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to growing and strengthening  
relationships with people and  
brands. Its founder shares what it  
has been like to do that for 30 years.

# Peer



Terri Krivosha  
Partner, Maslon Edelman  
Borman & Brand

Camille Thomas  
President/CEO, JMC  
Marketing Solutions

Jennifer Smith  
Owner/President,  
Innovative Office Solutions

Ruth Murman  
Owner, Auntie Ruth's Animal  
Care & Wellness Centers

Nancy Rosenberg  
Owner, Big Top Liquors/  
Sid's Discount Liquors



# WATER



Rose McKinney  
President, Risdall  
McKinney Public Relations

Deborah Callahan  
CEO, CTS Corporate Travel  
Solutions/American Express

Marie Bak  
President/CEO,  
SDQ LTD.

THESE  
ENTREPRENEURIAL  
WOMEN ARE  
SUPPORTING  
AND ENHANCING  
EACH OTHER'S  
SUCCESS

BY DAVID GEE

PHOTOS BY TATE CARLSON

AND EMILY J. DAVIS



# “CAN WE PLEASE FIGURE OUT A DIFFERENT ANGLE WHEN TELLING THIS STORY?”

said Rose McKinney, president, Risdall McKinney Public Relations, somewhat pleadingly. When I was casting about for a compelling cover story for our annual Women In Business issue a suggestion came from a member of one of the four Twin Cities' chapters of The Women Presidents' Organization, or WPO. She invited me to attend a meeting and then write about specific members of the group, as well as about the group itself and how they support one another, personally and professionally.

I wasn't quite sure from a logistics and layout standpoint exactly how to tell the story, but I was sure after attending a meeting there were lots of great stories to tell.

Although I had circulated some questions prior to the meeting, when I spoke, my preface

was something along the lines of “men network on the golf course and over lunches at the club, and we all know women network in different ways and I want to explore that” and blah, blah, blah.

To begin with, in my circle of male friends, guys who are CEOs and VCs and entrepreneurs, I don't know a single one of them “doing deals” on golf courses these days, though several do in fact golf.

And several members of that male group did also attend our Leadership Luncheon in April with Governor Pawlenty, Deborah Callahan and Irwin Jacobs, but long lunches are decidedly not the norm for them either.

So admittedly, I didn't frame my opening line very well and my thanks to Rose for reminding me of that. However, I do think

there are some distinct differences in terms of how men and women network, and maybe more specifically or importantly, how they support each other in peer to peer settings, such as these WPO meetings.

Through the WPO, a diverse group of women company presidents and owners of businesses with at least two million dollars in annual revenue are able to tap into the collective wisdom of their peers and advance their business and personal success.

The local WPO chapters are coordinated by a professional facilitator, such as Myrna Marofsky, of Red Book, LLC, who ran the meeting I attended. The idea for all of the chapters is to meet monthly to share business expertise and experience in a confidential and collaborative setting.

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**JENNIFER SMITH**

Owner/President, Innovative Office Solutions



**ROSE MCKINNEY**

President, Risdall McKinney Public Relations

**Q:** What prompted you to start your own business?

**A:** I was familiar with the office supply business from a young age as my family owned a small office supply business. I saw there was a void in the marketplace that the nationally owned office supply chains were not filling. I knew from how my family ran its small business that I could build a customer-centered office supply company that would allow me to compete successfully with the national chains and big box stores.

**Q:** How has the business environment changed for women since you started your career? **A:** There is better awareness of diversity in the market. More companies understand the concept and are looking for ways to incorporate women-owned businesses into their overall spend. We are doing business with larger companies today that years ago merely talked about diversity.

**Q:** What prompted you to start your own business?

**A:** Opportunity. An opportunity to partner with an established advertising agency to offer the business community a better approach to public relations—an approach that focuses on results that matter instead of media placements.

**Q:** How has the business environment changed for women since your first started your career? **A:** There are more women in leadership roles today, which means there is far more mentoring and role modeling for the new generation of women in the workplace. Further, women today are far more comfortable in their business roles than when I started my career in the late '80s. Women then were trying to prove they were just as good as men. We don't have to prove that anymore.





Smiles, support and some serious discussion at a monthly WPO meeting.



## CAMILLE THOMAS

President/CEO, JMC Marketing Solutions

**Q:** What do you like about having your own business?

**A:** I knew from an early age that I wanted to run my own company but I also was realistic. I had to gain enough experience to be able to succeed. The timing was right for me in the middle 90's as I had 13 years of corporate experience, international travel and sourcing experiences and a family that was happy to have flexibility. I enjoy structuring the company based on real need. Allocating resources, time, money, etc. can all be managed and repurposed as required, without any delay.

**Q:** How has your business changed over the years?**A:** Because I am in a design and sales business, women have always played a large role in manufacturing and retailing. The difference is that women were more in service roles previously, not heading up their companies as today.



## MARIE BAK

President/CEO, Sdq Ltd.

**Q:** What prompted you to start your own business?

**A:** Financial freedom and a career opportunity for me as a minority woman. I could also improve and help the lives of some wonderful employees while providing financial security for my immediate family.

**Q:** Has gender ever been an issue for you as the owner of one of the state's largest facility service providers?**A:** I was fortunate to find courageous men like Curt Carlson who gave me my first commercial account and believed in me at a time when women-owned companies were rare. In earlier years financial institutions were less prone to offer credit and funding; times have since changed to allow more equality. Women are now also able to receive loans without the counter signatures of husbands. Finally, women-owned business certifications offer good P.R. and tax incentives for prospective customers.





## DEBORAH CALLAHAN

CEO, CTS Corporate Travel  
Solutions/American Express

**Q:** Why did you start your own business? **A:** To provide a rewarding and nurturing work environment for those who share my vision and passion, as well as to provide value for customers and clients. I always thought if I work hard and treat people how I like to be treated, I would be successful. Though our business and industry has constantly changed, those same simple principles guide me and our growing company today, nearly 30 challenging and immensely rewarding years later.

**Q:** What advice do you have for leaders to help their businesses thrive in these challenging economic times? **A:** Some things are simply beyond our control, but we can change the way we interpret and react to them. Be decisive and keep being decisive, empower employees, build cash reserves, constantly reinvent your business and focus on the positives. Stay hopeful and optimistic.



## NANCY ROSENBERG

Owner, Big Top Liquors/Sid's  
Discount Liquors

**Q:** What was your first involvement in your business? **A:** I joined my family business about 15 years ago, and have been instrumental in its growth since. Some of the changes have included computerizing the office, establishing wine clubs and events, and formalizing employee training, education and travel programs. The leadership skills I have learned through WPO have helped me to develop a more structured company.

**Q:** What are some of the upsides/advantages to being a women entrepreneur and business owner?

**A:** The uniqueness of being a female owner in the liquor industry has made me more noticeable. Hopefully, that works to my advantage. The liquor industry is obviously heavily dominated by men in the leadership roles. I find that my leadership both in my business and in our industry organization where I have been a board member for many years stands out because of my gender. I am frequently asked to represent the "liquor folks" because it helps to dispel an old stereotype. I readily relate to many of the government officials and legislators that we work with to uphold and enact positive laws concerning liquor issues.



Kay Phillips, president,  
ATEK Manufacturing,  
makes a point.

"There are a lot of commonalities between what we do and I always take things away from our meetings," says Kay Phillips, president, ATEK Manufacturing. "Somebody always talks about things they are doing that I can use to help my company be better. That's the reason that I participate in this group is to be a better leader and create a better organization."

"Early in our careers and in our business, we focused very much on the industries we serve," states McKinney, a local public relations veteran. "As diverse as those are, like Kay said, it's the commonalities that bring us together and where we find solutions."

"I also like the networking aspect of it across the community and the country," says Terri Krivosha, partner, Maslon Edelman Borman & Brand, LLP. "When I meet women while traveling, or at a conference, you just say you're in WPO and everyone understands what that means and how you might be able to

➔ Minneapolis-St. Paul ties for fourth place among metro areas across the country with the largest number of women-owned firms.

Minnesota has the second highest percentage of women engaged in the workforce in the U.S. (69 percent).

Source: Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development





Rose McKinney,  
president, Risdall  
McKinney Public Relations

There are 200,000 women-owned businesses in Minnesota, generating more than \$35 billion in sales and employing over 200,000 people.

Source: Women Presidents' Organization

help each other. When I was starting my career women weren't very good at helping each other. It was more, 'I worked hard to do it, I'm not going to help you figure anything out.' Now I think there's such a desire for all of us to really pitch in and support others."

"Another thing I think about this group that's different than some of the other ones I have been in is we hold each other accountable," states Jennifer Smith, CEO, Innovative Office Solutions. "I think that's definitely a huge part of the group's long-term success as well. It's interesting that after five years we're still going and committed to each other."

"Anyone here who needs help, they know they've got people who will jump in and give it to them," adds Phillips. "Whether it's advice, a sales contact, a new business opportunity or simply someone to talk to who will say 'yeah, we've been through this,' it's all about the lifting up, right? All of us have been given different opportunities, different skills, different perspectives on things that help us do a better job. And I don't think any of us would be sitting here unless we thought this was going to help us." **MB**



## TERRI KRIVOSHA

Partner, Maslon Edelman  
Borman & Brand

**Q:** Is gender an issue for you in business? **A:** I think gender doesn't play an issue for a woman business owner if she has the respect of those who work for her. Personally, as a lawyer in a male-dominated area of practice (business law/mergers and acquisitions), gender has never been an issue for me. Again, I think the issue of respect is critical here, too.

**Q:** How has the business environment changed since you started your career? **A:** One of the biggest differences I have seen in my 26 years of practicing law is that the care of children is no longer just a "woman's" issue but everyone's issue. With two career households, childcare duties are often shared and we all need flexibility to meet family obligations. There are also many women's business groups available now to help women develop networks in a way there were not several years ago. WPO is a great example.



## RUTH MURMAN

Owner, Auntie Ruth's Animal  
Care & Wellness Centers

**Q:** Why start your own business? **A:** I started my business so I could do things the way I believed they should be done and to finally get paid appropriately for my work. You also get to apply your own standard of ethics to your business; no cheating the clients or taking shortcuts.

**Q:** Is gender even an issue for you? **A:** It is sometimes. Men tend to push me harder to see if I will give in. They are pleasantly surprised when I won't let them decide, as the client, how I will run my business. As a woman you have to be firm, but not a b\_\_\_\_. Guys are merely considered good businessmen when they are tough.

**Q:** What advice do you have for other business owners/leaders? **A:** Quit being stubborn! Accept the circumstances and go back to what worked when you began your business. Know that you are going to have to work harder and longer hours than you may have been. It's absolutely crucial to believe that you will survive in this economy. Let the public and your clients know what sets you apart and be honest and authentic.