

## Debra Taeschler – Business Women Advocate



To say this lifelong Jersey girl's (as she puts it) professional accomplishments began when she launched her own company would be an understatement. To say they began after graduating summa cum laude/Phi Beta Kappa from Rutgers University's ultra competitive fine arts program really wouldn't do it either. No, the true beginning of Debra Taeschler's accomplishments was losing her father at age 12 and subsequently seeing her mother take on multiple jobs to provide for her family. These life-altering experiences and her mother's daily verbal and non-verbal message of "do it right or don't do it at all" is really when the accomplishments began. That message became her motto and set her on a path to professional and personal success.

To that point, following college graduation, Debra began working her way up the advertising agency world ladder, first as mechanical artist (when they existed) and then on to layout/design artist, production manager, account executive, account manager, and vice president of account management. Through this career advancement, she developed a deeply-rooted strategic underpinning, a love of

creative and its power to communicate, a solid foundation in operational efficiency, and a work ethic that drove her beliefs on how clients should be treated, how an advertising agency should be managed and the superior service that always needed to be delivered.

With this core of experience, values and ethics in place, Debra set off and launched her own state-certified, woman-owned company, GráficaGroup, from her home basement in 1986, thus beginning her company's ongoing rise and remarkable growth into one of the metro area's leading full-service, integrated advertising and digital marketing agencies. During a continuing several decade run of seeing countless competitors rise and fall, GráficaGroup has flourished primarily because of Debra's ability to inspire and hire marketing communications professionals who share her unwavering commitment to quality work and service, her insistence on being judged by bottom-line results, her foresight into new technology solutions, and her indefatigable resolve to immerse herself in a client's business.

As a Who's Who of American Women and the company's driving force, Debra not only serves as President and CEO of GráficaGroup, she also plays a hands-on role in day-to-day activities, maintaining solid working relationships with client executives to ensure that objectives are being met and exceeded. Under this leadership style and commitment, the company has become an agency of choice among many FORTUNE 1000 companies and New Jersey's leading corporations and associations, including AT&T, Beneficial Management, Cathedral Healthcare System, Century 21 Real Estate LLC, First Morris Bank and Trust, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, Inventa, Jackson Hewitt Tax Service, KPMG LLP, Lucent Technologies, New Jersey Office of Clean Energy, Novartis, PSE&G, Rutgers University, St. Paul Travelers, Summit Medical Group, Trane, Trinity Biotech, Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, and many more.

Beyond her company's success is Debra's ongoing advocacy for women. With several decades of professional experience both as an employee and owner, Debra has seen much in the way of inequity and advancement of females in the workforce. Like her personal and professional experience molded her work ethic and management style, it also had a profound effect on the core programs and policies she instituted within her own company.

For example, early in her career, there were maybe one or two "token" female senior executives in organizations. Seeing and experiencing this issue, Debra consciously made the decision to actively hire and promote capable women senior executives (per bringing aboard the best expertise on what skills/experience were needed) throughout her career in an effort to further break down the glass ceiling of the business world. She also made a commitment to pay to the level and ability of an employee regardless of being male or female (which wasn't common then and rarely is now).

Further addressing perceived inequities from early in her career, Debra noticed many human resources departments having significant concerns about hiring women due to the chance of them becoming pregnant and missing valuable work time. It seemed to her that people were missing the concept of successful female executives who were also mothers with children born during key points

in a career. Debra herself gave birth and raised, along with her super supportive husband, two sons while owning/managing GráficaGroup. Seeing another practice that made no sense whatsoever, Debra was an early advocate (with policies in place) for flex schedules with the advent of more women working and raising a family. Her policy was so successful that she even had two female employees get married and give birth to two children while both staying employed full time.

On the mentoring side of business, Debra believes that a woman's inclination is to nurture employees at all times. As a New Jersey Advertising Club Hall of Fame member, she consistently provides mentoring and coaching to female leaders to help them overcome this inclination in order to become superior managers with the ability to manage, hire and release employees. This mentoring helps female employee growth, both within her company and as these individuals progress into leadership roles with other organizations.

Finally, and this speaks to her far-reaching reputation within the region and the advertising/marketing profession, GráficaGroup's internship program consistently receives a two to one ratio of female to male applicants. Why? The majority of the female applicants state an insightful reason - they want to be mentored and learn from one of New Jersey's top successful woman business leaders.