



It's not unusual to enter a corporate boardroom and find a woman sitting at the head of the table, or to patronize a small business that's owned and operated by a female.

In fact, it's a growing trend: According to the Center for Women's Business Research, in 2007 nearly 10.4 million firms nationwide were owned by women. These companies employed almost 13 million people and generated \$1.9 trillion in sales.

Central Ohio is home to a wide variety of successful female executives, from an Ohio Supreme Court Justice to the CEO of a local engineering consulting firm to an entrepreneur who opened her first restaurant at age 27.

Columbus C.E.O picked eight local businesswomen to atalk shop with, posing the same questions to each. Regardless of the industry they work in, each has intriguing views on what it takes for a female to succeed in business, as well as where they feel inspiration.

Dena Besece

A petite blonde, Dena Besece doesn't match the stereotypical image of a Harley-Davidson enthusiast. Yet the 41-year-old is general manager and part owner of C&A Harley-Davidson, a Plain City motorcycle dealership started by her parents, Carl and Adonna Besece, in 1987.

Besece has been putting her associate's degree in business (from Ohio University) to use at the dealership since the late 1980s. "I started out just working in the office," she recalls. The longer she stayed, the more she learned. She was named general manager in 1997.

C&A has 17 full-time employees, six of them women. So, it's no surprise that about 15 percent of the clientele is female, compared with Harley-Davidson's 10 percent national average.

Besece's father has retired, but her mother continues to help with the day-to-day operations. Two of her brothers, Barry and Kerry, work at C&A as a Certified Public Accountant and parts manager, respectively. In 2001, the dealership moved into a new 21,000-square-foot facility on Commerce Place. "Business certainly has grown every year. We've been fortunate," Besece says.

What's the best part of your job?

"Getting to work with my family and doing something that I actually enjoy doing," Besece says. Plus, "Seeing the excitement that it brings people when they're brought into the Harley-Davidson fold."

What's the worst part of your job?

In addition to long hours, Besece says it's difficult to forecast future trends in the motorcycle market. "Our business is a little different than, like, the car industry," she says. "A car you can go in and order it and have it in six weeks. I do the ordering like six months out. The market will change as far as what models will sell at what time of the year."

How do you maintain a work-life balance?

"I probably don't do a very good job," Besece admits. "But fortunately for me, since I work with my family, I get to spend a lot of time with them here. And I just recently got engaged, and I have a very understanding fiancé who has just as diligent a work ethic as I do."

What issue do women face in the workplace that men do not?

"The old adage that women can't do what men can...which, of course, we all know is not true," she says.

Who or what has been your biggest inspiration?

"Probably my father," says Besece. "He grew up in a family-owned business... and just has such a strong work ethic that he instilled in his children. He's just a down-to-earth, great guy and hard worker."

What are your future goals?

Besece hopes to increase motorcycle safety awareness through C&A's Rider's Edge Motorcycling Academy. She also wants to attract more female customers as well as tap into a younger generation of riders. "It'd be nice to debunk the definition of the stereotypical biker," she says. "They think it's a big, burly tattooed guy that rides bikes."

What qualities must a female executive possess in order to succeed?

"They have to be passionate and driven and committed, just due to the fact that they have to get over the hurdle they have with men," she says. "Unfortunately, they have to put forth 110 percent, when sometimes I think the men get to put in 80 or 90 percent."