

Connie Riley CMP, CSP Emeritus



When you ask people in the business how they would describe Connie Riley, CMP, CSEP Emeritus, the words just flow: Trustworthy. Honest. Fearless. Hardworking. Leader. Advocate. Mentor. Innovator. Rock Star. Connie Riley is a force within our industry.

When people call her a rock star, they're not speaking metaphorically. Riley parlayed her love of singing and performing into an early career as a singer in a society band in Washington, DC, and then in a traveling band playing everything from disco hits to jazz and hard-core rock-and-roll, complete with then-legal homemade pyrotechnics. She learned the basics of production and operations during her time performing everywhere from supper clubs to a main stage at the Calgary Stampede.

"We learned it wasn't our job to bring the people to the club, but it was our job to keep them there," she said. "We were already training how to work in the business."

So how did she go from being a self-described "chick singer" to vice president of a global entertainment agency? When the time came to give up her life on the road 33 years ago, Ted Skorman offered Riley an opportunity to open the corporate department of T. Skorman Productions, and she jumped at it. Orlando, where the agency is based, was on the brink of transforming from a small town to a major entertainment and convention hub, and "we were at the right place at the right time" to expand with the city, she said. Riley has since worked in all aspects of the business, from logistics and operations to sales.

"Our strength has always been not just acting as an agent, but producing the entertainment as well," says Riley.

Riley's volunteering started at age 14 when she served as a candy striper through the American Red Cross. She also formed a Neighborhood Watch for her area and has been a lifelong supporter of organizations such as Be the Match. Professionally, she has volunteered her time for the International Live Events Association (ILEA), including having served as president, as well as with Meeting Professionals International (MPI).

Having worked as an entertainer and an agent in a heavily male-dominated world, Riley makes a point of mentoring young women who are trying to make it in the tough world of entertainment. "As a female of my generation, I was never tall enough, never skinny enough, never sang well enough—the emphasis was always on the negatives, never the positives," she said. "That's why it's a huge mandate for me to remind the girls I represent that this is the best time of your life—enjoy it! I make sure to make it safe and comfortable for them so they can do their best work."

Riley also loves speaking to elementary school kids about careers in the entertainment industry. While she has adored being able to work with "bucket list" celebrities such as James Brown and Patti LaBelle,

the energy she gets from working with kids and being able to pass on her passion for her work to the next generation has been even more fulfilling, she said.

“The younger kids are definitely my favorites,” she continues. “I come out of those classes of elementary school kids on cloud nine.”

Part of that may be because she’s still a bit of a kid herself.

“I’m not afraid of my age because age is all in my mind,” she laughs. “I’m not a chic girl. I don’t love designer clothes. It’s the little things that make me happy—it can be as simple as a song.”

Her philosophy is equally simple: Enjoy what you do.

“If you enjoy what you do, the rewards are endless. It’s been an amazing career—and it’s not over. Especially now, there’s going to be so much to discover and rebuild,” she said. “One of our sayings is, ‘Always reach above your head.’ Go for it.”