

# Add an 'A' for arts and it's a STEAM-powered economy

Schools always have been used to ready students to take their place in the workforce.

Today, many question the effectiveness of a system that reflects Horace Mann's educational system of the 1800s, a system that relies on rows, lines and communal learning that blur personal identity.



Carol Dye

While it served our forefathers' need to produce workers for assembly line-bedecked factories, the structure of today's classrooms and teaching methods needs another look to address the question of whether or not today's entrepreneurs and business leaders can expect new hires to have the skill sets necessary to keep our companies competitive.

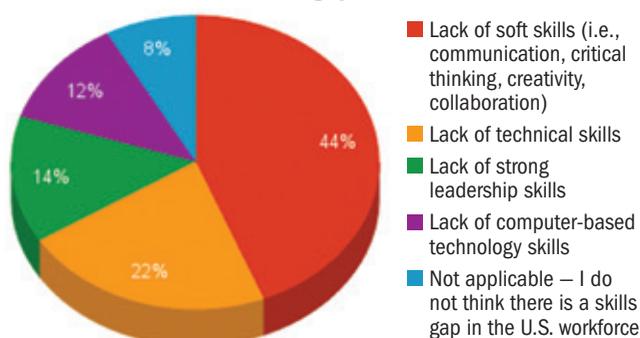
In Asia, where student prowess in science, technology and math are the envy of every capitalistic economy, children are engaging in complex mathematical operations mentally by the first grade. To remain competitive, businesses in the United States need our schools to focus on key skills.

Until now, STEM has been the answer. Most entrepreneurs are familiar with STEM – science, technology, engineering and math. It has become the antidote to the perceived deficiency of new hires being released into the workforce.

Many movers and shakers of the business world, however, already realize that, while STEM skills are necessary, they are not enough. Something is missing.

As it so happens, the East has had a leg up not only on STEM skills, but on arts skills, too. In a recent survey conducted by Adobe, Japan was seen globally as the most creative country.

## Which of the following do you feel best defines the 'gap' in the U.S. workforce skills gap?



## WANTED: SOFT SKILLS

Ninety-two percent of 500 top executives surveyed in 2013 said there was a job skills gap. About half of them believed the gap was in soft skills: communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.

SOURCE: ADECCO, VIA CNBC

Why is it that the push for U.S. schools to include STEM learning as a means to keep up does not also push to gain the creative edge?

STEM skills are important means for change and new development, but first we need creative minds – minds that think out of the box and are wired to go places yet conceived.

So, as a new school year begins, businesses need to demand that STEM learning be changed to STEAM by including the "A" – for arts.

### CREATIVE, ARTISTIC THINKING

Imagine your computer as limited to typing and seeing the zeros and ones of the binary system. Imagine your car as just gears, pistons and belts covered in metal.

Imagine the same for any object you see around you. Strip of it all of the wow factors, the eye-catching, the unique. That won't sell.

So how do you make products more appealing to the masses? How do you mold the necessary into the chic?

You think creatively.

In order for American businesses to compete effectively with the rest of the world, we need a workforce that is encouraged to think artistically.

The genius behind the next great innovation is at the barre, choreographing the steps for the next performance. He is in the studio putting chords together that never have been before.

She is in her room sketching what she believes the inside of her dreams must look like. He is in the classroom painting blue trees and yellow rivers.

The next great idea is born of the actor who adds music and modern dance to Shakespeare.

### COLLABORATION, ENGAGEMENT

The need for "A" skills spans every business. Though obviously relevant to businesses that are product-driven, they also are essential to our creative industries such as television, movies, games and architecture.

Moreover, success in the 21st century for any business demands employees who can collaborate, be engaging and persuasive, respond to

criticism appropriately or tell a good story.

These skills aren't learned in algebra, physics or statistics classrooms.

In 2007, The Conference Board and America for the Arts conducted a survey showing that superintendents (99 percent) and employers (97 percent) alike agreed that creativity was of increasing importance in the workforce.

Beginning at a very young age, these "A" skills are born in story-telling, song, dance and messy art activities. They are nurtured in mandatory arts electives in the upper grades.

### INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Ironically, as American leaders strive to keep our economy competitive, they are slashing the programs that can achieve that goal.

Arts matter.

STEM needs to become STEAM, and the business world is beginning to see that, as the Partnership for 21st Century Learning ([www.p21.org](http://www.p21.org)) would indicate.

In schools, as well, though teacher resources are still splattered with STEM lessons, there is a growing sector of schools that have embraced STEAM.

Realistically, it will be the influence of business owners that shifts the system and scope of learning out of the 19th century and into the 21st.

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## Financial planning is holistic and well-suited for women

Even though 51 percent of investors are women, a recent Certified Financial Planner Board study found that only 31 percent of all financial advisers are women.



Marilee Falco

That number ought to be higher. A career as a financial adviser affords women the opportunity to utilize analytical skills as well as interpersonal skills, a combination that can be hard to find in jobs in other business sectors.



Lisa DeStein Strohm

It is one of the few careers where one can engage both the left and right brain, analyzing investments and portfolios and then communicating with clients about their overall financial picture.

The good news is, there are many different paths to becoming a financial adviser.

The CFP Board study found that one roadblock to women entering the financial adviser sector is misperception.

Women who do not work in the financial industry "do not see financial planning as primarily about communication, relationships



**It is important for women to understand that a career as a financial adviser is not only intellectually challenging but also interpersonally gratifying.**

and holistic advice." Rather, they focus on the number-crunching aspects of the job.

It is important for women to understand that a career as a financial adviser is not only intellectually challenging but also interpersonally gratifying.

### EMPHATIC COMMUNICATION

It is interesting that 90 percent of women questioned in a 2011 Family Wealth Advisors Council's Women of Wealth study had no preference about the gender of their financial adviser. But 96 percent of those surveyed wanted their adviser to understand their "entire life picture, not just their finances."

Women financial advisers often excel in

anticipating the concerns of the client – and they prepare timelines and other practical models to assuage fears. They may not be as concerned about delving into the upside of a specific investment (although they will have certainly done their research) as they are about empathetically communicating the road map to a client's financial well-being.

A woman's approach to financial planning is practical and straightforward; less focused on showy stocks, for example, than on sound diversification and asset allocation.

### MANY WAYS TO GET THERE

There is no prescribed career path to becoming a financial adviser.

Even on an educational level, there are few prerequisites. Financial advisers need not major in finance – in fact, many talented, well-rounded female advisers are liberal arts majors. And a Master of Business Administration is not required.

Additionally, women come to the career via different employment backgrounds. Certainly, some begin as brokers or Certified Public Accountants, but others become financial advisers after early careers in engineering, science or education – to name just a few.

Female financial planners are talented,

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## CPAs can help to end Pa. budget impasse

Even after the Pennsylvania General Assembly's summer recess, bridging the political divide in the state budget battle will not be easy. It is not, however, insurmountable, given that both sides have several policy initiatives they want to see enacted into law.

Taxes continue to be a sticking point. Gov. Tom Wolf supports and needs a severance tax to increase funding for public education; Speaker of the House Mike Turzai is in fervent opposition to this. All parties seem to be in agreement about the need to increase spending, but how much is up for debate.

Senate Majority Leader Jake Corman recently said that his caucus would not consider an increase to either the personal income tax or sales tax (including broadening the base), but other revenue items (read severance tax, bank shares tax, etc.) are in play as long as Republican priorities, namely pension reform, are part of the dialogue.

Members of the Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants issued a report by its Fiscal Responsibility Task Force in February that addresses the need for pension reform and offers guidance on good tax policy. Our hope is that Wolf and the General Assembly give thought to the recommendations and call on CPAs to assist our elected officials in navigating this budget process.

*Julius C. Green, CPA  
PICPA president*

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## FOCUS ON WOMEN IN BUSINESS

# Nine years, four friends and one marketing force

By **JOE McDONALD**

Special for Lehigh Valley Business

Nine years ago, four friends with extensive experience in public relations decided they were ready to “stop being at home” and merged their collective skills into their own company, Imagevolution.

Randi Mautz, Elayne Polentes, Kari Keyock and Leslie Bowen, whose office is on West Broad Street in Bethlehem, have been on a roll ever since.

“We decided to merge and create a business of all our strengths,” Polentes said.

Advertising is their game, but erase all thoughts about the advertising world left over from “Mad Men,” the popular cable-TV show about chain-smoking, hard-drinking ad men.

You’re more likely to find the stars of Imagevolution at home with their families after work, not in a smoky bar.

Being an all-woman business cuts both ways, Bowen said. Sometimes when meeting a prospective client for the first time, there can be a fleeting moment where there’s a feeling that things might be better if the lead “ad man” were, um, a man.

“The other side of the coin is because we all are women, we really help each other and make it work,” Bowen said. “That just works perfectly for us.”

## FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIPS

The quality of the work speaks for itself from newsletters, magazines, print or Web designs, promotions or direct mail. Even the company name, Imagevolution, has a creative origin.

“Basically, [it’s] what we do, evolve the image of the companies,” Bowen said.

One secret to the company’s success is partnering with others, especially photographers and

## IMAGEVOLUTION

- **What:** Agency that provides integrated marketing, planning for long-term strategies, special promotions and events.
- **Location:** 77 W. Broad St., Bethlehem.
- **No. of employees:** Four.
- **Website:** [www.imagevolution.com](http://www.imagevolution.com).

freelance writers, as the company has grown.

Over the years, their client list has continued to grow, mainly through word of mouth.

The company’s branding and marketing skills, in print and on the Web, are the guiding force behind everything from small startups to giants in the Lehigh Valley, including St. Luke’s University Health Network’s physical therapy services. Other clients include Moravian College, the city of Bethlehem, Dorney Park and Lehigh Valley International Airport.

## GIVING BACK

You’ve probably already seen Imagevolution’s work hundreds of times without knowing it – on billboards, signs and logos all over the area.

And it has fun doing it. One billboard in particular gives a nod to World War II cultural icon Rosie the Riveter, who represented the American women who worked in factories and shipyards in the 1940s.

Imagevolution brought its own creative twist to that theme for Women’s Build Habitat for Humanity of Lehigh Valley with an illustration of a woman with rolled up sleeves and holding a hammer.

The company has a history of giving back to the community, a small part of which includes donating up to \$10,000 in services to nonprofits for graphic design and marketing services. In 2013, the winner of Imagevolution’s 2013 Design Grant was VALOR Clinic Foundation,



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The owners of Imagevolution, from left: Randi Mautz, Elayne Polentes, Kari Keyock and Leslie Bowen.

a grassroots volunteer organization devoted to helping suffering veterans.

## MULTIPLE MEDIA

Despite the relentless push to digital media, Polentes said there will always be a need to fundamentally understand print and design, nor

can a company simply choose one medium.

“We understand all the branding we do across every market,” she said.

While not disclosing any figures, the owners say they have their sights set on a larger piece of the market.

“We’re not living on our laurels,” Polentes said.

## BOSCOV’S

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“You don’t have to act like a guy to be effective,” Collins said. “Toni makes you feel like you work with her, not for her. Her style is kind and respectful.”

Marsdale said Miller has “brought a level of women’s leadership into our community where she not only impacts the women around her professionally, but also through her personal life. She is truly the embodiment of a servant leader.”

Miller and her husband fund a scholarship at Southern Nazarene University in Oklahoma City. The couple also supports a ministry, providing scholarships for technical school education, such as nursing, to youth in a Romanian orphanage.

Marsdale said as a keynote speaker in Greater Reading Chamber’s 2015 Women2Know series, Miller shared her story of her career, the loss of her only child and about her health challenges.

Miller recently completed chemotherapy treatments after a rare diagnosis (clear cell uterine cancer) and surgery in March.

## A NUDGE TO LEAVE

A 35-year veteran in retail business, finance and management, Miller arrived at Boscov’s dur-

ing a difficult transition period for her family.

“In 2005, we lost our only child at 21 years old, and by 2008 I felt a nudge toward making a change,” Miller said.

At Bass Pro Shops, a roughly \$4 billion retail company based in Springfield, Mo., Miller knew the ropes and achieved a top position after growing up in the company – it was comfortable and familiar.

She easily could have retired in Springfield, doing work she both knew and enjoyed.

Instead, she relocated in 2009 to Berks County after spending 28 years with Bass, banking on strong interpersonal skills to make a connection and a difference.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

At Boscov’s, she joined the largest family owned and operated department store in the nation, founded in 1914 and led by chairman and CEO Albert Boscov.

“When you go into a new environment, you need to be able to build relationships. You need to lead by giving people opportunities,” Miller said.

“Creating change without changing the culture” is among Miller’s mottos, as is being respectful of the company’s history, values and staff.

“There is a reason this organization has been here for 100 years,” she said of Boscov’s success.

## PLANNING

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intelligent people who do not want to miss out on a multifaceted career, with both analytical and interpersonal aspects of employment.

With the knowledge that they can enter the financial adviser field any number of ways, women should guard against being discouraged by naysayers. Professors, colleagues and family members can inadvertently limit women’s career choices because of their misperceptions about the financial services industry. They can be ignored.

## RECRUITING WOMEN TO THE FIELD

To address what the CFP Board refers to as the “feminine famine” in the financial adviser Certified Financial Planner industry, it is imperative for counselors to communicate to high school, college and MBA students that the career is truly holistic in nature and that there is no required path to the field.

A career as a financial adviser is not just about mathematical formulas, but about empathizing with clients and implementing practical solutions to help them reach their financial goals. Every day, financial advisers are challenged by the questions posed

by clients about their financial portfolios, motivated to develop practical strategies and enriched for having helped them attain financial well-being.

It’s a great way to make a living, and the profession will be further enhanced as more women join it.

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