



By Tasha Phelps

The Inside Edge on the Fast Track – Women Create Impact at the IRL

For nearly half a century, auto racing has been a staple in both the Indianapolis economy and the Indianapolis entertainment scene. What HASN'T been such a staple, is the female component in the industry. Until the past few decades, women have been (all but) shut out from opportunities within the industry. After all, it wasn't until 1971 that women were even allowed in the pits and garage area at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. ¹

Certainly, congratulations are in order for the women who have excelled to the rank of putting their lives at risk behind the wheel, but equally as important are those "behind the scenes" that are making it all work!

There are many jobs and professions behind the scenes that become so critical to the organization of the actual "EVENT," that they, too, need to be congratulated for a job well done! Concessions, Promotional Products, Hospitality Management, Event Planning, Marketing, Operations... the list goes on and on. The economic impact of the motor sports industry in Indianapolis is certainly memorable within its own right, but the impact that women have within the industry (in general) makes the industry that much more profitable. In 2004, when the Indianapolis Motor Speedway held a series of workshops to talk about the economic impact of the industry on central Indiana, a conservative estimate of the financial impact on the community was nearly \$ 727million (annually) ².

In a recent interview, Louise Hardy, owner of Corporate Images Promotional Products, shared some of her experiences as (not only) the wife of a race team executive, (but also) as a budding entrepreneur.

"In the beginning, I felt left out because I thought he had this GREAT job – and I was stuck at home. Little did I know, it was hard work! Through him, I got involved with charitable organizations and was [independently] introduced to the world of racing."

Hardy goes on to share that it was because of her involvement with charitable organizations affiliated with the industry, that she was able to align with other women and get involved by volunteering her time. CARA (Championship Auto Racing Auxiliary) was the first organization that she began spending time with. Even today, 14 years later, she's still involved and is now Board President of the Indianapolis Family Foundation (formerly Benevolent Fund). It is because of her relationships that she was able to secure contracts with racing teams to provide promotional products.



Felicia Catale-McCormack also shares a similar experience, but moreso from the perspective as a team owner. She and her husband, Dennis McCormack were CART team owners from 1991 – 1994 before moving to the IRL for a time of 1995 – 2001. McCormack was very open about sharing her perspective on what women should be prepared for, in the event they wish to pursue a career in this industry – "KNOW YOUR STUFF," she says.

She continued to describe how important it is for women to be responsible for their actions. Being a women in the industry doesn't give you any more advantages – but it does give you an added layer of appreciation and respect.

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Seeing how fast the league can change within 20 years (from first not allowing women in the garage area in 1971, to being a team owner in 1991) is proof of how quickly the industry has evolved.

After disbanding the McCormack team 2001, she shares that the experience was one worth living. "You will never work as hard in any other field—but you will gain a career satisfaction that is hard to come by."

So how does one take the DESIRE to get involved and turn it into ACTION? Hardy says it's simple.... VOLUNTEER & GET INVOLVED!

"No one knows that you're out there unless you get involved and show what you can do. It still boils down to networking. When I began my promotional products business 14 years ago, I started with the network that I had built with the teams in the IRL. It was scary at first! It was very misleading being on the outside looking in."

She goes on to say, that she thought everyone was more qualified, and apparently possessed something she didn't. THEN, she quickly realized that everyone in any kind of prominent position "put their pants on, one leg at a time" just as she did. Her advice: Get involved, be proactive, and stay focused.

McCormack agrees. She says that the best way to produce a profitable, positive outcome, is not only to stay involved, but to present yourself professionally.

Top 5 Tips for Navigating Thru the Racing Industry:

1. **Get Involved.** SHOW that you have the desire to be involved by volunteering your time and participating in events. You will undoubtedly be recognized, and you will begin to build a strong network of individuals that you can lean on.
2. **Stay Accountable.** PROVE that you know how to do what you commit to doing by doing it! Too many times, opportunities are given to people to simply help out, but for one reason or another, the ball gets dropped. Make sure that you do what you say you're going to do, and do it the best that you can.
3. **Network.** Relationships are key. The world of racing is nothing more than business.... And since business is built on relationships, it makes sense to build strong relationships with those whom you network. It's human nature to do business with who you know!
4. **Stay Professional.** How you look, talk, act, and generally present yourself are all pieces of your "puzzle." Your presentation to others at the track could make or break your rate of success. Make sure that you're always ready, because you never know who may be looking for the opportunity to do business with you!
5. **Manage your time.** Citizens of Indianapolis, and guests to the "Crossroads of Indiana" certainly know how time-intensive the month of May can be. It is essential that you proactively manage your time and your schedule so that (before, during and after this prestigious month) you're able to deliver quality products and services.

In the end, your PLAN for success, will only be achieved if you get involved, stay accountable, get to know people, keep your professionalism, and manage your time. Now it's time to go get what you want!!

¹History of the Indianapolis 500: Speedway track was built for automotive research"

IndyStar Online: <http://www2.indystar.com/library/factfiles/sports/autoracing/indy500.html> (5-28-2007)

² "Motorsports Workshops Highlight Speedway's Huge Economic Impact"

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Online: http://www.indianapolismotorspeedway.com/news/story.php?story_id=3826 (12-2-2004)