

Rebecca Linder

Bringing It to Life

Rebecca Linder leads a dynamic group of event architects—experts who excel at choreographing all the things that leave clients and their guests clamoring for more. Her firm, Linder & Associates, is based in Washington, D.C., but it has international reach, and as she helps clients reinvent the classic conference or summit in the digital age, the risks and opportunities are greater than ever.

Rebecca's willingness to reach for those opportunities stems from a spirit emboldened by her journey to this point, and perhaps most profoundly by a decision she made when she was seven years old. Would she admit defeat and go home, or would she dive into the challenge before her and shape her future with her own hands?

The daughter of a diplomat in the Foreign Service, Rebecca was the embodiment of the diverse cultural experiences of her young life. Her mother was Jamaican, and Rebecca was born in West Africa. The family moved to Brussels, and then to Amman, Jordan in the Middle East, before coming to Washington, D.C., where she felt like an outsider for the first time in her life. "I remember walking down the street, and the other kids ran and hid behind a tree when they saw me," she recounts now. "They had all grown up there, and they were afraid of my darker skin and my accent. I was exotic."

Sadness threatened her spirits, but in that moment, she realized she had a choice. With that, she grabbed a basketball and began dribbling up and down the street until the other children came out and played with her. "That experience made me realize how important courage is," she says. "I was either going to go home and stay hidden away, or I was going to make myself fit in. It worked, and ever since then, that's been my approach to overcoming challenges. I immerse

myself in the challenge. Defining moments are about the moments you create for yourself, and about the way you participate in them." Now as the founder and President of Linder & Associates, Inc., Rebecca has spent her life approaching those moments from a perspective of action, optimism, and progress.

Rebecca launched the company in 1997, and today, it specializes in planning events that span the gamut from small C-level functions up to galas, balls, parades, festivals, and conferences.

Linder & Associates takes care of every aspect of the process, including conception, production, registration, website development, air and ground transportation, crowd security and management, execution, and post-production issues. It employs a team of 28, but actually invokes and coordinates hundreds of people at a time when subcontractors and vendors are factored in. "We're really a management consulting company," she says. "We don't own any of the

equipment or push out our own graphic design. We live in a universe where we pick and choose the best options for each particular client."

Linder & Associates typically serves Fortune 100 companies and high-level nonprofits, and they've put on events for the World Bank, USAgainst Alzheimer's Campaign, the signature events of the National Cherry Blossom Festival, and the USA Science and Engineering Festival, which has half a million attendees. "Our work is incredibly dynamic," Rebecca says. "Events are an organization's biggest marketing opportunity and brand experience. They're an opportunity to truly connect with customers, and can have real impact on a company's ROI. Recognizing this potential, our firm is about excellence and service and making the impossible possible, bringing the visions of our clients to life with clarity and purpose."



The Women Presidents' Educational Organization has named the firm a Certified Woman's Business Enterprise, and it is a Top Owned Business according to DiversityBusiness.com. Linder & Associates is a member of the Washington D.C. Convention & Tourism Corporation, Special Event Sites Marketing Alliance, and International Special Events Society. In addition, Rebecca is a member of Les Dames d'Escoffier, a worldwide philanthropic society of professional women leaders in the fields of food, fine beverage, and hospitality.

As President, Rebecca is the visionary of the company. She tangentially oversees some of the creative work from the production side, but much of that work is now driven by the firm's project managers. For the most part, her days are spent building and maintaining sales relationships while immersing herself in new ideas and concepts. As an industry leader and a top-five D.C.-based event planning firm, Linder & Associates relies on Rebecca's proven ability to gauge where the industry is headed and to position the firm ahead of the curve.

The company's approach may seem avant-garde, and is indeed defined by its innovative and holistic style, but the fuel for its fire is as simple as it is timeless. "We just love the pure joy and challenge that comes from engaging with our clients and making them happy," Rebecca says. "Our job is bringing someone's vision to life, which is a constant challenge but also a constant source of gratification for us. We love engaging in conversation with someone, trying to understand their mission and goals, and translating that vision into a lived experience that allows people to come together and connect. That's extremely powerful for us."

Joel Simon, Fundraising Director for LifeBridge Health, can offer a client's perspective. "Rebecca's team helped us put on the largest fundraising Gala in Maryland history," he reports. "Their professionalism, technical proficiency, and ability to work with professional staff, volunteer leaders, and other vendors was superlative. I can not recommend them enough for such events."

Linder & Associates has an eye toward sustainably. It is keenly aware of the impact of its actions on future generations, as well as the wellbeing of the environment. The team is committed to sustainable practices, both internally as an organization, and in partnership with clients

for their programs. In planning events, they help clients maintain their environmental standards and can even augment them through recommendations on everything from venues with sustainable practices and locally sourced food, to the use of electronic communications rather than traditional printed materials.

Linder & Associates also works for a closer community and a stronger society by supporting Horton's Kids. This worthy organization provides comprehensive services to the children of Washington, D.C.'s challenged neighborhoods, improving the quality of their daily lives and nurturing their desire and ability to succeed. With programs that include tutoring, mentoring, enrichment, advocacy, and family support, Horton's Kids is truly making a difference.

In a way, Rebecca's work is about creating the kind of collective experiences that had such a profound impact on her as she grew up. Her life has essentially been centered around the kitchen or the dinner table, and the unique exploration of taste, flavor, family, and life that occurs in these settings. "It's like its own philosophy—a way of connecting to the various places I've been and sharing them with others," she explains. "I'll never live in the Middle East again, but I can recreate it and bring it to life through the food I cook and the way I share it. To this day, my brother, mother, father, partner, and our young children come together to celebrate the moments that food nourishes and the traditions passed down from one generation to the next. It's what connects us, and it's what I want to give my kids."

As a child, Rebecca watched her parents host wonderful events that transcended cultural difference and served to strengthen connections not only between people, but between nations. Cultivating in Rebecca a zest and passion for life, they taught her that nothing was impossible, and that the choices she made in life had the power to unlock every opportunity. Along with a sense of wonder and adventure, they modeled self-reliance and kept Rebecca and her brother grounded in who they were and what they were connected too, even when the family moved to new countries. "Sometimes it was hard to move, but I wouldn't change a thing," she says. "My family is very close, and our parents were very good at getting us excited about experiencing a new culture."

Rebecca's efforts led her not only to fend, but also to flourish. Her family moved to Greece

just before she started high school, and the first thing she did in her new country was run for president of the freshman class. Such boldness led her out of her comfort zone and didn't come naturally to her, but she understood it was important to insert herself in new surroundings and get to know her classmates in courageous and intentional ways.

Upon graduating, Rebecca returned to the U.S. and enrolled at Boston University because she wanted the chance to get lost in a bigger school and city. "The distinct advantage of moving is the opportunity to reinvent yourself," she remarks. "That's something I love about the work I do now. In a way, each event is an opportunity to develop an idea and an identity, with a definitive end point in mind, where you'll move on to the next one."

Though her parents would have been happy to give her money, she didn't rely on it and instead held a host of jobs through college. She worked for a stockbroker and a lawyer, hoping the experiences would help her figure out what she wanted to do in life. Through her first exposure to catering, she became familiar with the behind-the-scenes world of putting on events for thousands of people. Her most profound college experiences, however, happened not behind the closed doors of the kitchen, but instead under the open lights of the stage. After seeing a casting call poster for an Edward Albee play, she decided to step outside her comfort zone once again and audition. "I had to dig pretty deep to go out on stage in front of an audience, portraying a character that wasn't me and emotions I didn't feel," she remembers. "I realized that, if I could overcome my fear and triumph in that scenario, there wasn't much I couldn't do."

Rebecca spent the summer after her junior year at an acting school in Los Angeles and then decided she wanted to pursue a career in the field after graduation. Once she received her degree, she moved to Washington, D.C. and took a job at Arena Stage, but quickly realized her commitment to acting full-time had waned. "If you don't fit the physical profile of a part, you're out of luck," she points out. "I couldn't get behind that. But what I did love was the production—the energy, creativity, management, leadership, and level of coordination that went into it."

She had several other jobs at the time that also drew upon these interests in one way or another, but she soon decided to streamline her

focus by immersing herself in the world of food and catering. With that, she accepted a job at a D.C. catering company—an experience that utilized her passion for production in an environment characterized by her first love, food. She started in sales and then took on a special project, ultimately creating for herself the role of Director of Operations. In that capacity, she handled the production aspects for the company, as well as high-end accounts for the Smithsonian and the National Gallery of Art.

Rebecca gained tremendous exposure to the business and to the culture of the city, working with inspirational mentors like Geneva Higginson, the Director of Special events at the National Gallery. A tremendously accomplished woman in everything from tennis, to writing, to cooking, to leadership, she was challenging in all the right ways, teaching Rebecca never to compromise. Thanks in part to this wisdom, Rebecca soon decided she wanted to learn and do more. "I didn't want to just produce one aspect of an event; I wanted to be in charge of the full event," she remembers. "So I decided to step out on my own. I didn't know how I'd do it, or with what, but I was committed to making it work."

Thus, Linder & Associates was born. "I remember calling my dad and saying I needed a desk," Rebecca laughs. "I had a studio, and he came and helped me buy a plank of wood where I could set up my leased computer. I got a guy to incorporate me for \$500, and then I sat there in my pajamas wondering, what did I do?" Positive, upbeat, and self-assured, she immersed herself thoroughly in the production end, just as she had done in catering when she got a black suit and learned how to wait tables. Wanting to understand the whole experience, she did the same with lighting and staging companies. "I believed in myself and in the idea that, if people started hiring me, I'd get it done," she remembers. "And I did."

When she grew busier, she hired her father as the accounting and business manager, and when she outgrew the studio, she hired her mother to design and manage her new office space. As a child of the world, she has worked toward a vision with global breadth, participating at every level of her organization and leading by example. In an industry where churn-and-burn leads to high employee turnover, her team now has people with tenures up to 14 years in length. "Our success comes from constant introspection and evolution

as a business, but also from the way we interact with each other," she explains. "Every day, as a leader, I show up with my fist in the air and a smile on my face, ready to go. You have to be committed to your own energy and inspiration in order for that to trickle down."

Ever since she watched her relatives start their own drapery, dress, lingerie, and hat shops, Rebecca has equated entrepreneurship with independence, freedom, and choice. It lends her a control over her own destiny, agenda, and life that fits perfectly with her personality, and while leadership can at times be stressful, the love and support of her partner, Lisa Bodager, serves as a perfect counterbalance. "She's wise counsel, and I love her willingness to engage in my ideas, because I'm always thinking about new things I might like to explore or pursue," Rebecca says.

In advising young people entering the working world today, Rebecca stresses the importance of being prepared to work hard and absorb new ideas. "Don't be afraid to interact with everybody, because that's how you learn," she says, underscoring the courage she used to dribble that basketball up and down her street all those years ago. "If you're asked to take on a new

responsibility at work, relish the opportunity to make a name for yourself and play an active role in your growth. The ones that rock it are the ones that believe in themselves and just jump in." By bringing this philosophy to each project and each hard mark one aims for, every day finds new ideas and opportunities waiting to be brought to life.

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About Gordon J. Bernhardt

President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit www.BernhardtWealth.com and [Gordon's Blog](#).



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