

## 2004 Women in Business Achievement Award



### Lou Solomon, Interact

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**Title:** President

**In her words:** "We've really been blessed with some great relationships in the past year that have come to fruition."

**Her story:** Trying to get Lou Solomon to sit down and talk about herself and her business is akin to hitting a moving target.

It's a summer Friday afternoon. She's made three stops to drop off training videos before she can squeeze in an interview. Constantly in motion, she loves every minute.

Solomon is the founder of Interact, a firm dedicated to the improvement of clients' speaking skills. During all-day and half-day sessions, clients are videotaped and provided immediate feedback.

Costs for the service average \$500 per person, with follow-up training available. She exhorts her charges to forgo preconceived notions about formal presentations, urging them to "get real." She advises clients to "be how you are with your friends at your kitchen table when you're excited. That's the most powerful part of you."

Solomon has reason to be excited. During the past 12 months, revenue increased 64% and the number of clients rose to 21 from nine. New business came from Duke Power Co.; the Wishart, Norris, Henninger & Pittman law firm; McCulloch England Associates Architects; Allen Tate Co.; Wachovia Corp.; and Dickens Mitchener & Associates.

Over the past year, Interact's open-enrollment course attracted professionals from 20 companies.

"We're not working with people who are traditional candidates," Solomon says. "It's varied and I love that part of it. We've really been blessed with some great relationships in the past year that have come to fruition.

"I love what I do. How lucky can I be?"

Interact is working with Charlotte-based tech firm Handshaw Inc. to debut an Internet-based course called "Authentic Speaking Through Storytelling." It will be available in the fall through the Interact Web site.

Solomon credits last year's success to a trend among many companies to emphasize "soft skills" in the work force, skills such as listening and speaking. Conversational communication works best, she says. It's not so much what you say but how you say it.

"The spoken word is the main connection to our creative impulse, success and happiness," Solomon says. "What we see with our clients is, when people begin to discover that they can reconnect with their own sense of enthusiasm for life, and they come from that place of authenticity, something really remarkable happens."

Solomon came to Charlotte in 1986 and worked in marketing and promotion for WSOC-FM until 1992. She then briefly worked for WFAE-FM before launching a public relations business, Maverick Marketing. With help from marketer Cam Marston, that company evolved into Interact in 2000. Sally Mitchener joined in 2002.

Solomon credits some mentors for the company's success: Handshaw founder, Dick Handshaw; Cynthia Carlson, who runs an executive search firm; and Ty Boyd, a longtime radio announcer who also does presentation training.

A self-described military brat, Solomon moved frequently during childhood, resulting in many first days of school at places around the globe. But she's laid down roots here.

"Charlotte's really important to me because it's the first real home community I've had," Solomon says. "It's a wonderful time in my life."

Fred Tannenbaum  
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