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WBEs Who



ROCK!

These two entrepreneurs are driven to provide excellent professional development services to their corporate clients.

By Tanya Isley
Photos by Audrey Dempsey

COVER STORY

At some point, most corporations invest in their employees, whether they are entry-level or executives. They want the best from staffers, and the most effective way to attain it is through training. Employees who receive the necessary training have a greater understanding of their responsibilities within their roles, which builds confidence. And confidence enhances their overall performance.

Also, according to the **Association for Talent Development (ATD)**, corporations that offer comprehensive training programs have 218 percent higher income per employee than corporations that don't have formalized training. These corporations also enjoy, on average, 24 percent higher profit margins than those who spend less on training.

In 2016, corporations spent about \$359.3 billion on corporate training initiatives worldwide, with an average of 39 percent of the money going to external (outsourced) suppliers, training industry estimates say. **Sue Beyer** and **Gloria Carter-Hicks** are part of that group of external suppliers providing performance improvement and professional development services to corporations.

Although Beyer specializes in executive coaching and teamwork, her journey to corporate training began as a cashier when she was 16. "Most people in my field grow up in the human resources side of business. I grew up on the operations side," she says. "I worked for **The Kroger Co.** for 14 years. I started out as a cashier in the stores, then worked my way up to a checker/trainer. Then, I ended up working at the corporate headquarters in downtown Cincinnati. I was manager of productivity and cost control."

Beyer's experience as a checker/trainer inspired her to pursue a career in the training industry. So, she left Kroger to work with a small consulting firm. After a couple of years there, she decided to open her own business. Today, Beyer is president of **Operations Service Systems, LLC**, a professional development and management training firm that specializes in "selection, onboarding, coaching, and developing employees to reach their full potential."

She designs her own training, but also implements several products from industry leader **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.** in her training programs as an Authorized Partner for three of its brands.

"I'm an Authorized Partner for **Everything DiSC®**—the leading suite of DiSC-based corporate training and assessment solutions, where participants respond to an assessment and receive very personalized results," she says. "I also use *The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team™*, which is based on [the book] *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, by **Patrick Lencioni**. Finally, I've been using **PXT Select™** for a little under a year, as well. That's a hiring-to-retiring assessment. It is [designed to create] a selection pool to hire the right candidate, as well as to make sure that employees are in the jobs where they can succeed the best."

Although Beyer's first few years on her own were difficult, her passion to be her own boss and "teacher instinct" drove her to stay the course; she recently celebrated 29 years in business.

Her secrets to success and longevity in the industry are building relationships and providing added value for clients. When a client rolled out *The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team* program for the first time, the company called Beyer and she spent more

than an hour walking staffers through how to implement the particular module without charging any additional fees.

"I take a real interest in making sure that I deliver the results of the training that they are wanting from me because I'm 'it.' I tell people I have a three-person organization. I'm me, myself, and I," Beyer says. "It's my reputation that's on the line, and I want to make sure that I accomplish and get the result that they hired me for. And if you do that, they'll come back to you time and time again."

Unlike Beyer's nontraditional route to corporate training, Carter-Hicks enjoyed a 20-year career in human resources before starting **Hicks-Carter-Hicks, LLC (H-C-H)**. "I said, 'I want to be able to be in a position to help train, coach,



Beyer

COVER STORY

mentor, and develop people, and I like recruiting.' So I answered a small ad one day, and I ended up in the insurance industry in a management development program," she says.

Eventually, a mentor explained the importance of understanding all facets of business, not just human resources. He encouraged her to become an operations manager so she'd gain experience in leading people. Although Carter-Hicks initially resisted, she finally relented and spent eight years in operations before moving back into human resources. But those eight years in operations gave her a solid foundation

for running her own business.

"The benefit of that was understanding business, bottom lines, managing budgets, leading people—which is what we do today," she says.

H-C-H is an award-winning, full-service performance improvement company that helps clients who want to improve employee performance, enhance their bottom line, and create a diverse and inclusive work environment. Carter-Hicks, the daughter of entrepreneurs, started her business in 1999 after being caught in the reorganization tide of the company

for which she was working. However, that stroke of bad luck turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

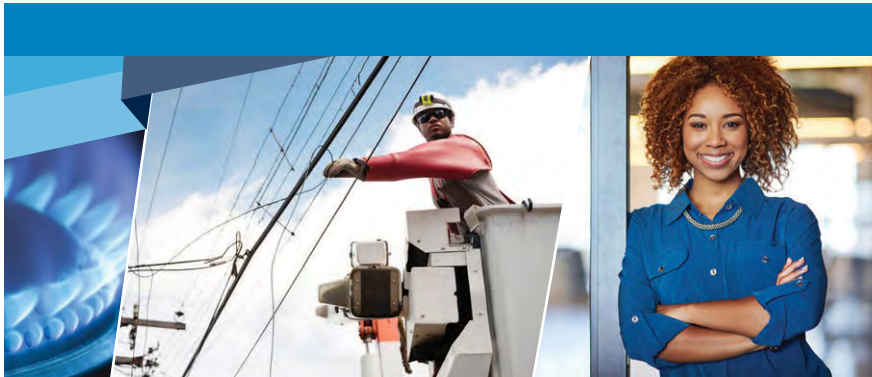
"It gave me the funding and the time I needed to start my business. And that's what my dad said I should have always done anyway. He felt that 'You always need to create wealth for yourself. You need to determine your own destiny. You cannot always do that working for somebody else.' He was my biggest hero and encouraged me to do those things," Carter-Hicks says.

Like Carter-Hicks, many of her employees have a corporate background, which she believes provides them with an advantage over other firms because they "can talk to [clients] in terms of not just theory, but real-world practice as well."

H-C-H provides services to a variety of clients in multiple industries, including the **City of Cincinnati**, **Monsanto**, and companies in the banking regulatory industry and healthcare. Carter-Hicks works to ensure that the firm has a good balance between nonprofit, corporate, and government clients. "If things are happening in one of the industries, we know there's another industry where maybe things are stabilizing," she says.

Because of her strong background in human resources and desire to train others, Carter-Hicks, who recently received the St. Louis American Foundation's 2017 Entrepreneur of the Year Award, is most proud that her firm helps other companies and their employees become stronger in their roles so that they can develop in their careers and help the company perform better.

Carter-Hicks, like Beyer, is also an Au-



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WEC Energy Group, based in Milwaukee, is one of the nation's largest electric and natural gas delivery holding companies, serving 4.4 million customers in Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota.

thorized Partner of Everything DiSC and The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team. H-C-H uses these assessment tools to help teams to strengthen their performance, increase collaboration and enhance productivity.

“We specifically focus on performance improvement, because that’s the work we like to do. That’s what I always enjoyed doing in the corporate world—mentoring, coaching, training, developing people. And we’ve been really successful at that, and we’ve won numerous awards for the work that we have done with clients.”

Like many other industries that faced uncertainty and challenges during the recent Great Recession, the training



Carter-Hicks

industry was no exception. Many of those in leadership positions view training and development as a discretionary portion of their allocated budget, and it is one of the first items to be reduced or eliminated during hard times. As a result, Beyer and Carter-Hicks experienced the effects of those cost-cutting measures.

“We had a downturn in 2008 and in 2009, and I had to change our business model a little bit because corporate America was changing its business model. Before the Recession, I would do week-long training sessions—maybe two days of classroom training and three days of one-on-one coaching,” Beyer says. “During the recession, people wanted me to accomplish the

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As busy as they are with their businesses, both women maintain an active presence in their communities, which is something in which they take great pride.



same thing I was doing in two days in three or four hours.

"[I] had to re-evaluate how we get our customers the results that they're looking for, not put our reputation in harm's way, and still do it within a reasonable time frame. I think with the economy—the way that it's growing—that we're starting to see some spend a little bit more in the training," Beyer says.

Like Beyer, Carter-Hicks was able to weather the storm; relying on her previous experience to get through the hard times.

"My degree isn't in business, but I had enough business expertise in the corporate world to understand how to run a business effectively both in good and hard times. We try to run our business like a major corporation," she

says. "We had to scale back; we had to wear many hats and look for new and different clients. So we balanced our client portfolio like you would balance your investment portfolio."

As busy as they are with their businesses, both women maintain an active presence in their communities, which is something in which they take great pride.

For two years, Beyer served as the **Women's Business Enterprise Council-West** Regional Nevada Forum Chair. Currently, she is president of the Las Vegas Chapter of the **Association for Talent Development** (ATD), the largest professional membership organization dedicated to people who develop talent in organizations. In her role, she oversees a board of six and 80 members; this year, she is focused on growing the membership to 100.

Carter-Hicks is very active in the **United Way of Greater St. Louis**, for which she has been a board member for over five years. She also serves on the Organizational Development Committee for the United Way.

"It's always been a passion of mine [because of] the work they do in the community that we serve," she says. In addition, Carter-Hicks serves on the corporate board of directors for **Previsor Insurance**.

When looking toward the future, both Beyer and Carter-Hicks are focused on continuing to grow their businesses, diversifying their client bases, and, for Carter-Hicks, "to be known as the best performance improvement company in the communities where we work, among our employees, [and] our clients." ♦