

Corporate Communicator

Angela Sinickas Shiromani improves employee relations by working with top companies to evaluate and address internal communication effectiveness

It's not hard to imagine, over the past four decades, more than one corporate CEO, when facing a challenge communicating with employees, has turned to the company's human resources director and said, "Get me Angela Sinickas Shiromani!"

That's because **Sinickas Shiromani**, '75 MEDIA—a trailblazer in the field of corporate communications—has established an international reputation as an expert who can improve employee relations by evaluating the effectiveness of a company's communications efforts, recommending changes in approach and providing appropriate training.

"I help businesses get better financial results by measurably improving communication with employees and other stakeholders," Sinickas Shiromani says. But that explanation barely begins to cover the depth and breadth of her work. She has provided consulting services to companies in 32 countries, including more than a third of the businesses on the 2019 *Forbes* list of 100 largest global companies. And her work has earned her prestigious Gold Quill awards from the International Association of Business Communicators on 21 occasions.

The daughter of Lithuanian immigrants, Sinickas Shiromani says she was focused at an early age, skipping a grade in elementary school, entering the U of I when she was 17 and completing her degree in three years. She began her career working for the University's alumni news service and editing U of I's Medical Center Alumni News. In 1979, she left to become editor of the employee magazine at the *Chicago Tribune* where she had to convince a numbers-oriented CEO that there was value in communicating with employees.

To get the data she needed, Sinickas Shiromani turned to lessons she had learned in U of I classes on advertising research strategies. She treated the paper's employees as customers, using interviews and surveys to produce measurable results. "My first job at the U of I involved communicating about science," she says. "After that, I became scientific about communication."

Not all of Sinickas Shiromani's decisions have been based on cold, hard facts. In 1984, she moved to California to be with her husband, Sarvottam "Sam" Shiromani, '84 UIC. Once there, she

quickly made a name for herself as a consultant before opening her own business in 2000.

"Angela is a pioneer in the industry," says David Murray, founder and president of the Professional Speechwriters Association, and editor of Sinickas Shiromani's first book, *How to Measure Your Communication Programs*, published in 1994. "She transformed employee communication from a corporate gesture into a purposeful pursuit. And she did so with equal parts shrewd scientific methods and her own immeasurable conviction."

That book is in its third edition; in 2017, Sinickas Shiromani published a follow-up, *The Ultimate Guide to Measuring Internal Communications*. She also has written more than 150 trade journal articles. "It brings me satisfaction that I've been able to impact the lives of so many employees and the people whose job it is to communicate with them," she says. "I think I've been able to elevate the value of what they do."

Having been displaced by WWII, Sinickas Shiromani's parents arrived in Chicago in the early 1950s, her father finding work as a tool and die setter and her mother as a secretary. Their experience made a deep and lasting impression on her, she says, instilling a sense of pride about her ethnic heritage. Fluent in Lithuanian, Sinickas Shiromani has done extensive volunteer work in Lithuania, imparting her expertise on business communications through speaking engagements at conferences. She has done guest teaching at the oldest university in the Baltic States, Vilnius University, and the Baltics' ISM University of Management and Economics.

"I wanted to give back to a country and culture that shaped me in so many ways," she says. In recognition of her efforts, the president of Lithuania presented Sinickas Shiromani with the Global Lithuanian Leaders Award for Knowledge Sharing in 2014.

Sinickas Shiromani is "beyond tickled to death" to be honored with the Alumni Achievement award. "When I walked through the Illini Union as a student, I would check out the portraits of previous winners and imagine what I would need to achieve in my career to have my picture up there with them," she says. "Now I know."—*Paul Engleman*

