

**Michelle Abreu**  
**Chairwoman and President**  
**Oxford Consulting Group, Inc.**

*Oxford Consulting Group, Inc., is a leading information technology firm servicing clients through the United States. Michelle Abreu leads more than 120 consultants nationwide and assists clients in developing sound business strategies that provide flexibility as well as adaptability.*

*Abreu and her team partner with more than 200 mid-market and global 2000 clients to develop, implement, and support technology portfolios.*

*Abreu has been named as one of the top three finalists for TechColumbus' Women in Technology Award and volunteers much of her time to community organizations such as Amethyst Inc., Habitat for Humanity, the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and Franklin County Children's Services.*

**What about your upbringing defines your character?** I was born in South Africa; my father ran a very successful engineering firm, and my mother was a nurse. We came to America, with only the allowed South African government limit of \$10,000, to escape apartheid. My parents wanted my brother and me to have a better opportunity in a county that respected equality. My daughter is actually our family's first-generation American-born citizen. **Explain how this transition was an adjustment for you.** I was eight years old at the time we moved over here, and I went from a private school in Johannesburg, South Africa, to a public school in Columbus, Ohio. I had a heavy accent and no friends or family. It was difficult, as you may imagine. This experience, though, helped to shape the person I am today because I realize the sacrifices my parents made. Anything I do, I feel pales in comparison to what my parents had to sacrifice when they moved here. That constant reminder helps to give me the energy and the will to keep moving and succeeding. I view challenges not as a risk, but as a task to overcome. It may sound silly, but everything I have done in my career was to make my parents proud; a lot of my success is driven from fear of letting them down. They gave up so much for me; I wanted to make sure I returned the favor. **How did your career develop?** I went to Miami University to pursue a business degree. At the time, Miami had the third-largest student-run credit union. I took a job there when I was a freshman, and within three years, I advanced to become the CFO. Upon graduation, I began my career at Procter & Gamble in its finance program. My first assignment was with Global Finance & Accounting Systems, and I worked with an amazing woman who was one of the highest executives who worked there; she became my mentor. I traveled throughout Europe, Asia, and South America, and this experience gave me insight into the value behind information technology. I realized the power behind the connectivity of it across the globe and really became interested in it. **Explain how discovering this passion led you to your current role as president and chairwoman of a successful IT firm.** A friend needed someone with a finance background to help automotive suppliers who were spinning off from General Motors. I took the job thinking it would be temporary, but realized quickly that this was what I wanted to do: process improvement and IT systems. I became very intrigued by the automotive and manufacturing world and started to ask the question, "How can we use systems to make business better?" So I looked into starting my own company. I began by identifying pain points with my clients and then would integrate software implementations into those points. Over the next few years, I brought on a partner and other people who knew production line electronic communications, so they could help me build out the business. **You were a part of a significant merger. What was that like?** A company called QAD realized Oxford was gaining significant market share in their space. They approached me about buying that business. I moved back to Columbus and worked on completing the sale of Oxford's QAD integration practice to QAD, Inc., a \$290 million global provider of enterprise software and services. As part of the sale, I set up and managed a global business unit for QAD, concentrating on the European market as well as leveraging the Oxford Consulting Group acquisition. It was an amazing experience, but it was also a very challenging time. I was wearing many different hats as a business leader. I was only 32 years old at the time. **How have you learned to become an effective leader throughout all of your professional experiences?** I've built this company from the ground up, and I've been a part of many different professional experiences around the world, so I can really relate to many different perspectives and roles. Plus, I started this business as a young woman in the automotive industry, so I had to learn quickly to get past perceptions. I learned how to identify my strengths as well as my weaknesses and then would surround myself with people who could help to fill in the pockets. I would say because of all of these learning experiences, I've come to find that I'm a very compassionate and flexible leader. I've been a single mother, too, so I understand what it takes to try and balance everything. I always try to lead with a consensus — all members of my team should consider themselves to be equal contributors. I have also learned that that I can have a very successful business without me being the entire brand; it takes a village to have a vision for a company, and I'm lucky to have a great staff. **Any regrets?** Not recognizing that I needed to have more balance in my life earlier on. I threw myself into my business and it wasn't healthy. Having a business isn't always the endgame. **What do you want to be known for?** Being a good mother, daughter, and contributor to the community. **What advice do you have for professional women?** Don't limit yourself. Women, at times, tend to be their own worst enemy. You can do what you want to do, just seek counsel and surround yourself with people who will support you. And, get an education!

