

VICKIE FRANCOVICH

President, CEO of Building Solutions Inc.

by **Megg Mueller**

Working for more than two decades with the same company is a feat many business people wish they could achieve. But follow it up with the launch of your own successful business, and that's just the tip of the iceberg that is Vickie Francovich.

Francovich is thoughtful, deliberate, even quiet. But she is also, like that iceberg, a force of nature whose true power lies beneath the surface. As president and chief executive officer of Building Solutions Inc., Francovich helms a successful general contracting company, and works as an advocate for appropriate bidding practices, is a member of the Board of Directors of the Associated General Contractors and the Women Construction Owners & Executives, is a LEED AP and a member of U.S. Green Building Council.

She's also the mother of three daughters, two of whom work for Building Solutions, and a mentor to the women in her office. Her role as a leader in the construction industry isn't one she'd planned on, but it's one she's taken on with characteristic drive and intensity, and above all, dedication to doing the right thing.

Francovich spent more than 20 years with Bank of America, first in San Diego, then in Reno when in 1995 the bank moved her to the head position here after the company bought Valley Bank. She was the first woman president in the main office. And it was that job that got her thinking about her own business.

"I managed a lot of clients at Bank of America that owned their own business, and I thought I'd own my own someday," she says. "I loved my career at BofA. But when NationsBank bought them in 1998, they brought on their own people, replacing much of the staff."

Francovich found herself out of a job. About the same time, her husband Jeffery was also in transition with his work. With her financial background and his technical skills, the couple started Building Solutions, working from their home.

The company first started in the private sector before



turning to public works, which Francovich says was a great equalizer. Helmed by a woman, Building Solutions wasn't being taken seriously, but public works contracts are awarded on a set of criteria that levels the playing field. The company began to steadily grow, and the partners were split on where to go next.

"In 2003, (Jeffrey) didn't really want to grow the business," she says. "From my standpoint, it's just as difficult to keep it small as it is to grow it. So he sold full

control of the business to me."

Then things took off much more than expected, and "I needed him," Francovich says. Jeffrey came back, and has taught her the technical side of the business.

"He does all the construction operations. In my opinion, he is one of the smartest technical people there is," she says.

Working with family can be a challenge, for sure, but Francovich notes that it's worked out well "as long as we understand our roles, and we try not to cross each other. I get a lot of joy working with my husband."

Two of her daughters, Tiffany and Tammy, also work for the company. Both girls have worked for other companies, and Francovich admits that while it was never the goal to

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have a family business, she hoped it might go that way.

“When we decided to grow the company, I hoped the kids would want to work for it. But I wasn’t sure they’d want to; I’m not so easy to work for,” she says with a smile. “I’m tougher on my kids because they are family; their expectations for performance are tougher.”

For the rest of her staff, however, the expectations are still high. But it’s clear her standards have gained their respect.

Robert Schenck, Building Solutions’ senior estimator, readily admits Francovich holds her staff accountable.

“She’s pretty tough,” Schenck says. “And she’s very good in front of people ... government, other sub contractors, whoever. She’s just personable, elegant, and focused.”

“She is so knowledgeable,” agrees project manager Stephanie Hernandez. “She can keep up with the best of them. And she puts up a good fight.”

Francovich has found herself embroiled in a few fights over the years, and when she’s convinced she’s right, she doesn’t back down. Years ago, the Reno-Sparks Convention Center remodel went up for bid, and Building Solutions was one of three bidders to show up with their bid. After opening the bids, Francovich’s company was announced as apparent low bidder. She waited to be awarded the contract.

But a few weeks later, the builder called and said the job was going to someone else. Francovich protested the award, which required she put up a quarter-million dollar bond. It was revealed the winning bidder had shown up 20 minutes late, and the bid should never have been opened. Eventually the bid was awarded to Building Solutions, and while she knows the process upset some, Francovich feels it was a turning point for her.

“That’s when I earned the respect of the bidding community. Granite Construction backed me; one company, West Coast Paving, said ‘Thank you. If it had been me I wouldn’t have had the stones to post the quarter-million

bond to protest the action,’” she remembers.

“I’ve been the person who’s late (to bid). It’s terrible. But there are rules, and the integrity of the bid process was what it was all about.”

There have been other incidents where Francovich took a stand to assure the rules were being followed, and she’s also been on the flip side when her company wasn’t aware of procedures or rules and has lost jobs because of it. But to her, it’s all been a valued process.

“I’m not proud to point out those issues,” she says. “But it demonstrates how I’ve grown in a professional way. When I’m right, I can point it out and be successful.”

Success, however, is merely a by-product of living the way she was taught. Raised in Arkansas by her grandparents during some very tough times, Francovich still remembers the lessons that made the greatest impact.


“We grew up poor, but I never knew I was. We looked out for others; we always had people over to eat. My grandmother would say ‘You might be entertaining angels. Never turn anyone away,’” Francovich recalls.

Her staff confirms that lesson was learned well; she’s a great entertainer, and a terrific cook, garnering praise like “Oh, man, her quiche” from appreciative employees. Her influence has been felt in more than just her culinary treats, however.

Office Manager Danka Chappell has worked for Francovich since 2005, and she sings her boss’ praises readily.

“She’s an inspiration as a woman in business. Raising young children, a wife, mother who still has time for soccer, working out ... she’s just determined,” Chappell says. “She’s definitely a woman who can hold her ground.”

And that ground was laid firmly in the past.

“I don’t forget my roots, the lessons of my life,” Francovich says simply. “I know where I came from, so I know where I’m going.” 



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