickly, be just as agile to keep up.



Space-as-a-service is not new, but it is for many in the contract interiors industry. It is our new reality. The technology experience driving the new breed of megadealer will be changing user expectations of how they manage the workplace. Value propositions that worked not long ago suddenly thrust resellers into low-margin bidding wars where long-term relationships lose their value.

It is no longer good enough to have the best products. It is no longer good enough to have the best connections. They both make a difference, but in many cases, not the difference. The difference comes from telling an integrated story, an adaptive story, and being able to deliver with all the components focused on a single point of view.

Adding AV technology capabilities into a collective point of view is critical in meeting the needs of end users in 2023. How the integration capability – the integrator – is integrated into the rest of the organization will go a long way in helping contract interior dealers weather the shock waves and turbulence in the market. The ground may be shaking under our feet, but offering integrated interiors can be a great foundation for building what's next.



About Doug Gregory

Doug Gregory, Syntigrations principal, is focused on creating integrated InterActive Spaces. A consultant and entrepreneur in the office furniture industry for over 20 years after stints at both HON and Steelcase, the novelty of learning how best to meet customer needs never gets old. The journey of these articles is to help identify how interactive technology supports contract dealer growth through meeting the complex needs of our mutual clients. Doug can be reached at dgregory@syntigrations.com.



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6 OF MRL'S FAVORITE PRODUCTS FROM ACROSS THE LIBRARY

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

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A base shape with loads of personality makes any space more unique. Leap into a brand new look atop legs that seem poised for action. With multiple tabletop materials, 250 colors for legs, and sizes, shapes, and configurations ranging from desk to conference size, we can craft any style that you want.



CORRAL STACKED TABLE

ALLSTEEL

The two table surfaces were designed with a soft profile hardwood edge inspired by the rails of a surfboard. The table allows for storage on the larger lower surface, which cantilevers from the legs to create additional space, while the top surface remains clear.



IRIS

STANCE HEALTHCARE

Versatile and sleek, Iris provides an understated modern elegance that complements a variety of seating arrangements. Features: Sleek soft shaped tops, Low-profile base, Solid steel disc for durability and cleanability.



PORTER END TABLE

TEKNION

Introducing a limited edition design collaboration from Gus* Modern and textile visionaries LUUM. This covetable collection re-imagines the Gus* Modern Halifax Chair and Porter End Table in playful colour combinations inspired by three bold hues of Knurl, a texturally captivating fabric from LUUM - designed for work, rest, and play.

TATTOO OCCASIONAL TABLES KI

These light scale, clean, and efficiently designed products put user control at the forefront. Unique space-saving design maximizes limited footprints, offering soft seating solutions.



MAX™

NIENKAMPER

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OUTDOORS



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, connect on LinkedIn or visit strategic-catalyst.com to learn more about her work.



**Delving into the
Public Sector**

Women in Business and Women in Leadership

Meet Donna Long, US Navy Veteran, Trailblazer in Public Sector

Women in Business and Women in Leadership particularly in the commercial furniture industry are topics I am very passionate about. If you listen to the Trend Report Podcast episode #77 or have been around me at any industry event it is likely you have heard me on my soapbox about the lack of women at these events or me being one of the “token females.” For those of you newer to the industry who notice this as well- take heart things are better than they were 26+ years ago when I joined!! We currently have wonderful women CEOs of major manufacturers as well as smaller ones, additionally we have a lot of female dealer and rep principals.

This month, in honor of this theme, I wanted to interview a female entrepreneur and dealer principal Donna Long of GovSolutions out of Virginia Beach. I honestly do not know when I met Donna for the first time, but I have had many years of the opportunity to work with her and watch the growth and success of her dealership. GovSolutions is a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned/Woman-Owned small business and, as expected, Donna, has a lot to share with us about being a woman in Public Sector.

Michelle: First off Donna, thank you for taking the time to share your experience and thank you for your service to the United States through your time in the US Navy. Can you share what drove you to join the NAVY? Please also share some of your experience that may have prepared you for your career which has led to founding and owning a very successful furniture dealership with a focus on Government.

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Donna: I had a strong desire to serve my country from an early age. Although I planned for college during high school, I made the decision to enlist in the Navy under the Delayed Entry Program (DEP) one year prior to graduation. The military brings Limited Duty Officers (LDO) up through the ranks because the job is so unique that specialized training is required to understand and lead the technical operation. I feel the same way about the Contract Public Sector Furniture Industry. It is a specialized industry that requires internal training, policies, and procedures. As a dealership, we must be nimble enough to adopt our Public Sector Client's requirements and contracts to do business with them as well as conform to our manufacturing partners processes for specification and order entry.

Michelle: Your first position in the commercial furniture industry, right out of the NAVY was as a Government Specialist with a dealer in Southern California. Can you share how that all came about and your experience, if you recall, in getting started in this industry and with a focus on Government?

Donna: I served my country in the U.S. Navy and traveled around the world serving at several duty stations for 2-3 years each. In the 80's and 90's this much travel did not resonate well in the business world. When a Federal Job opportunity fell through, I needed to apply elsewhere. I landed an administrative, temporary, position at the local furniture dealership. It was my second day on the job when the dealer Operations Manager asked me if I would be interested in a full-time position. I said "absolutely". I quickly learned Project Coordination/Project Management supporting Federal Government Sales. A major account was the standardization of NAVFAC Southwest Division. I worked my way into a sales position with a focus on the Federal Government Accounts and eventually wrote the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the Federal Government Sector at the Furniture Dealership in San Diego. I was even asked to train other dealer salespeople at one of the manufacturer's Federal Government training conferences.

Michelle: I love that you learned the industry and dealer from the ground up!! In 2004 you started a dealership in Hampton Roads Virginia. What led you to want to start your own dealership?

Donna: While writing the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) back in San Diego, I dreamed of one day owning a dealership with a focus on the Federal Government. The SOP consisted of developing a division within the Commercial Dealership that included modifications to their standard way of doing business. It built in the need to be nimble with the Public Sector clients. It was challenging to make this happen. There were commercial processes in place that would not conform to doing Public Sector business and I had to explain why the current standards would not work and write in the internal procedures to make it work. It was almost like having a business within a business. In 2004 I started my own company as a dealership with only the Federal Business Sector as a

potential client. The manufacturers held all of the Federal GSA Schedules but in 2007 I obtained a new GSA FSS "Packaged Office Contract" and was one of the first companies to register as a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The project that really launched GovSolutions into existence was a 2.5 million dollar GSA Packaged Office Contract project that consisted of approximately 50 manufacturers and vendors. The job was the first VA Cares project for The Department of Veterans Affairs in Pittsburgh PA. Now, 19 years later, GovSolutions services all Public Sector, Commercial, and provides General Construction Services as well.

Michelle: You have talked a little about this, but as you look back, what were the contributing factors that led you to the career in Public Sector?

Donna: Without a doubt it is my military background that is the largest contributing factor. I was in the process of applying for a Federal job when the National Performance Review began in 1993. The outcome was a significant reduction in Federal Workers so the position I was interested in was eliminated. I was fortunate to find an opportunity at a local Office Furniture Dealership as a Project Coordinator for Government Sales. They said it would be easier to teach me furniture than to teach someone else how to do business with the Department of Defense (DOD) and Federal Agencies.

Michelle: I definitely agree with that- way easier to teach furniture than how to do business with DOD. When did you know you were in Public Sector as a career vs a job?

Donna: I believe I always knew that my calling was working with or in Public Sector. The bigger question here is how did I know I would be providing interior solutions by way of Contract Office Furniture to Public Sector? This career is not one that most people go to college for or decide that this is what they want to grow up to become. Everyone I know has an interesting story for the "why"? I knew creating functional, ergonomic, healthy, beautiful environments in Government, Healthcare, Education, and other Public Spaces was my calling when I took part in converting an old Plant 19 Air Force Hanger in San Diego California to the Headquarters Building of SPAWAR (Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command) in 1996-1997. Our dealership provided the Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment and I was the Project Coordinator/Project Manager.

Michelle: You are seen as a successful woman in Public Sector, what are the key influential people or factors that supported your success?

Donna: One of the things I love about Public Sector is the team environment. When you enter into a contract with a client there are responsibilities for you, the client, and all of the subcontractors and suppliers. Whether working at a Contract Furniture Dealership or running my own Construction/Contract

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Furniture dealership, it is our customer, our manufacturers, internal team and our subcontractors that I attribute to success!

Michelle: Were there any twists or turns that developed that helped you to learn along the way that you did not anticipate?

Donna: Yes. There have been many. I once said that we made it through the Housing Market Crash, Sequestration, 2 Government Shut-Downs, and a Pandemic. In each scenario, we had to adjust business operations to some degree. I believe the motto here is to stay relevant to the current shift in tide. Circumstances can change everything at a moment's notice.

Michelle: You have weathered a lot of things in your years selling to Public sector for sure!! To the outside, it appears that Public Sector is favorable to women. How do you see the opportunity for women in Public Sector?

Donna: We have come a long way baby – but we are not quite there yet!

Michelle: I agree whole heartedly!! So, what is one piece of advice you have for women wanting to develop a career in Public Sector?

Donna: It is hard to pick just one thing so let me give you a couple. First and foremost, support other women! Be a mentor, a confidant, a team player, a role model and cheerleader! To quote Madeleine Albright: "There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women."

Madeleine Albright was an American diplomat and political scientist who served as the 64th United States Secretary of state from 1997 to 2001. She was the first woman to hold this position.

Lastly, Women are often expected to trade in their natural, collaborative, altruistic leadership style to conform to a more autocratic style of leadership. I'd say, be true to yourself and your style.

Michelle: Great advice for all women, not just in Public Sector!!! What would you say are some of the things you have learned over your career as a woman leader in the commercial furniture industry that you would want to pass on?

Donna: Our industry is small by comparison to many industries. When people find themselves in this industry, they stay or get back out really quick. Best advice I have is: "Don't burn any bridges or at least try not to." Our industry is more territorial than other industries too. Don't be afraid to work together and collaborate on opportunities that make sense to do so. Remember your ethics and also remember that 100% of nothing = 0 nothing.

Michelle: Such great advice and I couldn't agree more!! Ok, to wrap it up 2 final questions. What one book would you recommend for a woman who is pursuing a career in Public Sector? (This can be a book on business, leadership, life, etc.)

Donna: "Span of Control" by Carey Lohrenz. First Female F-14 Tomcat Fighter Pilot. It gets real!

Michelle: What one podcast you would recommend for a woman who is pursuing a career in Public Sector?

Donna: I recently listened to a podcast by an American, Female Entrepreneur whose net worth is approximately 650 million. Dolly Parton's America. She covered it all, business, leadership, life and even politics.

Michelle: I have never listened to that but it has been on my list of ones to listen to so I guess I need to move it up!! Donna, Thank you so much for your time and insight!!

I hope that you, the readers, find as much value in these interviews as I do. Great pieces of wisdom from successful women in Public Sector who have paved the way. If there is someone you would like to learn from let me know and we will see if we can get an interview on the books. Until next time- Be A Catalyst!!

Donna Long: Donna Long is a seasoned President with a passion for Design-Build-Furnish projects. As the head of govSolutions, Inc., she brings with her a wealth of experience and knowledge in the commercial and government office furniture industry. With a strong commitment to giving back to the community, Donna has instilled a culture of philanthropy within her company. Under her leadership, govSolutions, Inc. has been recognized as an Authorized MilkerKnoll Dealership, providing full-service interior space planning, project management, office furniture and furnishings, installation services, warranty/repair, and move/reconfiguration services. As a holder of the company's Class A Contractor's License, Donna has a deep understanding of the technical aspects of the industry and is well-equipped to manage complex projects from start to finish. Her dedication to her craft and community has made her a respected leader in the industry.





Berco Designs builds amazing furniture in the industrial heartland of St. Louis, Missouri. The Berco Designs and Oasis Berco family of companies is widely known for their series of high-end banquettes, hand-crafted tables and bases, and collection of office privacy solutions. What Berco Designs is really about is manufacturing opportunity. Berco Designs has created many leadership opportunities for women over the years. Some of whom have stayed with the company for over two decades and continue to play an active role in bringing more and more women to the workforce.

Providing top-notch manufacturing jobs to St. Louis after a pandemic takes leadership and a strong sense of pride. These women, several holding executive level positions, have helped make Berco Designs the company it is today, in a traditionally male-led manufacturing industry.

Below, Berco Designs senior level female employees share their thoughts on leadership in the furniture manufacturing industry.

**BERCO DESIGNS:
WOMEN IN THE
INDUSTRY**



Lori Stroehler working with plant manager Dave Dunn.



Lorean Jones working on table bases on the production floor of Berco Designs' St. Louis furniture factory.

Work Toward the Same Goal

Lori Stroehler, Berco Designs' Vice President of Operations, guides all of the craftspeople in production to be in sync with each other.

Workers and their products moving toward the same goal, she believes, is the key to success in manufacturing.

"When I see something needs to be done, I make sure it gets done," she said. "I've learned you don't always have to have all the answers, but you have to ask the right questions."

Stroehler has made it a point to be self driven at Berco, by being direct and not letting the traditionally male dominated manufacturing industry hold her back.

"It's a man's world—especially in manufacturing," she said. "To remove that stigma, I demand equal respect and give equal respect to everyone."

It's All About Process

Lorean Jones' talents go beyond her expertise as a painter at Berco Designs for 22 years. She enjoys painting at home and has always had a natural passion for her skilled trade.

"I enjoy it. When I paint, it's in the process itself," Jones said. "After the pieces come out of the oven, I'm like wow! I did that!"

Using bright colors, she paints a few things around the shop to catch the eye and entice people to ask questions.

"It's pretty cool to see the modern colors and textures," she said. "I like the Wasabi high-gloss finish I just did for Oasis Berco."

Jones likes to stay informed by communicating about incoming orders with her surrounding departments.

"Nothing in life is perfect, but I want to try to get as close as I possibly can," she said.

"To keep it smooth, you have to stay coordinated and be a people person."

**BERCO DESIGNS:
WOMEN IN THE
INDUSTRY**



Comradery in the Workplace

This executive enjoys the connection with the workers in the 130,000-square-foot manufacturing facility. Although Angie Balencie, the Vice President of Human Resources of 24 years, is located in the front office and showroom to welcome new talent, she regularly hosts workplace parties for the production team and strives to gain a close and personal connection with everyone who works at Berco Designs.

"I make that first connection during personal orientation," Balencie said. "Then I get to know everyone more and more as things come up in their personal life. I get to know when everyone's kids are graduating, getting married, or going on vacation."

Though the pandemic stifled the gatherings Balencie loves to organize for workers, she's excited to do more and more every year.

"Comradery in the workplace is so important," she said. Building up a feeling of togetherness allows the employees to thrive.

Be a Motivator

Joetta Pingel has a 27 year history at the St. Louis company as their Quality Control Inspector. Being a motivator and a trainer, she believes, is the key to staying connected to work.

"I'm always watching to see how I can pass on my experience during the manufacturing process," Pingel said. "There are multiple ways to do something that will end in the same result, but I always try to train and involve people from the start."

By including anyone who has hands-on interaction with the products, Pingel has taught valuable skills in quality control. Extending her wisdom to all production departments across multiple disciplines.

"The more involved employees are, the more they feel the connection," Pingel said. "That's when you get the real feeling of importance."

Playing a leading role in the manufacturing industry is not just about quality control, it's about encouraging people to live quality lives. The dedicated women in leadership at Berco Designs have fostered a positive environment and mentored many over the years.



Berco Designs is a nationwide, American design company and manufacturer. All Berco Designs and Oasis Berco products are made with U.S. parts.

Mickey Cash is the Marketing Coordinator for Fairway Holdings, the Berco Designs family of furniture design companies including: Berco Designs, Oasis Berco, and One Source Retail & Hospitality.



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Empowering Workspaces for Tomorrow

By Egan Visual

3 Ways Women in Design Are Leading The Change

The landscape of office design is undergoing a remarkable transformation, driven by trailblazing women who are reimagining the workspaces of tomorrow. As architects, project managers, and designers, these pioneers are tapping into their unique insights and creativity to redefine workspaces. A study by global design firm HOK confirmed that women-designed workspaces exhibit greater adaptability and flexibility, encouraging employee collaboration and communication. Consequently, this has led to creation of office spaces that effortlessly blend visual appeal with functional excellence.

Here are three ways women in design are transforming the office landscape:



Prioritizing Collaborative, Flexible, and Inclusive Spaces

Women in office design possess a keen understanding of the diverse needs of the people who inhabit these spaces. As a result, they tailor their designs to suit different industries and businesses, boosting workplace efficiency and satisfaction. With 79% of women designers believing that inclusive environments are crucial for productivity, they're creating adaptable spaces that cater to evolving work patterns and remote worker demands. Think movable walls, modular furniture, adjustable-height desks, and multi-purpose areas. Women designers also experiment with bold colors and patterns to inject energy and dynamism into workspaces.



Championing Wellness in Design

Women-led office design has been incredibly attentive to employee well-being. A Gensler study found that 89% of female designers surveyed believe workplace design can positively impact employee well-being. As a result, female designers have integrated natural light, biophilic design elements in mobile boards or shelving, and ergonomic furniture to foster spaces that support physical activity, mental health, and overall wellness. This focus on well-being is not just a trend; it's a commitment to creating spaces that foster healthier, happier employees.



Enhancing Employee Experience with Cutting-Edge Technology

Women designers are also leveraging innovative workplace technology to elevate the employee experience. For example, designers are incorporating intelligent lighting systems, virtual collaboration tools using EVS Surface whiteboards, and personalized workstations with adjustable heights to create workspaces tailored to each employee's needs. This trend promises highly efficient, productive, supportive workspaces that maximize employee satisfaction and well-being.

As we forge into the new era of workspaces, it's essential to celebrate and support the vital contributions women are making to office design. Their ingenuity, vision, and creativity make the industry more diverse, innovative and welcoming. By championing and empowering women designers, we can build a future of office design that is inclusive, equitable, and designed for the success of all.

Total Project Financing Solutions



By Janeen Waddell, CLFP

Janeen Waddell is Vice President of Commercial Interiors with Navitas Credit Corporation, specializing in helping businesses acquire “anything commercial interior.”

With 25+ years of industry experience, Janeen’s number one priority is offering a Total Project Financing Solution and options that are quick, easy, and align best with Dealer and Dealer client business needs.

What to Expect When Working with Janeen.

Janeen’s mission is to ensure clients have the best experience possible and view her as a trusted partner for commercial interior financing solutions. Adding Janeen to your trusted team of resources simplifies leasing and financing options, making it easier for everyone to move forward.

The “Financing Concierge.”

Janeen’s passion and personalized approach to financing, and the commercial interiors industry, is why clients come back time and time again. If you are interested in connecting, or are looking to understand and learn more, contact her!

jwaddell@navitascredit.com | 1-609-206-4513

Equipment Financing, Simplified.

As a seasoned professional in the equipment financing business, I’m always looking for ways to help Dealers and their clients reach their goals. Furniture and office equipment financing can appear complex and confusing, but with the right approach, and the right partner, it can be a game-changer for businesses looking to grow.

It’s a fact: Approximately 80% of companies finance at least some of their furniture and equipment needs, taking advantage of options that make project costs flexible, and monthly payments affordable, so business owners can offer employees the spaces they need to be more engaged and productive.

A Total Project Financing Solution

Often, businesses don’t understand what they CAN finance. This is where experience and creativity come together to deliver a total project financing solution. If clients need it to ensure a successful business, we can bundle tangible and intangible costs to get them what they need.

Tangible Costs Eligible for Financing

- Furniture
- Custom Millwork
- Audio Visual and Sound Masking
- HVAC Systems and Air Purification Units
- Phone and Privacy Booths
- Kitchen and Breakroom Appliances and Equipment
- Biophilia and Live Plant Walls

Intangible Costs Eligible for Financing

- A&D Design Costs
- Installation Costs
- Fit Out
- Furniture and Equipment Delivery
- Technology Cabling and Installation

Good for Dealer Clients. Good for Dealers.

Leasing and financing options offer great opportunities for both Dealer clients, and Dealers. As a client, these opportunities are often front and center. As a Dealer, educating your team on the positive impact to the Dealership bottom line can help position the internal and external benefits more clearly.

Good for Dealer Clients

- Total Project Financing – Tangible and Intangible Costs
- Single Inclusive Invoicing
- Affordable Payment Schedules
- Tax Benefits

Good for Dealers

- 100% Advance Payment
- Opportunity to Capture Larger Projects
- Increased Margins and Profitability
- Faster Payments
- Repeat Client Business
- Expansion Into New Vertical Markets

**Experience and Expertise
Make All the Difference.**

As an experienced leader, with 20+ years in the Commercial Interiors Industry, I pride myself on continuing to stay abreast of the latest information so I can provide the best possible service to Dealers and their clients, helping them navigate the complexities of leasing and financing with confidence and ease.

Yes, furniture and equipment financing is dynamic, and can be complicated, however with the right partner, approach and tools, it can help businesses achieve their growth goals and take their business to the next level.





My Resource Library is thrilled to highlight the amazing women of MRL. From sales to customer service and beyond, these women are the backbone of our company and we couldn't be more proud of their contributions. Their diverse perspectives, creativity, and expertise have helped make MRL the innovative and successful platform it is today. So, to all the women of MRL, thank you for all of your hard work!

We are honored to have you on our team.



Samantha Ayres
*Manufacturer
Account Manager*



Laura Carlson
*Director of
Architectural Division*



Sarah Davis
*Manufacturer
Accounts Coordinator*



Nicole Farragher
*Dealer Accounts
Manager*



Heidi Fields
Director of Dealer Sales



Leah Latini
*Chief Marketing
Officer*



Mabel Sansevero
*Marketing
Administrator*



Michelle Seluk
*Dealer Accounts
Coordinator*



Sally Reussille
*Technical
Communications
Coordinator*

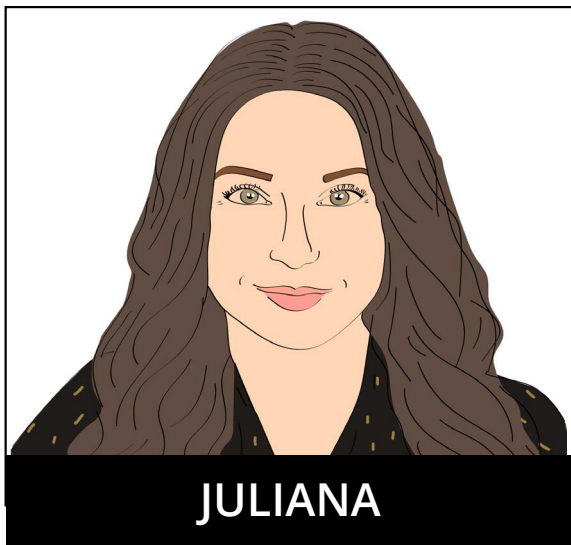


Kim Woods
*Rep Account
Coordinator*

Empowering Women at Palmieri Furniture

Celebrating Success Stories for Women's History Month

This Women's History Month, we're shining a spotlight on the remarkable women behind Palmieri Furniture's success. Juliana Gennuso, Arghavan Oveisi, and Carolyn Goodfield have each overcome unique challenges and navigated their way to influential positions within the company. These inspiring women not only contribute to the growth and development of Palmieri Furniture, but also serve as role models for others in the industry. Read on to learn about their personal journeys, professional accomplishments, and unwavering dedication to excellence in their respective roles at Palmieri Furniture.



My name is Juliana Gennuso and I am the Marketing & Business Development Lead for Palmieri Furniture!

The road I took to get to where I am currently was definitely not easy. I completed my Advanced Diploma in Graphic Design at Durham College, located in Oshawa, Ontario. Unfortunately, I was part of the batch of students who completed their post-secondary education during the ongoing COVID lockdown period. While also taking additional General Education courses in Marketing, it was difficult to learn new programs, design styles, and discuss feedback with professors without having an in person learning experience. Keeping my head held high, I graduated my program with honours and continued working part-time while offering freelance design services until I joined the Palmieri Team in 2022.

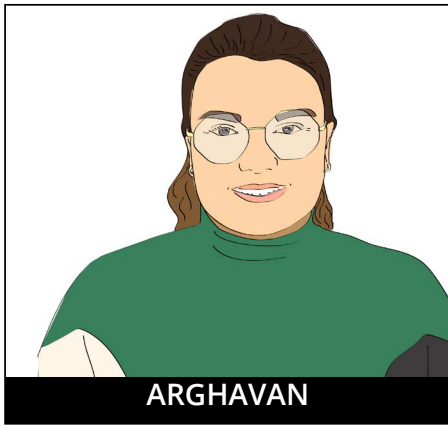
My role at Palmieri includes creating and updating marketing material, covering the responsibility for brochures, website & social media content. My skills have allowed me to expand, evolve and elevate Palmieri Marketing and successfully develop my skills in my role of Business Development. Finding innovative and strategic ways to connect with our clientele, while continuously creating unique ways to advertise our products, is part of the various steps I take to achieve and lead the Marketing & Business Development department at Palmieri Furniture.

Being part of a supportive group of individuals, they will never fail to show the hard work, determination and collaboration that goes into growing and developing their business now, and for many years to come.

If you would like to know more about Palmieri, please reach out at any time via email: marketing@palmierifurniture.com, I would love to hear from you!

PALMIERI

**EMPOWERING WOMEN
AT PLAMIERI FURNITURE**

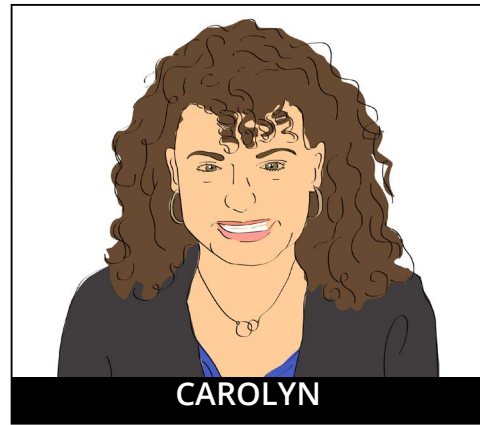


My name is Arghavan Oveisi and I am the 3D-Environment Designer for Palmieri Furniture! I was only 8 years old when I discovered my love for interior design. Since then, I began expanding my knowledge by painting and understanding colours professionally. Growing up in Iran, women are forbidden from pursuing what they love. I was determined to pursue my dream and attended Sharity University in Iran for Architectural Engineering. With only being taught 2D software, I took it upon myself to begin learning other softwares like 3D Max, Lumion, and Photoshop. After graduation, my search for employment opportunities in Iran proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. Businesses back home hired women to complete the same work as men, only to receive a smaller wage. I landed a job in one of the biggest professional Architectural firms in Iran, however the salary was not enough to pay for basic necessities. With determination and the ongoing support from my family, we decided to move to Canada in 2021 for better opportunities and a safer place to live. Upon moving and settling in Toronto, I immediately began applying to jobs in my field. After the ongoing search, I was hired as an AutoCad Drafter and worked remotely for Renor & Associates located in North York, Ontario. With being hired at the end of COVID, I felt my dream was not fulfilled and I could expand my skills in another role; specifically as a 3D Designer. Discovering my dream role at Palmieri felt like finding a Diamond in the rough, and getting hired was like winning the lottery! I was overjoyed and excited to finally work in an environment where I am able to apply all my knowledge and express my creativity in the environments I design.

My Role includes the rendering of Library, office and educational spaces for children and adults of all ages. With every environment I design, not only am I utilising my expertise, but I am also expanding my skills along the way.

Coming from such a professional and strict country where women were not respected as men were, I am thrilled to be in a country and workplace where everyone is friendly, supportive, and creative!

If you would like to know more about Palmieri, please reach out at any time via email: design@palmierifurniture.com, I would love to hear from you!



Thank you to Delve magazine for this exciting opportunity and for highlighting women in the industry. **My name is Carolyn Goodfield, I am the Customer Service Manager at Palmieri Furniture!** I have worked in the industry for many years. The last couple of years have brought both challenges and change to our business. Yet, my goal remains the same "to offer our clients the best experience working with our team". My approach is to actively listen, recognize the needs of our clients and find a solution in a timely manner. If I am unable to personally answer your inquiry, I will ensure I put you in touch with the right team member that can. Communication is the key, and I am always happy to help! My role as the liaison between our customers and our team members is a busy one that I enjoy.

Daily, I answer all emails and phone calls to the department. I review, create, enter, and produce the paperwork for every order and assign a ship date followed by an order confirmation via email. This immediately establishes a connection so that throughout the order production process I can communicate with our client and follow up with status reports and shipping details.

On a weekly basis I lead our production meetings with our engineering, purchasing, production and shipping department managers to gather info regarding our clients' orders and any information that the client requires to be communicated to our team members. I would sum up my philosophy by quoting a famous movie actor who once said, "Build it and they will come". This line resonates with me since our company has been building quality library furniture for over fifty years.

My role as a team member at Palmieri is to ensure our customers return not only because of our product but at the same time because they received excellent customer care every time. The entire process from ordering, fulfilment to delivery should be an easy one. We also pride ourselves on excellent after care as well, if needed. At Palmieri we want to exceed our customers' expectations! We truly value and appreciate our loyal customers and welcome new dealers and clients to check us out via our website, social media platforms as well at upcoming trade show events.

We would welcome the opportunity to create, communicate and collaborate with you!



Supporting the Women of Tomorrow with Worawa

Starting in 1983, Worawa College is the only boarding school in Australia catering specifically for Aboriginal young women in the middle years of schooling (Years 7-10) who have come from aboriginal communities in regional and remote Australia.

Offering an integrated education, their Indigenous culture and wellbeing model allows the College to directly tackle Closing the Gap educational priorities.

Their approach is designed to respond to high achieving students as well as those who may have experienced indi-

vidual factors such as exposure to trauma, family violence/dysfunction, physical or sexual abuse, anti-social peer groups or parent incarceration.

A mainstream education is provided so students can attain the confidence, knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become fully contributing members of Australian society. Equal emphasis is also placed on giving students a strong sense of their Aboriginal identity and culture.

This unique combination improves Aboriginal young women's confidence so they are able to walk in two worlds.

**SCHIAVELLO:
SUPPORTING THE
WOMEN OF TOMORROW**

Since early 2017 Schiavello has been supporting Worawa's work to improve Indigenous youth education and employment prospects.

Our ongoing partnership is focused on:

- Upgrading living and work spaces for students and staff.
- Supporting the further development of income generating services such as the on-site Art Gallery.
- Promotion of Worawa's Indigenous art and design connection.
- Exploring vocational work experience opportunities within our businesses.

Recently Schiavello provided furniture worth more than \$50,000 for use across both boarding and school areas of their Healesville campus. The sight of the trucks arriving on



site led to a high level of interest in their contents. A subsequent visit by senior managers confirmed the furniture was well received by both staff and students.

Thoughts have already turned to how best to satisfy the school's next wish list.

schiavello

SPEAK UP & LEAD

Confetti, Hiking Boots and North West, Spec's *Fearless and Fun Women* dish on life, career and their favored brunch guest.

For well over a century, women paved the way through corporate offices in North America and beyond to establish themselves as leaders. Capable, strong, and practical are some of the adjectives we use to describe our talented female leaders who lead the way at Spec™.

To celebrate women in business, we asked our fearless and always fun leaders questions to inspire and dive deeper into what makes them super-women of business.

With over 80 years of combined industry experience, the consensus among our leaders and self-proclaimed furniture nerds is that we're heading in a positive direction when it comes to change. Kelly Keess, Sales and Marketing Director, reflects on it. "In the past few years, we've seen a huge shift toward diversity and inclusion initiatives in our industry. From manufacturers embracing diversity in their leadership teams to designers considering equity and inclusion in their interior plans," she explains.

The positive momentum in the industry is abundant, and seeing women in leadership positions is very

theme in our leaders' responses, and Dubravka Milinkovic, Spec's Marketing Manager values her position as a role model. "I try to be a role model and support my coworkers so they can build on their potential," she says.



years combined
wisdom

**SPEC:
SPEAK UP & LEAD**

So as a manufacturer, how do we support, inspire and guide the next generation of female leaders?

Allison DeWinter, our Customer Service Leader, puts the onus on women. "Working as a woman in a male-dominated industry poses its challenges. As women, we owe it to ourselves to speak up and have a voice, and then the industry will listen and value our opinions."

Keess furthers this thought with her take. "Seeing women speak up and lead difficult conversations sets an example for all the other women in the workplace. When those women come to you with a new idea or want to apply for a new opportunity, encourage them to go for it! Boosting each other up is incredibly impactful," Keess notes.

Spec's Shipping and Receiving Leader, Nadia Saccucci, with the longest industry experience of forty years among Spec's female leaders, believes that providing leadership titles will help women be seen.

Once the title is earned and given, what makes a good leader?

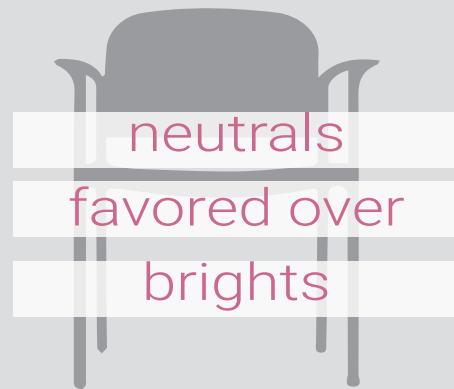
We asked our team to provide their knowledge and best practices. Milinkovic summed it up with a quote from world-renowned leadership expert John Maxwell: "A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."

Another common theme from our panelists is that leaders should be self-aware. "A good leader develops others; is self-aware; listens with intent and empathy; and has a bias for accountability and action," Nicholson conveys.

Gemba is a Japanese term that refers to the act of going to any place where value-creating work occurs to learn.

In today's culture of wanting to achieve bigger and better things, accepting a title and becoming a leader requires a competitive edge. We asked our panelists to share their not-so-secret anymore, secrets.

Fun Facts!



80%

choose hiking boots over heels



100%

vote old-school notebooks over tablets

**SPEC:
SPEAK UP & LEAD**

“Gemba is a Japanese term that refers to the act of going to any place where value-creating work occurs to learn,” says HR Leader Nicholson. “In my career, I have made it a point to go and see, learn, and ask questions about the product or service, the process, and the people to gain a deeper understanding of how the business works.”

A consensus is that knowing yourself is an asset. “My ability to have candid conversations has always been something I have been told people appreciate about me,” DeWinter says. While Keess’ inner knowledge of self has helped her flourish in her career. “My authenticity. I’ve aligned myself with roles that allow me to be authentic to who I am,” she confidently explains.

It does come down to relationships, whether with oneself or peers—it is, ultimately, what our industry is based on.

Most of us have heard, quite early in our furniture careers, that we are part of a niche industry. Many of us will have little or no prior knowledge of the industry until we first step through its furniture-filled doors. But what do our leaders love most about the industry—the products, the people, or does something else that keeps them here? “The fact that we do serious work, but we don’t take ourselves too seriously,” Milinkovic says, recognizing that we work hard, but we know how to have fun.

As a furniture nerd, I am happy to stay in this industry for the rest of my career. I want to inspire the younger generation looking to build and advance their careers in interiors or furniture.

Nicholson’s unique take tells us what sets the industry apart from others. “This industry is a fascinating blend of manufacturing and fashion. The building, making, creating of furniture that has aesthetic appeal...”

Keess states the people are what she loves; similarly, it’s all about our customers that keeps DeWinter motivated. “Being able to apply myself and problem solve to find customers the best furniture solutions for their needs!”

A potential fashion career was squashed by Keess when she came back to the contract office industry after briefly leaving. “The particular role I was working in with fashion was so transactional. I only spoke to my clients twice a year when they were ordering for the season. I realized how much

Who would you have brunch with and why?

From a comedic actress and producer, to a famous tenor, an astronaut, a past US president and a child reality star from an uber famous family—our leaders like a taste of everything.

Mindy Kaling

“She is hugely inspirational as a women’s advocate—plus she’s hilarious and who doesn’t love a good laugh at brunch?” - Kelly Keess

Wim Hof

“This man created something bigger than life, and is now bettering lives of so many people worldwide.” - Dubravka Milinkovic

North West

“That girl has not signed an NDA and would spill some tea...” - Allison DeWinter

Andrea Bocelli

“His music brings me to tears; his words are so profound and he carries a tune right through me!” - Nadia Saccucci

Roberta Bondar

“As Canada’s first female astronaut in space, I think the conversation would be fascinating!” - Grace Nicholson

Meet Our Leaders



Nadia Saccucci
Shipping & Receiving
Leader
*40 years in the
industry*



Grace Nicholson
Human Resources
Leader
14 years in the industry



Kelly Keess
Sales & Marketing
Director
10 years in the industry



Dubravka Milinkovic
Marketing Manager
10 years in the industry



Allison DeWinter
Customer Service
Leader
8 years in the industry

I missed the relationships that come with our industry.”

We work hard to make a positive impact on places where people work, learn and play. And we do celebrate our hard earned wins, each in their own way. It all comes down to keeping positive morale. Saccucci takes a personal approach and celebrates events with her immediate family. At the same time, Milinkovic longs to be festive by throwing confetti around the office. Sidenote, despite multiple wins, throwing confetti hasn't happened yet, but there is still hope!

DeWinter and Keess love to celebrate with their teams. “It’s so easy to look at the list of what’s left to do and forget about all the great things we’ve already done,” Keess says.

What does the future hold for our leaders?

Keess has a positive outlook. “As a furniture nerd, I am happy to stay in this industry for the rest of my career. I want to inspire the younger generation looking to build and advance their careers in interiors or furniture.” DeWinter has plans to stay indefinitely in the industry. “I jumped into the contract furniture industry without knowledge or experience and fell in love.” In contrast, Saccucci has personal goals to achieve. “I plan on retiring in three years to start an online business.”

Finding a balance between work, life, and loving what you do sets any leader up for success. As we continue to move forward and advance as an industry, the future is bright for Spec Furniture’s women of leadership and within our constantly shifting industry. Girl power, anyone? ■





By Special-T

PROMOTING FROM WITHIN

What is the first thing that comes to mind when one of your employees turns in their two-week notice? If I had to guess, your first thought is probably an expletive quickly followed with “who is going to replace them?” So, you reach for the phone to call your local recruiter and get someone in that empty chair as soon as possible. And just like that, the turnover cycle begins again.

**SPECIAL-T:
PROMOTING FROM
WITHIN**



On one hand, as a society we have become afraid of promoting from within. It is easier, and cheaper, to just call a recruiter. Why spend extra time and money when you could hire someone new for a fraction of the cost? The mindset of most mid-level managers and employers has shied away from putting in the effort it takes to make their teams successful and has moved towards making each position as simple and easy to learn as possible. That way, if their employees leave, they are able to fill the position with just about anyone. They think this helps protect them from turnover, but it adversely generates turnover.

On the other hand, there is a well-known stigma that millennials are entitled and unwilling to work. Yet, the average age of the incoming workforce is only 26. They have a long way to go and much to learn before retirement. With over 12 million mid-level managers in the workforce, it is not the best perception considering that almost 60% of the current workforce are millennials. This combination makes a perfect recipe for disaster – employers are unwilling to put coaching and effort into their new workforce, and the new workforce is discriminated against as lazy and incompetent.

COVID made it even worse. We were all on lock down, stuck in our houses and isolated from one another. More effort was needed from the top down to coach/train or provide additional feedback for improvement but was much harder

to accomplish with such isolation. Thus, fueling the fire of “turnover protection” on both sides. “Turnover protection” is what I call this resistance to either commit fully to a company or the company’s resistance to fully commit to an employee.

According to a recent article in IBISWorld, as of February 2023, there are over 12,500 recruiting firms in the U.S. It has never been easier for a mid-level manager to find someone quickly and fill a role. (Now, this article is not meant to throw off on recruiters – they work incredibly hard and helped me get my current job!) But since the pandemic, recruiting firms have grown significantly and consistently from 2019 until today.

So, is it the manager’s fault or the employees? Well, I think it is both.

It is disappointing that most companies are unwilling to put in the time and attention to train an existing employee from within the organization.

In most basic “business 101” level classes, one of the first concepts taught is that the most significant asset in a company is its people.

Another common concept is that people do not leave companies, they leave their managers. Therefore, it seems simple to me (as a mid-level manager) that most of us would default to hiring from within our pre-existing biggest asset. Yet, the recruiting industry continues to grow. It is a never-ending vicious cycle that will be repeated for eternity unless we start to change.

The company I work for, Special-T, almost always promotes from within. In my seven years with this company, I have seen at least 30 positions become open. Of those, around three or four were filled from the outside. They all ended up leaving the company of their own accord in roughly six months. However, all the other positions were filled from

SPECIAL-T: PROMOTING FROM WITHIN



within, and those people are either still employed with Special-T or have retired. Obviously, we cannot speak for other companies, but our system is working for us overall. Admittedly, sometimes it is a hindrance for us in the beginning. It requires more time to teach the employees new skills and coach them with feedback to help them be successful. But, Special-T is now known for a world class customer service department, superior production department, warehouse workers that thoroughly understand the nuances of our product, and a marketing department that rivals any other in the industry (if I do so myself.) ;)

Furthermore, every single member of our executive leadership team – including the owner – has been promoted to their current positions from within. Dmitri, our CFO, began by driving a forklift and packing orders. Justin, our Vice President of Operations, started as the shipping coordinator. Steve, our owner, was hired by his father as the marketing director. Dale, our CEO, began as the Vice President. Brandon, our current President, started in the warehouse pulling orders. And Ian, our Vice President of Sales, started as the Georgia Sales Rep. Every member in our Customer Service department began as either the receptionist or in the warehouse. Even me! I started as the receptionist and am now the Marketing Project Manager.

I can confidently say that almost all the employees at Special-T are not only extremely satisfied with our jobs, but

also, have been here for an average of five-plus years and have zero intention of looking elsewhere for employment. Special-T cared for all of us and gave each of us the opportunity for growth and a chance to learn new skills. When they just as easily could have hired someone else.

In graduate school, one of my professors (talking about promoting from within) told me to “. . . always, always, always spend the time it takes and find the budget it takes to grow your employees and teach them new skills.” To which I ignorantly replied, “But what if they leave?” He looked at me and said “. . . but, what if they stay?”

Special-T's aim is to sell superior quality, long-lasting tables at a fair price because our customers' best interests come first. I know what you are thinking: “that's what everyone says.” But we do. We want to help people; that is our thing. We provide jobs to those with barriers to employment for them to grow personally and professionally. They, in turn, can improve their lives and the lives of those around them. There is no way we could achieve that without promotion from within. Brandon Rayburn, our President, says “We hire any external people with the initial intention of promoting them in the future – from the get-go.” If everyone keeps the mindset of “well. . . find someone else” no one will ever grow personally and professionally. I would be willing to bet that most of you reading this article are mid-level managers OR are working for a mid-level manager. If so, I challenge you that when the next open position comes, which it will, take a little extra time and see who you already have that would be a perfect fit with a little coaching.



WOMEN TRAILBLAZERS IN DESIGN

By Stance Healthcare



Resilia by Stance Healthcare

An Interview with Suzanne Fawley, IDS, CHID Behavioral Health Interior Design Consultant, Stance Healthcare



Suzanne Fawley

Q: How did you first become interested in design? What are some of your earliest memories exploring this interest?

A: I spent a lot of time in my room as a little girl, and as I think back I always decorated my room seasonally; dandelion flower arrangements, clover chains as window swags, Christmas trees, pine cones and lots of lights if I could find them. This evolved into spending hours drawing, painting and designing floor plans of creations in my mind. I had no idea at that point I wanted to be a designer, probably didn't even know what designers actually did but I guess I was practicing design even at that point.

Q: What inspired you to pursue this interest as a profession? How has that inspiration evolved over the years?

A: As I went off to college I thought I wanted to be a teacher. I loved working with kids and with the exception of my parents, many in my family were teachers, principals and counselors. I thought a teaching degree was the way to go. After completing a BS in Education I began to feel the call to design when the design of a classroom, or friend's homes, or layout of a building began to be of great interest. I then went on and added a couple more years in school to gain a BA in Interior Design with an Art minor. With regard to how my inspiration has involved I think it is more of a compilation of the meaningful and exciting Interior Design, Brand Design and

Product Design roles I “fell” into. I didn't set out to be a designer as I mentioned; it called me as a way of helping people create a better daily living experience, through supporting brands that actually feel and breathe the product, and product design that leads to true environment specific solutions.

Q: Is there a female mentor who has been particularly influential in your personal and professional development? What are some lessons you learned from her?

A: This is the easiest question to answer. My first Interior Design job was with an interiors only firm located here in NC. Hayden Design Associates is a woman and minority-owned business and until recently, when the company was sold after 40 years, was owned and operated by Donna Hayden Keene, IIDA. Donna was and continues to be my greatest mentor, as she has been for many designers. Though I left the firm after several years, we still today work on “specialty projects” together and she serves as one of my most valuable focus group members and closest friends. She is a trailblazer for women, strong and kind, creatively talented but also “creatively” able to pull the company through the lean years by putting people first, clients first – yet skillfully able to bring in new business through a variety of market segments. I remember in the 90's she made sure we all worked on “professional presence”; in those days we wore suits, dresses and skirts to the office. She taught me a lot about presentation. Always understanding that if we were not put together, how could a client trust us to envision a space that would encourage their company growth or living environment. Today things are a bit more relaxed but I still only wear solid colors that blend with the scheme I am presenting or black that doesn't compete with the desired goal. She emphasized the client's goals first even when it was our job to figure out what their objectives need to be to achieve the goal. Though she has won many industry awards, she has never been concerned with personal accolades. A great lesson. Win for the client and ultimate user... a successful outcome. She is and was, a teacher and designer. I guess that is enough said about her influence on me.

Q: How did you get into healthcare design specifically? And, what were some of the formative experiences you had learning about this industry and the importance of it?

A: Wow, a big question. Early in my career I began to space plan, provide interior design, furniture specification & budget planning for numerous MOB's (Medical Office Buildings), Dental practices, Senior Living, Behavioral Health and overall general healthcare work. At the same time I worked on Hotel, Banking, a variety of commercial buildings and once in a while a client's home. I now realize the opportunity to design

for so many types of environments in different work environments was a learning decade, a true benefit and has led me to understanding the commonality among all of them: the user experience. Understanding the nuances, codes and requirements per type of space comes in time, and additional education is critical. However, understanding that you get the most critical information from your programming team, from user-observation and listening carefully to the people you are working for.

Q: What are some of the most interesting projects you have been involved in?

A: Most recently and healthcare related, would be assisting with the soon to open Idaho Youth Ranch, a non-profit agency that offers emergency shelter, youth and family therapy, adoption services, and more; the newly opened Steve Smith Foundation Behavioral Health Urgent Care in Charlotte, NC, several addiction recovery centers, Duke Cancer Center, Duke Behavioral Health Hospital and a couple of notable Prison hospitals. In general, throughout my past, there are so many. How about a three story, 100' Catamaran luxury yacht, an Art Museum, Planetarium and concert event space, a 200 year old mansion, various hotels and automotive dealerships? All are different, all were hard work and fun, all experiential!

Q: You have done commercial and residential design, and are now an award-winning product designer. Tell us about how you approach furniture design?

A: Designing products requires great skill and time. Stance Healthcare has been the perfect partner to design product with. They have skilled product development individuals led by Cesar Fernandes, and have a leadership team that has come to know how important the patient experience is, beyond developing a product just to fill out a line package. Several years ago I was privileged to work with Stance and the Brandon Agency as the brand direction was determined. Together a meaningful tagline for Stance was developed, Improving lives by Design. At this point in my career this mantra, the way they allow for thoughtful design, is more important than individual design awards. Though very enjoyable :)

Q: What is your favorite of the collections you have helped design? What are you most proud of about them?

A: The Resilia table collection is probably my most loved collection because it was one that was pitched to a major manufacturer and rejected. I believed in the product and

STANCE HEALTHCARE

knew that it would perform exceptionally well in every high-use environment. Resilia uses a high-performance flooring material created out of natural materials, with no use of synthetic materials like PVC plastic or polyolefin, around the surround of the table. It is nearly indestructible and very safe for Behavioral Health and any high-use space. It is a little beast with every detail intentionally designed. Stance Healthcare's then-CEO, Bruce Kennedy and then-President/current CEO, Carl Kennedy listened to the concept, reviewed the drawings and within 6 months it was produced and entered into 2017 Healthcare Design where it won the top Nightingale Gold Award in its category. Stance is a "never say no" company when it comes to designing for solutions.

Q: In your opinion, how is healthcare delivery impacted by the environment care is delivered in? How does the design work you do play a role in the patient or care provider's experience?

A: Environment is everything! Many years ago I walked into a blood draw medical office building to get blood drawn myself. I was horrified and as an interior designer I saw everything. The chairs were dated and covered in outdated upholstery with dried blood on them, the vinyl seats were cracked, the carpet was frayed and the walls were beaten up with tears in the wallcovering and gauges in the paint. At that moment I wanted to hand out my card and volunteer to "fix" this office. As a patient who already felt vulnerable, I questioned the care and the professionalism of the healthcare workers because of that environment. My thought was that if they didn't care about their work environment, how was I to think they would take care of me? This was long before brand image was integrated into design but this company even today, is a very large and well-known lab company – a true example of the connection between the designed environment and patient (user) experience. As they say, the whole by way of its parts. The caregivers were skilled but I just felt "gross". Healthcare above all, is impacted by all of those parts and must give great attention to the total experience one has. Architects and Interior Designers design with this in mind

Q: What are some ways you support young women starting out in this industry? What avenues for professional development do you encourage them to explore?

A: I love working with young designers and have had interns along the way. Today I have designers call me after the CEU I give just to chat, to gain perspective and hopefully use the advice and banter to excite them, to help them see the value in design. We truly have a wonderful way to impact lives in such a powerful way, and that includes all aspects



of design. Today, I have my hands in so many different types of projects that each have a way of inspiring me and challenging my mind to stay fresh, think bigger and differently. With regard to professional development, I encourage those starting out to gain the professional credentials that are required now, or at least encouraged and recognized. Early in my career the professional exams of today were not available or they were not necessary for advancement. There was no licensing. Experience and a strong portfolio was more the mantra for professional gain. I did however challenge myself a few years ago and studied for the CHID, Certified Healthcare Interior Designer, professional exam. It was tough, but I am glad to have passed it and enjoy the camaraderie and continued knowledge I gain from the American Academy of Healthcare Interior Designers.

Q: What's next for you?

A: Presently, I am partnering with Stance on a new furniture collection in the making for Behavioral Health environments, one that does not look or feel clinical, unapproachable, or appear plastic or as "safety furniture". It is the culmination of my thoughts on designing for dignity through universal, experiential design. The collection will be able to be used in many applications, Behavioral Health, General Healthcare, Contract and Hospitality spaces. With regard to Interior Design, assisting Interior Designers and Architects gives me a lot of pleasure. I can be a sounding board which hopefully helps them and I continue to learn. Team input truly leads to the best design outcome.

Q: Anything else?

A: With regard to Interior Design in general, I will always keep my hands in interesting "experiential" projects. Personally, I'll keep working on my own home, plan parties, design floral arrangements and most importantly spend valuable time with my husband, three children and three grandchildren, encouraging them to see and experience the beautiful details in life and then create their own.

Empowering Women in the Commercial Furniture Industry

Women have been breaking barriers and proving their tenacity in various fields across the world, including the commercial furniture industry. Traditionally a male-dominated industry, we have been seeing a significant shift toward gender equality in recent years. Manufacturers such as Tayco, have been making every effort to promote a workforce that is equitable. Tayco has even been recognized as a Great Place to Work™ for its commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion over the years.

Tayco has seen firsthand the benefits of having equal gender in leadership positions and it has become a key factor while driving the company's success.

Female Leaders Driving Tayco's Success

Tayco's leadership Team comprises talented and experienced women who are dedicated to creating a positive and inclusive work environment. Women hold key leadership positions at Tayco, including directorial roles in Sales and Marketing, Human Resources, Finance, and Customer Experience. They bring a unique perspective to the company and have been instrumental in developing and launching successful product lines, expanding the company's reach into new markets, and driving its overall growth.

Fostering Leadership Skills and Career Growth

Tayco not only recognizes the importance of women in leadership positions but actively promotes and supports their development within the organization. The company offers professional development sessions that allow all genders to advance their careers while gaining leadership skills. Tayco also encourages women to take on challenging roles and responsibilities, providing them with the support and resources needed to succeed.

A Shift Towards Inclusion

In addition, Tayco is an employer partner of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI), which hosts virtual diversity and inclusion training to effectively address the full picture of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace. Founded and run by experienced diversity and inclusion practitioners, CCDI focuses on practical, sustainable solutions that help employers move toward true inclusion. By partnering with CCDI and with Team Members from over 41 countries, Tayco's innovative workplace policies provide an exceptional workplace and enjoyable culture for all Team members.

Tayco understands the importance of gender diversity and inclusion in driving business success. The women leaders at Tayco have made significant contributions to the company's growth and success, and their unique perspectives and experiences have helped the company stay ahead of the curve in the rapidly-evolving business furniture industry. Tayco's commitment to promoting and supporting women in leadership positions reflects its commitment and dedication to creating a positive and inclusive work environment.





Getting to Know B3W

B3W has been family-owned and operated for over 5 decades and continues to grow as a premier manufacturer's representative firm. Our core values don't just drive us, they define us. To ensure we are exceeding our sales goals and metrics while creating quality, lasting relationships, B3W lives by these 5 core values: responsiveness, entrepreneurialism, professionalism, integrity and tenacity.

www.B3W.com

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

A: You can trace our roots back to the mid 1950's when the office furniture industry consisted primarily of desks, chairs and filing cabinets. Distribution looked very different in those days but our founders quickly established a discernable brand built around the principals of excellent service, reliability and relationships. As a service company we recognized early on that our reputation is fundamental to our long term success. We are now in our third generation of family ownership and still going strong.

Q: How has the company changed over the years?

A: As a local small business, we can pivot quickly to address market volatility and product line gaps to capitalize on consumer needs. Speed to market is valued more and more and will only continue to escalate. We embrace technology to aid in the delivery of the messages our manufacturers want in the marketplace.

**REP FEATURE:
CONTRACT FURNITURE
PROFESSIONALS**

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

A: Products come and go but to have survived this long, through multiple economic cycles and product trends, We are convinced that our core values have proven to be the secret sauce that keeps us relevant today. These include: Responsiveness, Entrepreneurialism, Professionalism, Integrity and Tenacity.

Q: What makes you most excited about working in the contract and hospitality industry?

A: It never gets boring. There is always some new problem to solve, product to launch, or question to answer. We never stop learning and our value to our customers continues to grow.

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

A: No doubt the challenges will come at an accelerated pace. We will add value as a resource to our customers in new and creative ways. As a local conduit between manufacturing and distribution right on through to the end user, our place in the buying cycle will remain relevant as we maneuver to address demand.

Q: If you could use one word to describe your rep group, what would it be?

A: Family.



KEEPING CONNECTED

With the challenges that 2020 and 2021 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!



Visit from Drechsel - Paula Phillips and Enia Pheakos

Kirstens

Kirstens Sales Agencies is a firm that represents several office furniture manufacturers in a sales, marketing and support role. Founded in 2002, we have continued to expand and grow our ability to service the dealer and interior design community. The experience of the Kirstens team allows us to understand the needs of our clients and help them provide sound and cost appropriate solutions for their furniture requirements.

www.kirstensales.com

**KEEPING
CONNECTED**



Kirstens New Showroom

Kirstens have just opened a new showroom on January 3, 2023, in Etobicoke, Ontario Canada.



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Danika & Company

Danika Leeks started Danika & Company an independent contract furniture rep firm in 2001 with the goal of providing high quality design solutions with personalized attention. Currently representing ancillary furniture, acoustical lighting, wall and ceiling solutions / textiles and demountable glass wall line. Danika works with the architectural and design community to create spaces people want to be in.

danikaandco.com



Unika Vaev Acoustical & Textile Display Pin up in Corgan Dallas Interiors Library



Hot Chocolate with Danika at The Source Commercial



Yoga with Corgan Dallas Interiors team

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