

THE POWER OF A MOMENT

By Calandra Weaver

Wendy (Byrnes) Baker (T'95) and Karen Korellis Reuther (LA'79) believe the world is missing out on the true impact of women due to barriers that block them from initiating much-needed change.

The two women are pushing past their own barriers and sharing a new idea during their joint keynote presentation at Purdue [Women's Conference 2023](#), which includes two days of sessions focused on personal and professional development. At first mention, that might not seem like much of a bold move. After all, conferences are places to share ideas. But the Purdue alumnae have an idea that still needs nurturing.

Baker and Korellis Reuther are collecting women's stories for a book that will explain why building lasting change requires a disruption of the status quo—but their pages are far from the publisher's desk. They are eager to get feedback from attendees, which is a testament to the supportive community of Purdue women at the conference.

If it weren't for the Purdue Women's Conference, Baker and Korellis Reuther might never have met. Baker, vice president of operations at BlueEQ, was a keynote speaker at the 2022 conference. In her presentation, "Leading With Intention and Impact," she discussed how women can draw on their emotional intelligence to achieve personal and professional success, especially during difficult times.

Korellis Reuther, an advisor, educator, and activist at Harvard University, was struck by the similarities she saw between Baker's keynote and her own breakout session. "We both spoke about women not reaching their potential because of obstacles thrown in their way," Korellis Reuther says. Her presentation, "Inclusion by Design," was about advocating for gender diversity in design and design for gender diversity.

After Baker's keynote, the two women met over lunch, and they haven't lost contact since. They both had a gut feeling that they wanted to collaborate with each other in some capacity. The alumnae connected over Zoom and eventually developed the concept for a book that would include impactful stories of strong women succeeding through their struggles.

"Our purpose is all about sharing ways of disrupting the status quo so women can find success in an equitable manner," Baker says. "We want them to test new ideas without fear of retribution and to collaborate in an inclusive environment where their input is valued and prioritized. Women need to have an equal seat at the table."

"Our society suffers when barriers prevent women from realizing their potential," Korellis Reuther says. "Wendy and I want to focus on the benefits of women leaders. We're looking for examples of women who have challenged everyday routines and prevailed with their own unique styles, helping move things forward."

The Purdue Women's Conference is an opportunity for a sisterhood of women to engage, connect, and grow. "Gathering with other Purdue women was really inspiring," Korellis Reuther says. "It felt like I was with people I'd known for years even though I was meeting them for the first time."

Baker and Korellis Reuther wanted to experience that sense of community again, and they knew Purdue women would be welcoming to their partnership. "I thought it would be a special opportunity to present with Karen and talk about the evolution we've had since the last conference in an effort to drive change," Baker says.

In their presentation, "The Power of a Moment," Baker and Korellis Reuther will provide examples of women who navigated barriers and succeeded as leaders. They are also developing a way for attendees to share their own experiences. The alumnae want to use some of these stories for their book, but they also want to start a conversation and urge fellow Purdue women to learn from each other.

"There will be so many successful women in that audience, and they've all succeeded in navigating a playing field that wasn't necessarily designed for them," Korellis Reuther says. "Purdue women have a sense of grit, but they might not realize they have secret weapons to help them get things done. I don't think stories like theirs often get told."

Baker and Korellis Reuther are two of more than 20 women speaking at the conference. "The Purdue Women's Conference brings in such a diverse crowd of women," Baker says. "I love learning from them. It's for people who want to learn and people who want to share."

The [Purdue Women's Network](#) is hosting Purdue Women's Conference 2023 June 8–9 on the university's West Lafayette campus. Registration is open now—check out the [conference website](#) for more information.