

Executive Interview

2020

Crowe LLP is a public accounting, consulting, and technology firm with offices around the world. Crowe uses its deep industry expertise to provide audit services to public and private entities.



The firm and its subsidiaries also help clients make smart decisions that lead to lasting value with its audit, tax, advisory, and consulting services. Crowe is recognized by many organizations as one of the best places to work in the U.S. As an independent member of Crowe Global, one of the largest global accounting networks in the world, Crowe serves clients worldwide. The network consists of more than 200 independent accounting and advisory services firms in more than 130 countries around the world.



MARY ANN K. TRAVERS

ASA

*Principal Valuation Services
National Practice Leader
Crowe LLP*



RACHEL COOKE

*COO and Podcast Host
Brandon Hall Group*



About Mary Ann K. Travers

Mary Ann K. Travers has over 30 years of consulting experience, specializing in the valuation of businesses and business interests, intangible assets, liabilities, and complex securities in connection with mergers and acquisitions, financing, income, and estate tax planning, and regulatory requirements. Her valuation studies have been used for financial reporting, litigation, tax, acquisition, regulatory and accounting purposes.

Mary Ann leads Crowe's women's initiative, *Women Leading @Crowe*, and was a recipient of *CPA Practice Advisor's* 2013 Award for Most Powerful Women in Accounting, as well as a *Chicago Business Journal* 2017 Women of Influence honoree.

Mary Ann has also served as an economic consultant and investment banker in her consulting career. Additionally, Mary Ann worked in valuation with a Big Four firm for over 12 years where she led a national industry line before joining Crowe in 2005 to serve as the national valuation services group practice leader.

Mary Ann is actively involved in volunteering and board service with Junior Achievement and Metropolitan Family Services DuPage (MFSD)/Family Shelter Service (FSS), along with classroom volunteering in her local school district and church. Mary Ann and her husband, Paul, are family-focused, instilling their values of giving back through their time and resources to their three children, Savannah, Jackson, and Brady. The Travers were recently named the Roger K. Johnson Award Recipients for their years of service to FSS.

About Rachel Cooke

Rachel Cooke is Brandon Hall Group's Chief Operating Officer and Principal HCM Analyst. She is responsible for business operations, including client and member advisory services, marketing design, annual awards programs, conferences and the company's project management functions. She also leads Advancing Women in the Workplace and Diversity and Inclusion initiatives, research and events. Rachel worked in the HCM research industry for 15 years and held several key management and executive positions within the Talent and Learning Research, and Performance Improvement industries.



RACHEL

Mary Ann, can you share a little bit about your background, your career journey, hobbies?

MARY ANN

I am a native Chicagoan, born and raised. I am adopted and grew up bilingual, speaking English and Czech. I participated in a Czech school and dance group, a unique cultural aspect of my upbringing. I am the first member of my immediate family to attend college and had the great fortune to go to the University of Chicago in Hyde Park, where I received an excellent education and met amazing friends. I also had the pleasure of being a founder of my women's fraternity, Kappa Alpha Theta.

My career journey has been a bit of a varied one. I've been a consultant my entire career, starting as an economic consultant. I used my degree and parlayed it into economic consulting experience but found myself gravitating toward the financial aspects of the job. I did a lot of antitrust and financial-related work, in addition to programming, looking at statistics and economic data, and more. I enjoyed it but knew I did not want to get a Ph.D. in economics, which was required to reach the top ranks in my former firm so, I decided to go into investment banking. I was an investment banker for several years and loved my job. I worked with clients across various industries, which solidified my finance love. But, as an investment banker, it is common to work 14 to 16 hours a day, seven

days a week, for months at a time, when on a deal. However, I knew I wanted to have a family, and 110-hour workweeks were not going to be symbiotic with the work-life I tried to create for myself. So, I left investment banking and moved to a Big Four firm valuation position where I began as a staff person and worked my way up to Senior Manager. I truly enjoyed valuation with all the diversity it offered and continued with it until 2005 when I moved over to Crowe to lead the national valuation practice. I've also had the great fortune of chairing our women's program, Women Leading @Crowe. My career journey is ongoing and exciting, all at the same time.

On a personal note, I am married and have three beautiful children. I love to cook, travel, hang out with my friends and family, and make craft cocktails in my free time. I also do some volunteer work through a local organization that helps support women and children victims of domestic violence. I sit on the Board of Junior Achievement of Chicago; I volunteer at my local church and have also volunteered through my children's schools over the years.

RACHEL

How has work changed for you during the pandemic, and how do you see it impacting the future of your workplace?

MARY ANN

A I'm a big believer in operating from a place of gratitude. It's easy to focus on the negatives when being faced with a lot of challenges. Our colleagues, clients, and communities face them, but I believe in dwelling on the possibilities. Crowe has an incredible mobility strategy in place before the pandemic, which gives employees the ability to choose where to work on an almost daily basis. For example, on a Sunday night, I could look at my week ahead and determine where I needed to be for the week. Did I need to be at a client site? Did I need to be in the office because I had team meetings? Could I work at my local coffee shop? Did I want to work at home? So, once COVID hit, we didn't miss a beat; nothing changed for us. There was a mental mindset shift because it is very different from home because you can versus doing so. After all, you have to. Crowe's goal is to keep our people, communities, and neighborhoods safe, so we stay home to protect everyone. Especially during this time, when operating from a place of gratitude, it's essential to look for the silver linings. Even in some of my darkest days, I try to reflect and tease out the silver linings from the day. Perhaps it is not having to commute to work and getting back that time in the day or having a great dinner with family or making an excellent client connection. It's important to look for ways to be grateful for what we have and not focus on the driving challenges. Life has a way of happening to us to control, so learning to roll with it, is helpful. Resiliency is important, and this pandemic is teaching us lessons in that regard.

RACHEL

Q Can you describe your women's program - Women Leading @ Crowe, and its impact to date?

MARY ANN

A The mission of our Women @ Crowe program is to inspire, grow, and connect our women to reach their full potential in their careers.

The program is a three-tiered structure that meets all of our women's needs across their entire career journey.

INSPIRE

GROW

CONNECT

From staff to partner, there's something for everyone. The **Inspire tier** is focused on our leaders. The managers, directors, and partners create a community of leaders across business units that share ideas, go to the market together, skill build, and continuously learn to showcase and hone in on talents and skills because it is vital to grow and develop in this evolving world continually. Typically, this community gets together in-person annually, but this year, it will be virtual. The focus is on leaders, teachers, mentors, role models, and career advocates for future female leaders.

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The **Grow tier** is the leadership development program targeted at senior manager women. The business units nominate these women; they apply and are then selected to participate. It's a reasonably high-touch, elite group of women who go through a two-year leadership journey. The focus is on helping these women have all the right tools in their toolkit to allow them to continue being successful in their careers and reach leadership ranks. We are on our fourth Grow class, which was inaugurated last year. Being halfway through their program, I'm thrilled to share that already 24% of them have joined our leadership ranks. Equally as exciting, 100% of those from our very first Grow program, integrated several years ago, have attained the title of managing director or partner. In our Grow one and Grow two classes, 83%, and 76% are already firm leaders.

The **Connect tier** is the women's program that covers the whole firm. The topics in the Connect activities are things that women from the senior manager levels are interested in learning about and skill-building areas for the tools they want to have in their toolkit. The Circles Program matches women from all levels, business units, and geographies across the firm. It puts them into more intimate groups based around affinity topics of interest to dive deeper and create more meaningful connections. While it's not formal mentoring, we think of it as an organic, virtual mentoring effort. These women have an opportunity to connect with others who probably have a relatively diverse set of experiences that they can learn from. Through the circles, we put forth the idea that peer-to-peer mentoring is incredibly valuable and junior leader to senior leader mentoring, maybe even more so. Everyone has a story and experiences,

no matter the tenure. We are finding it has been terrific to create curated communities of women who support each other throughout their career in small groups, or 1:1. Many exciting things are happening from a Connect standpoint, including idea-sharing and connections to colleagues, all making for a rich and rewarding work environment, which has never been more critical than in this virtual time.

Q **RACHEL**
What's the typical size of the groups?

A **MARY ANN**
They're groups of about 5 to 6 women each

Q **RACHEL**
Once they connect, is it the women's responsibility to schedule their meetings and coordinate their interactions?

MARY ANN

A Yes. Once the women sign up, they all receive a dashboard with their group and interesting demographic information about each individual. We set a series of questions or suggestions for them to consider as they're meeting. We encourage them to meet as a group. We tag a team leader in that small group to arrange the first meeting. That team leader typically arranges the group-wide meeting for that small group. It's incumbent on the individuals to determine if they want to meet individually or if they want to do another short group meeting. We've heard lots of terrific stories over the years of how women are collaborating, whether it be 1:1 connections, whether they've cross-sold business together, whether they just connected on a topic or have stayed connected and have regular touchpoints. It's been a fun way to create a community for people in their areas of interest.

MARY ANN

A We've had a series of events, including our quarterly Connect programs, and typically about one thousand employees join. There are 4,100 employees at Crowe, and roughly half of them are women. We get a great turnout at those events; I believe the latest event had 740 women that joined, and then a host of women viewed the session later. All of the Connect program sessions are recorded, which allows great flexibility, especially during this pandemic.

RACHEL

Q Where do you see the future of Women Leading @ Crowe heading?

RACHEL

Q That is amazing. You mentioned that due to COVID, you were unable to meet in-person this year but hosted virtual events. How many people attended?

MARY ANN

A At the moment, we focus on supporting our women and keeping them connected during this pandemic. In this virtually working world, we want to ensure those connections aren't lost.

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We've launched the circles as I mentioned, we have scheduled our next quarterly event for Connect, we will host our Inspire group virtually in October, where we will have a half-day session of skill-building. We are doing happy hour with the Grow program and will be taking the program through a series of curated content virtually between now and the end of the year. Normally we would do that over a couple of days in-person, but we will break it up into manageable chunks so that folks aren't sitting in front of their computers for hours on end. These individuals will gain a lot of experience from a skill-building standpoint through curated content over time.

Additionally, we have a Parents Network to support our men and women facing challenges during this time. Many employees are part of dual-income families or are managing families, or perhaps even elderly parents or pets, that focus on their lives. Everyone manages something personally, so we wanted to create a safe space for people to meet like-minded people. With our latest Parents Network event, we allowed people to opt into ages/stages groups that aligned with their children so they could learn tools, tips, and best practices from colleagues, to help get through this unusual time.

We're looking toward the future. We will dwell on the possibilities of what we can do and not look at the negatives. How can we do things better, stronger, faster, and in a more innovative way at Crowe? The future is bright. We're excited that we haven't slowed down and all of our programmings are available. Not only that, we're helping with new things like our brand-new Parents Network and are also looking at conducting focus group work with the long-term goal of potentially developing a program for our

emerging leaders, female manager-level women. We're talking to those women about their needs that may not be met through the Connect activities. We don't know what we don't know, but we are learning a lot. It's been inspiring for us to continue to drive gender diversity. It's a great place to be, and we'd love to share that with the world.



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