

# PRINT MATTERS

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## It was love at first sight

Let's just say that the subject of this month's lead feature was not exactly keen on the idea.

We say this with love of course, for the topic is our boss — Ann Adkins, president of JPA. A reserved person, Adkins stays out of the spotlight as best she can. "I'm the type of person who wouldn't even tell you if I had a cold," she says.

But we wouldn't take no for an answer. We postulated that women are a hot topic in the news these days, particularly those in leadership roles. We said that journalists are in fact story tellers, and this would be a good tale to tell. Furthermore, in these days of discord, it seems especially important to share and learn from one another.

Adkins loves quotes; this is one of many she has in her office.

In short, we wore her down. We hope you will enjoy reading her story as much as we enjoyed gathering it. If so, please drop her a line (it might help to get us out of hot water).



to Queens, New York and told her that's where they would be landing. Adkins said, "But there's water all around it." Her friend replied, "Yes, but don't worry. It's July. Sometimes the planes skid off into the Hudson River in the winter."

And so...

The story of Ann Adkins begins on a farm in Morris, Illinois. One of seven children, she learned the value of hard work from her father. "He was a farmer and an ag teacher, and he raised pigs and later became the director of a vocational center," she said. "He would literally leave for work in the morning, come home for dinner at night, and then shave and go back to work."

When Adkins was young, she thought that she would marry a farmer and work on a farm. But life, as it so often does, intervened.

"I accidentally fell into printing," she says. "My husband worked for a printer, and I was looking for a part-time job. But they wouldn't hire me because they said I was overqualified and they were worried I wouldn't stick around."

As fate would have it, the printer changed its tune and hired her a couple of months down the line. "I loved it from the very beginning, and 32 years later, here I am," she says.

Adkins eventually ended up in the engineering department, and her manager gave her opportunities that she normally would not have had. "He told me I was logical and thought like a computer," she said. "We worked on incredibly complex spreadsheets."

And then came the day in the late 1980s that her boss came in and told her she was going to put together — and lead — a digital department. Adkins asked how on earth she would do that, since she had no knowledge in the area. "He said, 'You'll figure it out,' and he sent me in the direction I needed to go," she says. "He was such a confidence builder. I was terrified, but there was no way I was going to let him down."

#### Standing solo

In those days, there were very few women in the industry. Adkins remembers many conferences where she was the only woman in the room. "Sometimes men wouldn't even talk to me because they assumed I didn't know anything," she said. "But my colleague knew I was capable and he would always make sure other people understood that. If they would ask a question, he would say, 'Well you'll have to ask Ann about that.'"

Adkins also fondly remembers her first trip on an airplane. As the plane began to descend on LaGuardia, her colleague pointed

After working for that printer for more than a decade, Adkins found herself at JPA as a prepress manager. Shortly thereafter, she led a team that solved a vexing plate problem. Her prior experience in transitioning from traditional film stripping to computer to plate undoubtedly contributed to her problem-solving skills.

#### A big move

A few years later, in 2011, the formerly shy girl made a brave move. The operations manager position was open, and Adkins went for it. "I went in to President Dale Flesburg and said, 'I want to do this,'" she said. "It was amazing to see how invigorating it was to learn more about the operation. I oversaw prepress and the press room, as well as bindery and shipping."

Flesburg, who had been with JPA for 22 years, passed away in 2016. He had Adkins in mind as his replacement, and mentored her for several years. "Dale was so well-informed about everything," Adkins said. "He shared so much knowledge with me."

When it came time for Adkins to assume the role of president, she had two main worries. "The first was about how I would manage the sales team, because I couldn't sell lemonade at a lemonade stand," she says. "The other was knowing that every decision I made would impact the lives of everyone employed here. I would think, 'That's 34 house payments, car payments, etc.' I lost sleep that first year."

Eventually, Adkins made peace with the worry demons. "I realized it isn't all on me; all of us working together is what keeps the ship righted."

Adkins also has a clear philosophy on how she wants to lead. "People have value and should be heard," she says. "The fact that I'm signing the checks doesn't mean I'm more valuable than any other person. I treat people the way I want to be treated."

So it looks like we were right. Because as far as lessons go, that's a good one for all of us. Thanks boss.

# Publisher's Corner

## A long journey



It took a while to get here, but Marilyn Burkley is ecstatic to be an editor now.

From an early age, Burkley loved to read, and grammar and spelling were second nature to her. But when she graduated from high school in 1979, she was sick of school and decided to work instead of going to college.

"I didn't have the confidence that I could do anything challenging in terms of a job, so I settled for secretarial work," she said. "Eventually, when I was 27, I ended up going back to school while I was working. I started in psychology, but ultimately realized that I needed to be an English major."

However, when she graduated from college, she was pregnant. The journalism career was put on hold while she was a stay-at-home mom for 12 years. But when she was ready to go back to work, the economy was bad and she couldn't find work as an editor. She settled for a data entry job, but was laid off in 2011.

At that point, she was determined to find editorial work because she knew it was what she wanted to do. "I was looking all over, but nobody would take me because I didn't have experience," she said.

Burkley kept looking, and one day an Internet search turned up an indexing company in her town. The firm creates back-of-the-book indexes, mainly for medical and legal textbooks. Even though she was very shy, she decided to drive by and drop off a resume.

"I said something ridiculous like, 'You probably don't need anybody, but I just wanted to drop this off,'" she said. "I thought for sure he would file it away and I would never hear from him."

Lo and behold, he had so much work he couldn't keep up, and Burkley started shortly thereafter. In time, he started referring clients who needed editorial services to her as well.

"He said that other hires hadn't worked out because they found the work boring or they weren't accurate enough," Burkley said. "He told me I had great attention to detail, and he didn't know what he would've done without me."

Six years later, Burkley is now a freelancer with a full client load. "It was definitely a journey, but now I love what I do and almost don't consider it work. In fact, I feel guilty taking people's money."



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