

A CEO Who Gets Her Kicks on the Farm
Mylle Bell Mangum
CEO, MMS Incentives – Atlanta, GA

Born in Thomas, GA in a family that always had farmland, Mylle grew up knowing something about humility. “To this day,” she says, “shoveling manure keeps me humble.” Well, maybe so, but this Georgia girl certainly has a lot to be proud of from a business resume and accomplishments standpoint.

Recently named as the “Decision Maker of the Year” by *Business to Business* Magazine, Mylle has been the chief executive officer of MMS Incentives since May, 1999. MMS is a private equity company headquartered outside Atlanta and involved in developing and implementing marketing and loyalty programs in a high technology environment. MMS serves the “click and brick” market including an impressive 28% of the Fortune 100. Under Mylle’s watch, the company has done an amazing turnaround with a 250% increase in sales, 2% decrease in expenses, a 1,111% increase in the loyalty program client base, and a 400% increase in operational volume through productivity.

Ma. Mangum not only runs MMS, she also serves on the corporate boards of Scientific Atlanta, Payless ShoeSource, Inc., and Haverty Furniture Companies. In addition, her list of outside activities include Past President – Committee of 200 (an organization of top U.S. and international business women); Society of International Business Fellows; Piedmont College Board of Trustees; Member of the Advisory Board of the Emory Business School; and Member of the Board of the Georgia Center for Advanced Telecommunications Technology. She’s also a sought after keynote speaker and has spoken at forums around the world on international education and American competitiveness.

But the story of Mylle Mangum didn’t just start with MMS. After earning a BA degree from Emory University in 1970, she began her work life as a teacher of gifted children in the North Syracuse New York School System. From there she would land her first corporate job with the behemoth, General Electric Corporation, where she started in 1972 as a computer programmer and systems analyst. Before leaving GE in 1985, she rose to the position of General Manager Systems Operations responsible for the information technology function of many of GE’s high tech businesses, both domestic and international.

About this same time, BellSouth was planning to launch its international business and Duane Ackerman, current Chairman of the Board of BellSouth, hired Mylle to be the first president of BellSouth International. She served in this capacity for over a year, and then became director of corporate planning and development.

In 1992, Mylle left BellSouth after being recruited by the parent company of Holiday Inn Worldwide, the Bass Corporation in England. She would become the only woman to serve on its board of directors and served as executive vice president of strategic management and later, of marketing as well. Her scope of responsibilities included corporate strategy for properties worldwide (64 countries); investments, acquisition, and mergers; contract management and purchasing; new product development, and pricing. In 5 years, growth doubled in the primary markets of the US, Mexico, China, India, Indonesia, and Germany.

Ready for an opportunity to run her own show, Mylle left Holiday Inn Worldwide in March, 1997 to become President, Global Systems and Senior Vice President, Strategic Planning and Expense Management for Carlson Wagonlit Travel, a \$14 billion international operation. While there she led the reengineering of the entire delivery system into a virtual call center for the global company.

Besides her impressive bio and many accomplishments, Mylle's perspective on leadership is also very compelling. Seen by some as a workaholic herself, she feels she now has a healthy perspective and manages to balance work and a personal life and expects people who work for her to do the same thing. (Noticeably, she has a treadmill in her office, but it isn't clear whether she has time to use it at work.)

When she arrived at MMS she had to fire a lot of people in order to rebuild the company and repackage its products. That wasn't pleasant. In the last 1½ years, she has hired half of the current staff. She looks for people with a good value system who can dust themselves off if the company has a hiccup, rebound, and go on. It's not hard to see Mylle's personal positivism and energy and that she likes what she does. She says she also wants the people around her to feel the same way. In addition, she believes in listening to the marketplace and then mapping out your action plans. In a business that helps other companies build loyalty among employees and customers, it's easy to get excited about results, she says, and "everybody needs what we do."

Interview Completed April 2001
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