

Local Executive Authors Corporate Survival Guide

By: Teri Miller Barker

What began as a simple journal to record her thoughts, insights and experiences as an upper level executive, has evolved into a survival guide for women who are trying to make it in Corporate America. The book, titled *I'm Here, Now What?*, was written by Toni Perry Gillispie, Director of External Affairs for AT&T Ohio.

The informative book packs tons of tips and advice into 77 pages. The book gives simple, direct guidance to any woman who wants a successful career in a corporate environment.

"When I was a little girl, I dreamed of being a lawyer, teacher and ballerina," shared Perry Gillispie. "The reality is that I'm in my forties and I'm none of the above." Perry Gillispie may not have realized her childhood dreams, but she's living her dream in other aspects of her life. As the Director of External Affairs at AT&T Ohio, she manages the philanthropy, media relations, and stakeholder relationships with the federal, state and city legislators, and non-profits in nine Ohio counties.

The overachieving wife and mother has received numerous awards that attest to her expertise and business savvy. Some of those awards include the AT&T Supplier Diversity Advocate Award, the Dayton Chamber of Commerce Volunteer Award, Dayton Business Journal 40 Under 40 Award, Dayton Daily News' Top Ten Women 2007, and Top Ten Women African American CEO 2008. She holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Wilberforce University, a bachelor's degree in biblical studies from Dayton Bible College, and a master's in community economic development from Southern New Hampshire University. In addition to being on 11 boards and committees, Perry Gillispie also serves as the director of the children's choir at her church. She's grateful for a husband and son that support her in her endeavors.

I'm Here, Now What? could be summed up as a Business Basics 101 course with chapters that offer sound advice on networking, managing stress, managing your manager, image and brand, challenges for recent college grads, challenges for women over forty, how to juggle the responsibilities of family and a demanding career, and other empowering topics.

Perry Gillispie's book is not only filled with anecdotes of triumphs and successes, but also shares narratives of her disappointments and frustrations. As a woman in a male-dominated arena, she often found herself the only female and person of color at

business meetings. “I dreaded the looks, sneers and sighs sprinkled between warmth, kindness and genuine friendship,” she says in the networking chapter of her book.

Called the ‘Networking Queen’ by her friends, Perry Gillispie has taken her professional show on the road by facilitating workshops and Girlfriend Gatherings. Her main topics are networking, diversity, and leadership. During these workshops and gatherings, she expounds on the topics covered in her book and teaches women what they need to know to break through the proverbial glass ceiling.

During the course of her career, she has obtained a wealth of knowledge that she now shares with participants in her workshops or those who read her book. Perry Gillispie attributes her success to her faith in God, and people who have supported and mentored her. Part of her support comes from a group of professional women, called the Power Ladies, that she meets with about every three months or so. “Everybody needs at least one other person that they can be weak in front of, that they can cry in front of, that they can ask the stupid questions and not feel that they’re going to be judged,” explained Perry Gillispie. “For me, the Power Ladies have been a godsend. Whether they are getting their doctorate degree, or running their own business, or working in Corporate America, I know that I can call them at any time and get advice.” She encourages all women to get at least one person or a group of women they can depend on for sources of strength and the exchanging of ideas.

Perry Gillispie, a self-admitted ‘workaholic’ who spends about 60 hours a week on the job, knows that it’s essential to also set aside time to replenish or reward herself. “As women, we tend to give to others without restraint and forget about ourselves,” said Perry Gillispie who confesses that she’s still learning to take time out for herself.

With the support of her family and the encouragement of her publisher, she has written *I’m Here, Now What?*, an instructive book that offers guidance on how to thrive in Corporate America. To learn more about Toni Perry Gillispie, her networking workshops, or her inspiring book, visit www.theinspiredword.net.