

# Cowgirl Power

An Interview with Gay Gaddis,  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, T3

**EDITORS' NOTE** In 1989, Gay Gaddis started her company after cashing in a \$16,000 IRA. Today, T3 (t-3.com) has offices nationwide and creates innovative digital marketing programs for Fortune 200 clients. T3 is a top ranked innovation firm and one of the largest agencies owned by a woman in the U.S. Gaddis has been nationally recognized for the unique family-friendly policies she initiated at T3. She serves on the Board of Directors of Monotype Imaging Holdings, Inc., sits on the Dean's Advisory Council to The University of Texas McCombs School of Business, is the first female Chairman of the Texas Business Leadership Council and is former Chairman of the Committee of 200 (C200), a top women's business organization that advances women's leadership in business. She is also a board member of The Foundation for a Globally Competitive Texas. She and her husband own and operate the historic Double Heart Ranch in the Texas Hill Country. Her bold Texas landscape paintings have hung in New York City gallery shows and earned her distinction by Texas Monthly magazine as one of the top ten artists to collect now.



Gay Gaddis

## What was your vision for T3 and has it evolved as you expected?

Things always have twists and turns, but I set off with a specific mantra and vision statement.

I started T3 in 1989 in what was sleepy Austin, Texas, at the time. My husband and I were having dinner one night and he was goading me about what I was going to do to differentiate my agency. I came up with these principles defining how we were going to be at the crosshairs of excellent creative that gets results. I had taken a stab at this several times and had floundered a bit. After a few glasses of wine, I slammed my hand down and declared that we're going to do kick-ass work for clients who want to kick ass.

My husband got up and went to the bar to get a napkin and wrote that down and handed it to me and said, "This is your business plan." Ironically enough, over the years, this has remained the mantra. It embodies a lot in a few words. We want to be leaders in doing awesome work.

It set the tone for how good we wanted to be and it talked about what kind of company we would keep. We give awards for supporting this mantra.

## When you have that type of vision and are focused around differentiating from the start, how difficult is it to fulfill that?

It's always hard to get through the clutter. Fortunately, early on, we were working with Dell and we started doing projects that were their first Internet projects. As a result, we learned a lot about embracing technology even before many agencies thought it was going to be a factor.

We continued to build on top of that technology platform. Through the years, we have pushed it out there, staying one step ahead and it's what we're known for.

People know they're going to get interesting, forward-thinking ideas from us. We'll take care of what they need at the moment and they look to us to come up with great ideas.

## The book is about finding one's inner personal power.

We were recently named one of the top five innovation agencies in the country. This was based on our innovation and how we bring that out every day for top Fortune 100 and 200 clients.

Innovation is more than a word for us – it's what we do every day.

## As the company has grown, has it been more difficult for you to find client time?

The good news is that I still stay in touch with our top clients. Even if it's through e-mails or phone calls, I still make the time to do this. This past year, our new business grew 30 percent, which is amazing. I can't go to all the meetings, but I have surrounded myself with a great senior management team and they have great people working with them, so we have good folks out there who can speak for me.

The other blessing for our family is that our eldest son came back into the business eight years ago and I named him president recently. He is now carrying the flag for the family to a certain extent.

## You recently wrote *Cowgirl Power*. What made you feel it was the right time for the book and what are the key messages in it?

I have been involved for many years in the Committee of 200 where we champion young women. I'm also part of Paradigm for Parity where we look to help with gender inequalities in big companies. I have been an avid spokesperson trying to empower women for many years, but I didn't feel there was anything in the marketplace that was as prescriptive as I wanted to be.

*Cowgirl Power* has several dimensions. I'm inspired by historic cowgirls and I'm a cowgirl myself, as I started riding horses as a child. I believe in the ethics and spirit of cowgirls.

I went to the Cowgirl Museum in Fort Worth and I was so inspired by their stories. I decided to include vignettes about them before every chapter in the book to give women a vision and hope and energy around what these brave women did before women could even vote.

Cowgirls embody the spirit and the thinking that is all throughout my book.

I also wanted to tell my story about building a business from the ground up, and about my setbacks, failures and wins to teach people how I found my personal power. The book is about finding one's inner personal power. This is not top-down autocratic power. It's giving oneself an opportunity to grasp power when it comes along so she has choices in her life. I want women to have a lot of choices and not just be pigeon-holed or cut off because they didn't take advantage of the options available to them.

At the end of the book, I added the Cowgirl Power Toolkit, which is very prescriptive. It tells the readers step by step what will help them in their career, as well as with family or running for office.

The book speaks to helping women have the best success.

## What advice do you offer young women to guide them down a career path?

First of all, they must be very competent. They must do the homework and be good students. Competence leads to confidence, which gives one the opportunity to spread their wings and be more assertive. ●