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THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSION'S  
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# COLLEEN BARRETT

## SERVANT LEADER & SUPERSTAR



WHEN THE ADMIN AWARDS WAS LAUNCHED IN 2012, WE SAT DOWN WITH COLLEEN BARRETT TO ASK HER FOR HER THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES ON THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSION. HER ANSWERS FROM THAT SEPTEMBER INTERVIEW, EDITED FOR BREVITY; ARE BELOW:

### INTERVIEW

**WHAT DID YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT BEING A SECRETARY?**

I Like To Serve So You Have To Start There. I Loved To Solve Problems. And I Loved To Give Exemplary Or Positive Customer Service Delivery On Behalf Of Whomever I Was Working For. Life Is All About Relationships... You Have An Opportunity In The Administrative Group To Form More Relationships Than Probably Any Other Position — Even Much Higher Up On That So-Called Ladder Because You Are Very Often That First Point Of Contact With The Outside World Or The Customer... Life Is Just One Big Grassroots Campaign As Far As I’m Concerned.

**WHAT DID YOU LIKE THE LEAST?**

I Didn’t Like Anything That Was Routine. I Loved To Master Projects, But, For Example, Filing Was Only Interesting To Me Because I Loved To Be Able To Find Anything That Anyone Was Looking For... I’ve Never Liked Rote Work. (But) There’s Some That Goes In Every Job No Matter What Position You’re In.

**WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF SERVING HERB KELLEHER?**

Being A Nanny For 45 Years For A Man Who Has Always Thought He Was 17 Regardless Of Any Year That Was Added To His Personal Calendar! He Was A Great Servant Leader. He Loved Life And You Almost Couldn’t Be Around Him And Not Catch That Love Of Life And Love Of People.

**AND THE BEST ASPECT?**

It Was Truly Feeling His Egalitarian Spirit And Appreciating The Fact That He Valued My Judgment And Thinking As A Team Member.

**DID YOU EVER THINK YOU WOULD RISE FROM SECRETARY TO PRESIDENT AND COO OF SOUTHWEST AIRLINES?**

Quite Honestly It Wasn’t Something I Wanted, And I Never Wanted To Be COO—And I Made That Very Clear To The Board— That Isn’t My Strength. My Strength Is Customer Service And People And Everything That Touches People, And, Honestly, Being President And COO Wasn’t My Favorite Position At Southwest...My Favorite Position Was Executive Vice President- Customers. Customer To Us Means Employees, Passengers, And Shareholders, So I Could Really Touch Everything. I Could Touch Every Department. And As President... I Had To Do A Lot More External Things... I Did Them... I Can’t Say I Hated Them... (But) I Like To Get Down And Dirty And Really Roll Up My Sleeves.

**WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR ADMINS?**

Love. Everybody. Just Love. It’s A Word That Corporate America Doesn’t Use Very Much... Always Remember Where You Came From — So That You Know How Far You’ve Come...I Don’t Think Most Of Us Start Out Thinking We’re Going To Be The President Of The United States Or The CEO Of A Company... And I Think... Be Humble And Appreciate What You Get. To Me Psychic Satisfaction Is 10 Times More Important Than Pay Or Title.

*“Be Authentic. Be Real. Remember Who You Are”*





# COLLEEN BARRETT AWARD FOR ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE

WINNER



## JACQUELINE CASTRO

EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, CRATE AND BARREL HOLDINGS, INC

Jackie Castro doesn't just keep things running — she makes them better. As an Administrative Assistant at Crate and Barrel Holdings, Jackie supports multiple senior leaders while serving as the steady, joyful force behind a team of more than 100. She leads with intuition, professionalism, and a kind of grace that can't be taught. From orchestrating leadership events and handling complex travel to knowing who needs a pick-me-up or a celebration — Jackie sees what's needed before anyone has to ask. She fosters connection, solves problems on the fly, and makes the impossible look easy. But what truly sets Jackie apart is her heart. Her empathy, dedication, and fierce commitment to service ripple through every corner of the company. She advocates for her colleagues, uplifts her team, and ensures every person feels seen and supported.

### Finalists



ANN DAHLKE  
UMR, Inc



LARISSA GARMAN  
Samaritan Ministries International



SUSAN NARRAJOS  
Chicago Board Of Education,  
Board Office



# Small Ships, Big Adventures

Aurora Expeditions is honored to support the Admin Awards and its vital mission of publicly recognizing the invaluable contributions of Administrative Professionals!









# ACHIEVER AWARD

## LISA PETRUSHA

SR. CREW BASE COORDINATOR, SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

Lisa Petrusha is the kind of colleague who gets things done before you even realize they need doing. In just four years as an Admin at Southwest Airlines, she’s become the backbone of the Midway Flight Operations office, serving 1,200 pilots and three chief pilots—all while mentoring peers, leading systemwide projects, and earning a reputation as the gold standard among 35+ coordinators company-wide. This past year, Lisa played a key role in one of the company’s most complex operational changes. She kept it moving forward with calm, smarts, and near-impossible patience. When challenges pop up, people say, “Ask Lisa.” And somehow, she always has the answer—and the heart.



## Finalists



MARIA BARNES  
Chicago Public Schools



RACHEL LEWIS  
New Life Covenant Southeast



MEGAN NOLAN  
Prosperity Partners



MARGARET PHILLIPS  
BlueCross BlueShield Association



RENEE SIMONE  
BlueCross BlueShield Association

*SolomonEdwards congratulates the 2025  
Chicago & Midwest Region **Admin Awards nominees!***

Thank you for your dedication, talent, and the immense impact that you bring to organizations in the community.

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# THE ABOVE THE CALL AWARD

WINNER



## LINDA COLELLO

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, ADTALEM GLOBAL EDUCATION

When your job is all about people, the little things matter — and no one understands that better than Linda Colello. As Executive Assistant at Adtalem Global Education, Linda supports a high-powered team of executives while also serving as a go-to for coworkers, vendors, and visitors across the organization. She’s known for her incredible responsiveness, calm under pressure, and ability to make everyone feel like a priority — because to her, they are. Whether she’s managing complex schedules, helping launch onboarding improvements, or organizing joyful office events, Linda shows up with care, professionalism, and a contagious sense of positivity. She’s also the force behind Adtalem’s first Culture Committee, helping make work more connected, inclusive, and fun. It’s no wonder people say: “If you want it done well — and done with heart — ask Linda.”

## Finalists



NEVILLE GREEN  
Southwest Airlines



LAURABETH GRUBB  
Ofi



ALISON HANKS  
North American Bancard



ADOREE KINARD  
BlueCross BlueShield Association




NICHOLE MATTHEWS  
BlueCross BlueShield Association



LATANYA MITCHELL  
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's  
Hospital of Chicago

THE RIGHT  
Executive Assistant  
CHANGES EVERYTHING.

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" NEXT TO  
EXCELLENCE IS THE  
APPRECIATION OF IT "

- WILLIAM THACKERAY





# ADMINISTRATIVE EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

WINNER



## LARISSA GARMAN

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE COO, SAMARITAN MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Larissa Garman is proof that public service starts from the inside out. As Executive Assistant to the COO at Samaritan Ministries International, Larissa plays a key role in serving over 280,000 members through the people and processes that keep the ministry strong. From coordinating high-stakes board meetings to leading all-staff business events and guiding executive transitions, Larissa’s work ensures the organization runs smoothly — and stays mission-focused. She’s known for her clear thinking, steady presence, and deep care for the people she serves, both inside the building and beyond it. Whether mentoring new Admins or volunteering in her community, Larissa leads with heart, and it shows.

### Finalists



**ANISSA BARRETT**  
University of Illinois Chicago



**ROCIO ROBLES**  
Chicago Public Schools



**CALLIE SARGIS**  
Crate and Barrel Holdings, Inc



**MARGARET SIAME**  
Gift Of Hope Organ And Tissue Donor Network

CONGRATULATIONS  
TO OUR NOMINEES!



**Jackie Castro**



**Callie Sargis**

**Crate&Barrel** **Crate&kids** **CB2** **HUDSON** | **GRACE**



**Hooray!**  
Hats off to you!

THANK YOU TO OUR ADMIN TEAM AT  
THE SHERATON GRAND CHICAGO RIVERWALK AND  
CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE ADMIN AWARD NOMINEES.







# LEADERSHIP AWARD

WINNER



## JOSHUA DUTTON-DEBEER

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE COO, HERZING UNIVERSITY

Leadership isn't about titles—it's about stepping up when it counts. And that's exactly what Josh Dutton de Beer does, day in and day out at Herzing University. As Executive Assistant to the COO, Josh supports national leaders, manages mission-critical projects like campus moves and openings, and makes the complex look easy. He's trusted to lead events, improve operations, and provide strategic counsel far beyond the typical EA role. Whether he's handling real estate logistics, organizing multi-campus events, or saving the university money through vendor negotiations, Josh leads with clarity, care, and the kind of reliability others build their work around. Across departments and campuses, people don't just count on Josh — they follow his lead.

## Finalists



MELISSA BENNETT  
BlueCross BlueShield Association



RYAN GENSON  
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's  
Hospital of Chicago



MICHELLE TERKOSKI  
Stonebridge Capital Advisors



CAROLINA WALLACE  
Grainger



GWENDOLYN YOUNG  
Your Virtual Admin Expert

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SPAAN Tech Congratulates Linda Miller

Finalist | 2025 Admin Awards  
Executive Assistant, SPAAN Tech

52 years of leadership, loyalty, and quiet command.  
Linda Miller is the steady hand behind bold decisions, a tireless advocate for small business, and a trusted force for her CEO and team. She brings grace to every challenge—and strength to every room.  
We're proud to honor a legacy still very much in motion.









# LOYALTY AWARD

WINNER



## JAMES VELEZ

SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, ANN & ROBERT H. LURIE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OF CHICAGO

For more than 31 years, James Velez has been a pillar of consistency, care, and commitment at Lurie Children’s Hospital. As a Senior Administrative Assistant at the Chicago Institute for Fetal Health, he’s the steady presence patients see first thing in the morning — and the helping hand they remember long after. James doesn’t just do his job; he shows up early, stays late, and brings his whole heart to everything he touches. He’s covered shifts during staffing shortages, mentored new team members, and even bought lunch for patients when they needed comfort the most. Loyalty like his is rare. It’s not just about years served — it’s about the kind of legacy James has built: one of generosity, excellence, and deep-rooted dedication.

### Finalists



LINDA MILLER  
SPAAN Tech, Inc.



TANEYA HORTON  
Charles Drew Health Center, Inc.



MICHELLE DIETRICH  
BlueCross BlueShield Association



LISA DENTE  
Aflac



# THE SPIRIT AWARD

## LORENA DESROSIERS

GUEST RELATIONS SPECIALIST, CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

There are people who keep an office running—and then there are people like Lorena DesRosiers, who bring that office to life. For over 25 years, Lorena has been the heart and soul of Chicago Public Schools’ Central Office. She’s the first smile you see when you walk through the door, the steady presence who makes stressful days better, and the reason so many celebrations feel like family gatherings. From creating stunning decorations to organizing joyful, meaningful events that bring people together—Lorena does it all with love, purpose, and an infectious energy that lifts everyone around her.

WINNER



### Finalists



EDWIN ALMEIDA  
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital Of Chicago



EVELYN CASTRO-LAKE  
BlueCross BlueShield Association



CHRISTIE KAMINSKI  
Southwest Airlines



CAITLIN MACKUS  
CNA



ANGELA POTE  
Grainger



PRECIOUS WITHERSPOON  
American Telemed





# THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AWARD

## WINNER



## KAREN GABRIELSON

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, GRAINGER

Every leader needs someone who just gets it — and for Karen Gabrielson, that means not only understanding the strategy, but moving it forward. As the Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Onsite Services at Grainger, Karen is more than a right hand. She’s a thought partner, a problem-solver, and a driving force behind a function that spans all 50 states. Karen manages complex logistics with precision, leads key cross-functional projects, and helps steer her executive’s time toward what matters most. From leading the planning of a 200-person leadership event to streamlining operations across HR, Finance, and Supply Chain — her fingerprints are everywhere. She’s also a mentor, a connector, and someone who makes everyone around her better. Karen is the definition of strategic partnership in action.

## Finalists



NIKI COUSINO  
TransUnion



RITA DONOGHUE  
Lockton Companies



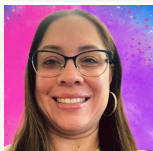
STACY FARQUHARSON  
Southwest Airlines



KASSANDRA MCCRAY VAN DYKE  
Saint Louis Public Schools



MELISSA MENDIOLA  
Grainger



AMANDA QUIROZ  
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's  
Hospital of Chicago



# FOUNDER'S AWARD

## CRATE AND BARREL HOLDINGS, INC

Through the partnership between CEO Janet Hayes and her Executive Assistant, Lisa Walker, Crate & Barrel has cultivated a more connected, growth-driven experience for its Administrative Professionals. Leadership coaches and guest speakers inspire and develop it's Admin community. Career pathing now includes clear salary thresholds and intentional title progression. Admins are leading company-wide events, shaping internal communications, and taking on high-impact initiatives. Lateral movement is supported and encouraged, backed by mentorship and knowledge-sharing across teams. Recognition is baked into the culture. From meaningful Administrative Professionals Day celebrations to company-wide shoutouts recognizing Admins to participation in public recognition through the Admin Awards - appreciation at Crate & Barrel isn’t reserved for once a year - it’s part of how leadership shows up every day.

## WINNER





Team Spirit Winner - Chicago Public Schools



Good As Gold Outfit Winner



Ryan Genson  
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

GRAND PRIZE WINNER

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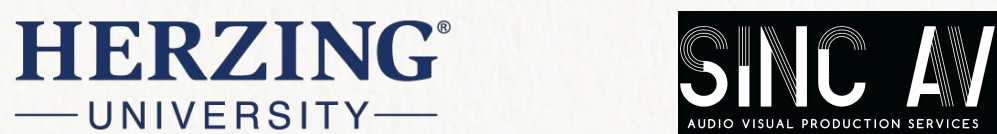
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