

Mary Tribble

PRESIDENT/OWNER
TRIBBLE CREATIVE GROUP

Mary Tribble, president and owner of Tribble Creative Group, was named the 2000 Charlotte BusinessWoman of the Year at a February 8 luncheon sponsored by McColl School of Business at Queens College and Wachovia Bank. Tribble, who started her company in 1985, is a nationally recognized and award-winning special event professional who has appeared in publications including *Cosmopolitan*, *Kiplinger Financial*, and *Special Events* magazine. In addition to receiving the Charlotte BusinessWoman of the Year award, Tribble was also named the 2000 Entrepreneur of the Year by the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce.

Following are Tribble's answers to questions posed by *Today's Charlotte Woman*. ▶



Photo by Donna Blise

introducing...

The 2000 Charlotte BusinessWoman Of The Year

BACKGROUND

Describe your current work.

MT: I am president of Tribble Creative Group, a full-service event marketing, management and production company. We help our clients achieve their communications and marketing goals by creating innovative, impactful special events.

What's your business philosophy?

MT: My philosophy, whether applied to my own business or that of my clients, involves focusing on the human potential within. We seek to give individuals the tools and information they need in order to change, grow and thrive in an increasingly chaotic and amoral world.

PROFESSIONAL

Briefly describe your career history.

MT: I graduated with a B.A. in art from Wake Forest University in 1982. After working for two years for a Winston-Salem museum, I moved to Charlotte to enter the for-profit world, taking a position as an account executive at a small advertising agency. After being there a year or so, a client approached us about planning the grand opening of a new headquarters. I ended up planning it, and it set me on a path to open my own event production company in 1985.

Why did you choose your career field?

MT: I really fell into the events industry, through the first project I ran at the ad agency. I didn't even know this industry existed when I went to college (in fact, it was just being "discovered" as its own industry when I got started). It was inevitable, looking back at my childhood, that I'd be drawn into a creative field. It was serendipitous that the opportunity came my way.

To what or whom do you attribute your success?

MT: I believe there is a guiding force much bigger than any one person that has set me on my path. Individuals who have helped encourage me in many ways include my parents and my husband, Chip Ferguson. The person who has made the greatest difference in my recent professional life is Linda Libby, my new partner and vice president of operations. Linda's operational abilities and strategic perspective have set the company on a path of growth. While our philosophies and vision are remarkably synchronized, our approaches are very different. Linda sees things analytically; I see things from a more conceptual point of view. I learn from her everyday.

Were there turning points in your career?

MT: There were two turning points, at two different points in my career. The first was when I worked for the ad agency — I recall being frustrated when I'd sell something to a client but our creative department would fall short. I didn't like selling something over which I had so little control. Opening my own com-

pany gave me the opportunity to control the creative product. The second turning point occurred two years ago. After 14 years of business, I was frustrated and burned out. Although I had started my business to have better control over my destiny, somehow, I had allowed it to gain control over me. A spiritual trip — a two-week silent walk across the Sahara Desert — provided me the insight necessary to make positive changes in my business and life.

What are some of the most rewarding things about being in business for yourself?

MT: The rewards of owning a business are many, once we understand the balance necessary to make a difference in people's lives. We can't affect people positively if we're working 14 hours a day, seven days a week. We can't contribute to the community in a meaningful way if we're fried from too much stress or pressure. If we adopt a playful and faithful approach to our role in business, then we can put our minor catastrophes in perspective and roll with the punches. If we remember that the point of running a successful business is really about serving others — our employees, clients and community — then the rewards are many.

What are drawbacks to being in business for yourself?

MT: The drawbacks come when we forget our true purpose and get caught up in the daily struggle to win. The more we put money, power and prestige on our path to success — the more we allow our business to control our lives — then the long hours, the constant competition and daily challenges become unbearable. We become bitter, petty and uncompassionate.

How do you see your industry changing?

MT: At Tribble Creative Group, we are on the cutting edge of change in our industry. When we first started out, the company was primarily tactical in nature — a client had an event to plan, and we planned it. Now, corporations are seeing a greater value in their events as tools to leverage their marketing and communications plans. Events are a more integral part of their overall strategies. While our core business is still production-oriented, we have become much more strategic in our approach. Clients invite us to the table earlier, as equals, with their public relations and advertising professionals, and ask us to help solve their marketing objectives. Our goals are all the same; the tools we use are the difference. The PR professional's primary tool is story placement; the advertising executive's primary tool is paid media; ours is an event that captures the imagination and touches the consumer directly.

What do you see in your professional future?

MT: I see myself at the helm of this company, continuing to grow it, with Linda Libby at my side. I want to use my experience and opportunities to touch people and change their lives for the better — whether

that's through helping to produce an event that moves people to action or sharing my experiences through a talk to a group.

PERSONAL

Where else have you lived besides Charlotte?

MT: I grew up in Miami, Florida. Once I graduated from Wake Forest, I spent two years working for the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts as a field researcher. While on that job, I lived in six cities for several months at a time: Greenville (S.C.), Greenwood (S.C.), Rockingham, Gastonia, Charlotte and Asheville.

Family?

MT: My husband, Chip Ferguson, is a real estate and project consultant. I have two stepsons, Andrew, 25, who attends Loyola Law School in Chicago, and Ian, 21, a freshman at Queens College.

What do you do in your free time?

MT: I am an avid reader and usually have about half a dozen books going at once — my husband is sure our second floor will someday cave in under the weight of my books! I am a writer, as well, having written several unpublished novels. I'm currently writing a proposal for a non-fiction book, *The Nomadic Vision: Living An Adaptive Life*, which will explore how we can apply the principals of ancient nomadic living to modern day life.

Favorite vacation?

MT: A week at our favorite rental house on Silver Lake on Ocracoke Island... nothing to do but fish, read, run, ride bikes and poke around the island!

BITS AND PIECES

Recently read book?

MT: *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* by Jared Diamond.

Favorite book?

MT: *Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn.

Most productive time of day?

MT: From 7:45 to 9 a.m. at the office, when few others are there and I can organize my day.

Best hiring advice?

MT: Try to hire objectively; look deep to try to determine the applicant's motivations and values. Don't overlook someone because they don't fit into some preconceived mold.

Worst business decision?

MT: Actually, it was a decision I *almost* made: At the height of my frustration a year and a half ago, I nearly sold my business. I went through a year's worth of looking at offers and analyzing my options... thank-

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fully, I woke up in time to realize that I didn't have to throw away all I had achieved to be happy.

Best business decision?

MT: Deciding not to sell my business, and instead, taking on a partner and vice president of operations, Linda Libby.

Favorite way to relax?

MT: I built a little reading garden near the front door of my townhome a few years ago. When the weather is warm, my favorite way to kick back is to turn on the fountain, get a good book and relax in the Adirondack chair and read.

What time do you usually get home from work?

MT: I'm usually home between 6 and 6:30 p.m.

How do you manage your responsibilities at home?

MT: My husband Chip helps out a lot. He does the laundry. I cook, and he cleans the kitchen afterwards. We have a cleaning person come in twice a month to do the deep cleaning.

What suggestions do you have for women who feel overwhelmed?

MT: The most important thing to do is to create space, both physically and spiritually. That's what my reading garden is about — a place to retreat in solitude. I built a meditation room off my office for the same reason. We also need spiritual space. Whether we create it through meditation, prayer, exercise or silent retreats, it's essential to the core of our being. **TCW**

Lockman-Brooks
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BITS AND PIECES

Recently read book?

LLB: I belong to a wonderful book club and recently we have read *Breakfast At Tiffany's* by Truman Capote, *Big Stone Gap: A Novel* by Adriana Trigiani and *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* by Thomas Hanchett.

Most productive time of day?

LLB: Late afternoon, when I get a burst of energy to finish the day, or leave the office to spend time with our son.

Best business decision?

LLB: In 1988, I was in my "dream marketing job." However, my husband decided to take a job in Charlotte, so I informed my boss at American Express in New York. Because I had given him plenty of time, my boss was able to figure out a way for me to stay with the company. I moved into the AMEX sales organization and expanded the presence for that division in Charlotte.

Worst business decision?

LLB: I don't have just one "worst decision," but I know that I have made lots of mistakes along the way. Taking on too much and not asking for help has gotten me into trouble over the years.

Your heroes?

LLB: Marion Wright Edleman, Amelia Earhart, and my mother and father.

Favorite saying?

LLB: "Hope springs eternal." **TCW**

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