

**Women
Who
Mean
Business**

**SUCCESS STORIES
OF WOMEN
OVER FORTY**

A. MIKAELIAN

Women Who Mean Business Published by William Morrow & Company, Inc.

Veronica A. Williams is featured on pps. 210 – 214

Cover Jacket Intro

More and more women are succeeding in the business world these days. Many of them launched careers in the 1970's – and are just now breaking through the glass ceiling. Or they are a part of the last generation of stay-at-home moms, and now that the kids have grown up, these women have found the confidence and drive to start their own businesses. Who are they and how did they get to where they are?

Women Who Mean Business profiles more than seventy successful businesswomen in their forties – from every state and Canada– to inspire and instruct future and current businesspeople nationwide.

The author interviewed CEOs and CFOs, entrepreneurs and small-business owners. Among the success stories are a woman who began her own music label and another who bought a forklift-manufacturing company. Some handle million-dollar clients and others hope to see their profits run into the millions one day. There's an amazing diversity of education and upbringing among these women. But whether they are single mothers or women of color, MBAs or high school graduates, they've all found success in business that both challenges and fulfills them

In *Women Who Mean Business*, they offer firsthand advice on how to get ahead, reveal what their day-to-day workload is like, and give suggestions on balancing work and home life. They offer an inside look at what women in business can expect from their male counterparts, show how the business world has changed, and divulge how they deal with stress and pressure. What makes them do what they do and what the rewards and costs can be are also part of these fascinating profiles.

Exemplary and encouraging, this unique book delivers a welcome message: The corporate climate is changing, and all across America there are new challenges, new opportunities, and new promise for *Women Who Mean Business*.

A. Mikaelian is a freelance writer who lives in Washington, D.C.

Editorial Review - Amazon.com

"Nothing has transformed the business world in the past forty years more than the women who entered it," writes A. Mikaelian in the introduction to *Women Who Mean Business*. In the pages that follow, freelance writer Mikaelian offers a revealing look at these female pioneers through profiles of 75 who have broken through the so-called glass ceiling in nearly every field of corporate endeavor. Each sketch opens with enlightening yearbook-type data, such as work history, education, associations and networks, community service, mentors and influences, and greatest obstacles overcome. Following these are brief narrative biographies that detail the subjects' business histories and philosophies. The women, drawn from every state in the U.S. and several Canadian provinces, include Mary Jean Connors, Knight Ridder senior vice president of human resources; Anna Garcia, president of ANKO Metal Services; Brenda J. Culpepper, PepperCo Music Group president; Rebecca Graham Paul, president and chief executive office of Georgia Lottery Corporation; and Phyllis J. Campbell, president of U.S. Bank Washington. "As the last generation that faced a male-dominated workforce," Mikaelian concludes, "their lives are a record of that time and an inspiration to anyone who is building a career." --Howard Rothman

Veronica Ann Williams



**PRINCIPAL AND
MANAGING DIRECTOR**

ACT Inc.

South Orange, New Jersey

WORK HISTORY

1979-1982	Account Executive, Systems Marketing Representative, Chicago, Illinois.
1982-1988	Product Manager, Data Account Manager, Staff Manager, AT&T Corporation, New Jersey and New York.
1988-1989	District Sales Manager, UniSoft Corporation, New York City.
1990-1991	Director of Business Development, Software Corporation of America, Stamford, Connecticut.
1991-1993	Northeast District Account Manager, Fujitsu, Inc., Mountain lakes, New Jersey.
1986-Present	Principal and Managing Director, ACT Inc.

Veronica Ann Williams

EDUCATION

- 1977 B.A. (honors) in economics, Brandeis University
- 1979 M.B.A., Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University.

FIRST JOB

Piano teacher for other children in the neighborhood. At age 15, I began working as a summer intern at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

ASSOCIATION AND NETWORKS

Telecommunications Industry Association; National Black MBA Association; Advisory Board Member, COMDEX Conferences; N.J. Technology Council; Advisory Board Member, Consumer Electronics Show; Advisory Board Member, Expocomm.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Founder, Manager, Computer Training Program at St. Paul Baptist Church; Member, South Orange Citizens Budget Advisory Committee, 1983-1986; Former member South Orange Planning Board.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Top Sales Awards at Control Data, AT&T & Fujitsu; 1996 Women of the Year, St. Paul Baptist Church, Montclair, NJ; Outstanding Young Women of America, 1979; Journee Francaise d'Economie et de Finances Conference Participant, 1978.

GREATEST OBSTACLES OVERCOME

Lack of money when starting business, lack of minority and female role models. Learning the "rules of the game", the structure, and the culture of corporations which was difficult in the beginning.

Veronica Ann Williams

DRIVING FORCE

The need to destroy barriers, the need to show those who say that I can't that I can, and the need to be in control of my own destiny.

DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Seeing someone else benefit from my efforts.

BUSINESS MAXIM

1. Identify a need, create win-win solutions, and then deliver.
2. Some succeed because they're destined to, others succeed because they're determined to.
3. Entrepreneurs need the 4 F's: focus, financing, fortitude and faith.

WAYS OF DEALING WITH PRESSURES AND STRESS

My belief in God, the love and support of my family, swimming and scuba diving, travel.

ADVICE TO ASPIRING BUSINESS WOMEN

1. Decide what you want to achieve or what position you want to be in, understand what it takes to get there, find someone to give you the real answers, determine if you are willing and able to make the sacrifices, then fish or cut bait!
2. You have to learn what comes from racism or sexism and what comes from the normal corporate culture. Look at what the white males have to go through to get where they are – you have to be able to discern what's just part of the game and what's due to something else.

There are no words to describe what I went through. I did whatever was necessary and legal to support myself as I went out to look for business.

Veronica Ann Williams

In 1993, Veronica Williams finally took the leap. For seven years, she had dreamed of establishing her own consulting firm but offers kept rolling in; offers that promised growth and stock options that never materialized. The funds she had expected from these positions were supposed to pull her through the early lean years of making it on her own. Instead, she rented out rooms in her house, took temp work and worked on a book that, if successful, would establish her as a premier authority in her field. She had put off her dream long enough – it was time to start, with or without capital.

It was hardly the position Veronica would have foreseen for herself. She had two prestigious degrees and fourteen years of experience in some of the biggest names in information technology. But she had never chosen the easiest route: upon graduating from business school while her classmates were taking high profile and high paying jobs, she opted for a sales position: “in sales you get to see everything. I realized it probably wasn’t the most prestigious job, but it got me onto the ground floor of the industry of my choice, and it gave me the opportunity to learn a lot more in less time.” Back then, Veronica says, a salesperson in IT wasn’t just devoted to selling: “if you take the position I held then, it would be split among ten people today. Twenty years ago, we did it all.” She sold, but also designed systems, trained clients, and offered support, gaining on the job the overview and skills she had been seeking.

It wasn’t many years after her first job, however, that Veronica realized she wanted to be out on her own. “The glass ceiling is there,” Veronica realized. “There’s a glass ceiling for women and for minorities. Depending on how you work, there’s a glass ceiling for white males as well. I began looking around and saw that my ambition wasn’t going to be realized in a major corporation. I didn’t want to wait to be given a chance to do all the things I knew I could do.” After her position was closed at her last company, Veronica decided she was ready.

“Most people start a business without enough money,” Veronica says. “I started with none.” For three years, she used her only asset – “every waking moment” – to build a reputation and a client base. The turning point came in the third year, when Veronica finished her book, *Wireless Computing Primer*, which helped her get speaking engagements and a position as an advisory board member for COMDEX, the mother of all IT conferences. It was then that she realized it was nothing more than faith that had kept her going: “I reaffirmed my religious beliefs after I finished my book – I handed the manuscript over to the publisher and went to church. I couldn’t believe I had made it through this and I had to thank God.”

Now the rewards come in both small and large forms. “It was such a little thing,” she says, but when a young African-American boy, no more than fourteen, approached Veronica after a speaking engagement to say how much he admired her, “I wanted to cry. It was a private engagement and I don’t know how he and his mother got in, but I gave up the schmoozing of the cocktail hour to talk to him. He made all of my sacrifices worthwhile.”

With her business secure and new business ventures – such as high-tech training course licensed by Motorola – in the works, Veronica is now in the position to turn work away in favor of clients and projects she really wants. With seventeen consultants on call, Veronica has time to devote to a basic computer skills training program at her church, one that she hopes will eventually branch out to include financial training. But Veronica also sees her professional life as a way to make a difference.

There are still those who dwell on her race and gender rather than what she has to say, there are still those who walk out of her seminars assuming they have nothing to learn from an African-American woman. Veronica is, however, unfazed by these slights: “I got that in high school, I got that in college, but I look at it as an opportunity to prove people wrong. I’m proud of my heritage. I play with the hand that I’m dealt, and I win.”

INVALUABLE ADVICE AND INSPIRING STORIES FROM

Women Who Mean Business

“Try to achieve a balance early on in your career and your personal life, when you are setting up your work habits for life.”

—ROSE MARIE BRAVO, chief executive, Burberrys Ltd., New York

Greatest obstacles overcome? “That’s easy: getting through breast cancer twice. That helps my perspective when a trucking shipment is lost and things go haywire. I can always be thankful that I’m alive and healthy.”

—SUZANNE LOCKLEAR, owner and founder, Suzanne’s Sensational Foods, Idaho

“I’m not one of those who spends a lot of energy on coulda, shoulda, woulda. I’m more of a ‘next thing’ person.”

—BRENDA J. CULPEPPER, president, PepperCo Music Group, Connecticut

“One of my very favorite parts of this job is participating in bringing new industry, development, and progress to the community. I love to watch things change.”

—JUDY R. LOVING, chairman, president, and CEO, The Bank of Yellville, Arkansas

“I hit a pretty big crisis in my life. My oldest son left for college, and my youngest son started driving and had a girlfriend. Suddenly, I woke up one day thinking nobody needs me anymore. I needed excitement.”

—SUE LAN MA, chairman and CEO, Elwell-Parker Ltd., Ohio

“I used to define myself as a friend and mother, but being a businesswoman is now part of that makeup.”

—SHARON MEEHAN, president and CEO, “Ham I Am!” Enterprises Limited, Texas

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