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2019 Women Who Build: Nancy Hagstrom, Interscape Commercial Environments

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Name: Nancy Hagstrom

Position: CEO

Company: Interscape Commercial Environments

How many years have you been in your current field? 30

Which project, deal or transaction was the “game changer” in the advancement of your career during the last 10 years? Going into partnership with my youngest son with the opening of Interscape Commercial Environments in Hartford was the beginning of an exciting, rewarding journey with surprises at every turn. Because our talents and our personalities are very different, we compliment each other. He’s an organizer; I’m a bit of a dreamer. He has the more serious nature, is very bright and confident, is customer service-oriented and unflappable. I am an open book and love to hear the stories and laughter of others. I am also customer oriented, but quite flappable. I attribute much of our success to that mix of personalities, our respect for each other, our high standards for performance and product, and, of course, the fact that we both work 12 hours a day.

What are you doing differently in 2019 that has had a positive impact on your career? In the early years of my Vermont dealership, I was responsible for the entire process; winning the project, doing the design, ordering the furniture, supervising the installation and paying the bills. Since Josh is the boss now and Interscape is so amazing, I am now able to devote my time to hiring and helping to develop an amazing Interscape team, being a cheerleader, focusing on the design work I love, and being involved in the decision making that maps our future.

What was your first job and what did you learn from it? My first real job was teaching English in a middle school. I learned that to communicate effectively with kids you need to enter into the conversation with respect, patience, and some serious listening skills; and that your first few words will set the tone for success or failure. Communication with adults is no different except you might not know as quickly if you are headed uphill or downhill. Kids are soooo refreshingly open! I also learned that to motivate or be motivated you need to love what you are teaching or what business you are in; and you need to have confidence in your values, your knowledge, and your goals. Kids were great teachers. And were followed by project managers in companies like ESPN and Procter&Gamble, who taught me how to be less flappable and have more confidence. that they

recognize and appreciate integrity, and that success requires true grit!!

Who are three women – living or dead – that you would like to have drinks with and why? Barbara Bush, because she was steadfast, calm, reassuring as a presence and comprehensively intelligent. And she never rambled. I tend to. Evelyn. She was a rider in our handicapped riding program. Unable to speak clearly, requiring a wheelchair, and in frequent pain, Evelyn never stopped smiling. She swallowed her fear and let us hoist her up 5 ½' in the air onto a furry beast, and she delighted in every minute of every day. I want to learn from her. The girl who excels in football. I want to hug her and tell her how very brave and lucky she is. And maybe tell her what it was like in the early 1990's to be a woman trying to sell furniture or her design to a facilities manager.

What were your biggest fears when you started out in your profession? When I opened my first business in Vermont, a furniture and design firm, I was literally shaking in my boots as a sales rep. I didn't know how not to take rejection personally. Selling girl scout cookies had been daunting for me. But my livelihood and investment were at stake! But I loved building relationships with clients who asked for my services and products. And through those relationships and successes I finally gained the confidence, the belief in my business and myself, that is necessary for successful selling.

What motivated you to step out on your own? Thirty-some years ago my husband bought an office supply and copier business. It took us two weeks to discover we had to choose between being in business together or being married. So I went back to school, spent a year doing research and choosing manufacturers, and opened up my own business, NBI Interiors. My oldest children were either still in college or had their own careers, and Josh grew up installing furniture.

What project, transaction, honor or accomplishment are you most proud of? I must mention two. Interscape Commercial Environments was the recipient of the Metro Harford Alliance "Business Champion" award in 2010, 3 years after we opened our doors. I have never been more excited in my life! And I received the "Friend of Education" award "for your dedication to our children" awarded by our local school district. Awarded after I stopped teaching and more for other programs I created for kids, it meant to me that I was still making a difference in their world.

What is the best leadership advice you have ever received? To successfully lead, you must make those who follow you believe it was their idea to want to.

Who was it from? A horse named Spirit and many of his friends along the way. They taught me more than most professors.