

# TODAY'S WOMAN

LISA TRETLE & JANE VERON

## Empowering women to reach their potential

By TRACI DUTTON LUDWIG

Success starts with belief. Belief in your vision, your capabilities, your efficacy — and yourself. But that's not all; success also benefits from direction and support. With concrete goals, an outlined path to achievement and participation within a network of like-minded individuals, success becomes a logical and achievable destination. Harnessing and developing women's talents, in order to achieve success and boost economic development, is the passionate mission of The Acceleration Project (TAP), a non-profit organization co-founded by Lisa Tretler and Jane Veron, of Scarsdale, in 2012.

According to Tretler and Veron, TAP's purpose is to deploy professional women to assist local small businesses with strategic and tactical advice. TAP connects consultants with small business owners to provide a well-structured, accessible and results-oriented program of education, strategy, development and support. Through dialogue and hands-on interaction, each customized program enables the corresponding small business to flourish and grow. Similarly, TAP positively benefits its consultants by empowering them to make a meaningful impact in their community while advancing their professional skills.

TAP selects small business owners with the greatest need and potential for growth. Together, they address a broad array of business challenges, including strategic planning, goal-setting, marketing, financial planning, operations, organization and time management. TAP's model is successful because of the close relationships that develop



JIM MACLEAN PHOTO

At Imagine Candy in Scarsdale, village residents Jane Veron, left, and Lisa Tretler, right, consult their client as part of The Acceleration Project.

between the business owners and the consultants who act as advisers and resources. TAP relies on the generous donations of individuals, foundations and corporations to fund its efforts.

According to Tretler and Veron, consultants have been identified through a selective vetting process and are trained to ensure the highest level of skill and dedication. Collectively, TAP consultants are highly educated; they have relevant college and graduate degrees from top schools; and they have worked in a variety of fields, including strategy consulting, marketing and investment banking. They also have extensive professional experience in management and service sectors.

According to Tretler, TAP creates real-life professional possibilities on a pro bono basis for women "not ready to commit fully to a career, but looking for an opportunity to hone their skills. We built TAP to give women an opportunity that has not yet existed — to work in a professional capacity with a low risk, part-time commitment that is different

from traditional volunteer experiences."

Through its consulting structure, TAP harnesses the enormous potential of local women who are "in the earlier stages of career re-entry or who have toyed with the idea of returning to work," Veron said. "TAP provides a hands-on, résumé-enhancing experience. It enables women to work alongside like-minded professionals and learn from each other as a team. It builds confidence in problem solving and in working with clients. It shows women how much value they can add to their community, and it gives them an opportunity to give back."

Testimonials from both sides — clients and consultants — praise TAP's productive relationships. One client said, "We get so stuck in the day-to-day. Talking to you takes us above to an objective view of our business." Likewise, a consultant said, "I am so proud to be part of this organization and part of these women. I have so much respect for TAP's

*Continued on next page*

The Scarsdale Inquirer

RECORD REVIEW

THE RIVERTOWNS  
Enterprise

FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2014 • REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

# Empowering women to reach their potential

*Continued from previous page*

intelligence and process. It is a privilege.”

Tretler and Veron’s own story is one of inspiration, success and commitment to social good. As extremely qualified business professionals, mothers and civic leaders, they found themselves living very full, multifaceted lives. Tretler has over 20 years of experience in marketing strategy consulting. She is the owner of a consulting firm and has worked in managerial roles, focusing on business strategy, at several large firms, including American Express, Andersen Consulting (now Accenture), Kurt Salmon Associates and Towers Perrin. She has been a member of the professional faculty at the Wharton School of Business, where she previously obtained her M.B.A. She has also taught courses in entrepreneurial marketing through affiliation with the Women’s Enterprise Development Center in White Plains and she has facilitated local networking groups for women business owners.

Veron’s biography is equally impressive. She earned a B.A. magna cum laude from Yale University and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School. She developed her professional skills as a strategy consultant and marketing executive at Bain & Co., where she advised Fortune 500 clients across a variety of industries. Veron additionally served as a marketing executive at American Express and is the principal of her own private consulting business. In Scarsdale for the past 15 years Veron has held numerous leadership roles in the public and nonprofit sectors. In recognition of her sustained and significant impact on the community, Veron received the Mayor’s Award for exceptional leadership in 2007. Both women also have children who are currently or formerly students in the Scarsdale school district.

After being introduced by a mutual friend who knew of their similar backgrounds and interests, Tretler and Veron quickly discovered a strong alignment of personal perspectives, vision, community involvement and goals. “We found we had so much in common... so much that was complementary. This provided a wonderful platform for our partnership,” Veron said.

Through observations and conversations with many women in the larger community, Tretler and Veron each began to encounter a familiar predicament. “For many reasons, including raising families, a significant number of high-achieving women have opted out of their careers,” Tretler said. She cited a Center for Work-Life Policy study from 2005 that reported 43 percent of “highly qualified” women ages 28-55 “left work voluntarily at some

point in their careers.” Of these women with children, 93 percent indicated a desire to return to their careers. These results were calculated from survey data received by thousands of women with graduate or professional degrees or high-honors undergraduate degrees.

Importantly, as the survey suggests, careers can get put on hold, but the women’s knowledge, skills and talents remain. Veron affirmed this reality: “There’s a large pool of highly qualified women out there with wonderful talents to put to use ... We want to help women reconnect with their potential.”

The truly wonderful aspect about Tretler and Veron’s work is that, while it benefits women and business owners individually, the positive results also have a synergistic effect. Their work reaches out into the community by way of three initiatives. First, through TAP, their nonprofit organization, they are able to not only accelerate growth of individual businesses, but also relationally boost economic development throughout a community’s entire local business sector. So far, TAP’s team of approximately 15 consultants and industry and functional experts have worked in depth with approximately 12 small business owners across Westchester — including Peekskill, Hastings, Mamaroneck, Bronxville and Edgemont. This fall, TAP partnered with the Scarsdale Chamber of Commerce for a Buy Local project to analyze and accelerate village commerce. The study’s purpose is to invigorate the local economy by exploring how all stakeholders — shoppers, businesses, service providers and organizations — can play a role in local business development for the benefit of the entire community. The results of the survey will be used, first, to provide strategic advice to business owners; second, to develop recommendations for a consumer awareness campaign to promote supporting local businesses; and finally to create a community partnership model that can be used in other communities.

As demonstrated by the Buy Local project, while many of TAP’s small business clients are women, TAP does not exclusively serve women-owned businesses.

Second, Tretler and Veron engage the community through speaking engagements on the topic of professional re-engagement. Two upcoming workshops are “Strategic Volunteering: Leveraging Your Volunteer Experience for Professional and Personal Growth” sponsored by the Junior League of Central Westchester on Thursday, April 10, at 7:30 p.m.; and “Tapping Your Potential: Leveraging Your Skills for the Next Chapter,” on Thursday,

May 1, at 9:30 a.m., sponsored by the Harvard Business School Women’s Association of New York.

Finally, through a private coaching practice, Tretler and Veron also provide individual and small group coaching sessions to help women set goals and address résumé gaps related to career re-entry, as well as to provide guidance on launching new businesses. These coaching sessions facilitate dialogues among women and build networks of career resources.

“Through our work with our nonprofit, business owners, and individuals looking to identify the next steps for their career trajectories, we can establish goal-oriented partnerships and networks that keep growing,” Tretler said. “We provide customized assistance to clients at all stages of their professional life. In particular, though, our work has been especially effective for women re-entering the professional world after a hiatus due to children or other life situations, women looking to change careers in the direction of their passions, and women attempting to direct their talents into viable entrepreneurial businesses.”

If women don’t know how to actualize their talents or grow their businesses, Tretler and Veron can help by directing clients’ energy and potential. “We help to identify goals and establish a plan for realizing those goals,” Veron said. “We give clients homework and break everything down to a series of achievable goals.”

This might involve guidance in writing a mission statement, drafting a business plan and formulating a marketing strategy.

“We tend to look at the big picture and the small picture,” Veron said. “We work with clients to establish an overarching plan, yet we also focus on day-to-day challenges that come up. These have to be addressed in order to move forward.”

Tretler and Veron have seen a surge in interest from women thinking about the next steps in their professional journey. They note significant demand for conversations and advice from those seeking to turn ideas into reality. Many find themselves at important inflection points and are energized by the opportunity to think more deeply about a new business idea or career path.

Tretler concluded: “We are motivated by the tremendous opportunity around us — to harness untapped potential, maximize human capital and empower women to deploy their talents to make a meaningful impact.”

*For more information about The Acceleration Project or to contact Tretler and Veron, visit [www.theaccelerationproject.org](http://www.theaccelerationproject.org).*