



[« Back](#) | [Print](#)

15 Gifted Women: Joan Ulrich

By Meredith Schwartz -- Gifts & Decorative Accessories, 11/9/2009



**Senior Vice President
MMPI**

Joan Ulrich has been with MMPI since 1997 and oversees sales for the Chicago Merchandise Mart's Gift and Home division, New York's 7 West, and the L.A. Mart. She has been involved in the acquisition of MMPI's High Point buildings and the L.A. Mart, Beckman's Handcrafted Gift Show Chicago and the Chicago Gift Show. Prior to joining MMPI, Ulrich worked for 13 years at gift vendor Enesco, where she sold high-volume national accounts, and had sales careers with General Mills and Johnson & Johnson. Ulrich is an executive committee member of Gift for Life, the gift industry charity which raises funds for AIDS research and education, as well as a member of WithIt (Women in the Home Industries Today) and the American Craft Council.

Gifts & Decorative Accessories: What have your biggest challenges been?

Joan Ulrich: My biggest challenge is to leave the office at the office. We're so engrossed in this business that my mind just races 24/7, especially since we're in a business that doesn't go on the clock; we're working with a lot of

entrepreneurs who work long and nontraditional hours. My husband is in this business too, and if I am not careful, it is very easy to work all day, and then come home and keep talking about the gift business, and obviously, that is not is what we want for a healthy relationship.

G&DA: What have been your greatest successes?

JU: My family, my husband and my kids. Recruiting and working with a great team of professionals. Specifically, I was involved in launching the One of a Kind retail craft show in Chicago; launching 7 West in New York, working with the old 225 Gift Association; purchasing the LA Mart in 2000, and then the California Gift Show; buying the Chicago Gift Show from GLM, and Beckman's. Of course I did none of these things by myself.

G&DA: Do you think that as a woman you approached doing business differently?

JU: Yes I do. Of course, it is not fair to stereotype all of us into one mindset, but I think women in general tend to take everything very personally. I know myself, if something doesn't go according to plan, I think, if I had only done one more thing, if I had just done it differently. Sometimes I just have to accept that it is out of my control. I think women think they have more control then they actually do. Sometimes I just have to accept it and move on.

G&DA: How has being an executive affected your personal life and relationships and how do you deal with it?

Joan Ulrich



Shonnie Bilin



Frances Gravely



Isadora Frost



Jenny Hammons



Anne McGilvray

JU: I raised my kids while I was involved in this business. This is especially hard because there is so much travel and a lot of weekend work. Logistics has always been a problem, but I will do just about whatever [is necessary] to be home when I need to be home, including going to LA and back in a single day. As a mother and a wife, you will do extraordinary things to keep things normal and on track. My husband is very supportive and we share our at-home duties. If we didn't do that, I don't know how this would be possible. One of my daughters said once "you're not that kind of mom, the kind who makes lunches." I've never been quite sure what that means, but I hope it means I set a good example for her.

G&DA: How and why did you get into business?

JU: By chance, really. I started early working with General Mills and Johnson and Johnson, and decided that I didn't want to be in that kind of corporate environment. I got involved with a rep principle in Minneapolis, where I'm from, and ultimately started working for Enesco directly, then found my way to the Mart.

G&DA: What advice would you give to a woman starting out in the business?

JU: I wish there were more women starting out in the business. My advice in general is not to be afraid to fail. I know that it is a little bit pat, but I have lived by that, and I have failed plenty. I don't like to take the safe road. There's no fun in that; there's no glory in that. It's important for people to learn to say yes instead of finding reasons why they can't.

G&DA: What is the best — or most memorable — gift you ever received?

JU: Every homemade gift that my children have ever made for me.

To read the interviews with each of the other 14 Gifted Women, please click on their image at right.

[« Back](#) | [Print](#)

© 2009, Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Advertisement



Your Opinion Matters!

Please participate in a brief survey.

Click Here!

opinion-central



Maxine
Burton



Susan
Roghani



Wendy
Rosen



Anna Griffin



Barbara
Baekgaard



Andrea
Grossman



Andrea
Sadek



Ande Rooney



Marian
Sullivan