

*Women to Watch***Adrienne Diercks**

Adrienne Diercks is the founder and executive director of youth-development organization Project Success, which works with students during a six-year period from middle school through high school to help them develop life skills and inspire them to act on their dreams. She began Project Success in 1994, serving 200 students and one school in Minneapolis. Today, the program serves more than 7,000 students and their families and 11 schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Among the accolades Diercks has received are the Minneapolis Award for her contributions to the city of Minneapolis, the Community Member Arts Advocate Award from the Minnesota Alliance for Arts in Education and the Hispanic Heritage Month Award for work in education with the Hispanic community. Project Success was awarded the 2007 Ordway Center Sally Award for Excellence in Education. Before starting the organization, Diercks worked as a facilitator for Possibilities Inc. and in accounting for *Mpls./St. Paul Magazine*.

Continuing education:

B.A. in English from Whittier College, Whittier, Calif.

Graduate of the James P. Shannon Leadership Institute



**Founder and
executive director
Project Success**

www.projectsucces.org

Membership in professional organizations:

Guthrie Community Relations Committee, the University of Minnesota Paddleford Scholarship Committee, the University of Minnesota Humphrey Institute Arts and Culture Study Group, the Minnesota Regional Arts Council Review Panel, the

National Civic League Ambassadors in Education and Met Life Foundation Nation Selection Committee

What professional accomplishment makes you most proud?

Through Project Success we have been able to bring so many partners and individuals together to help young people dream and imagine a future. We have had the opportunity to help them take steps toward their dreams. What could be better than that?

What do you see as the biggest issue in your industry right now?

The issue of high-school graduation rates. Too many kids are not graduating from high school. There are many reasons and circumstances that lead to this problem.

What are your goals for this year?

One of our goals this year is to serve more kids and families and continue our high-quality programming in Minneapolis and St. Paul. As always, it is also a goal to have fun along the way and truly make a difference.

What are your long-term goals?

Fifteen years ago my long-term goal was to inspire young people to dream about their future and help them create that future over several years. I wanted to be a part of

this work because I had a strong belief that all people have the ability to be happy and successful. I believed that with time, a plan, the right tools and ever-present support, great things could happen. I still believe this today and am still working on this very long-term goal. Another personal goal is to travel to Thailand, Cambodia and Australia.

What was the single most defining moment in your career?

The moments when Ted Koenecke, Sheila Livingston, George Roberts and Karla Ekdahl, my dear friends and mentors, said yes! I had a dream and a vision to help kids, and they said, "Let's do it!" Since then there have been so many individuals that have made our work possible.

What advice would you give to women professionals?

Follow your instincts. Focus. Do what you say you're going to do, and do it with integrity.

Family: The best mom, brother, sisters, nieces, nephew and friends

Hobbies: Running, crossword puzzles, travel, *Law & Order*