

JESSIKA FERM

BY JOHN ROSS
PHOTO BY JODI MILLER

Age: 35
Day job: President, J. Ferm LLC
Neighborhood: Short North
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From her Grandview office, Jessika Ferm offers no-frills, no-fluff leadership development — direct and concise training designed to make your business more effective. She'll also tell you about art, her favorite Short North haunts and learning to cook.

I grew up in a tiny little town outside Gothenburg. Gothenburg is very much like a Boston. It's by the ocean. It is extremely lively. People are into fashion. They're into high-tech things. It's a really vibrant city.

Johnston & Wales had a Swedish campus. I had lived in Switzerland. I came back to Sweden because I realized I needed an education. I saw this American university, and I thought, "Wouldn't that be cool? I can go my freshman year here in Sweden and then I can transfer to the U.S."

I came to America with two suitcases. When I landed in Boston, I wrote my mother a letter, and I said, "I've come home." I've never moved back. I've never thought of moving back. I just knew.

At first, I wasn't really sure if Columbus was going to work. Columbus is a really funny city. It has a lot to offer, but you have to kind of go look for it. It's sort of underground.

At J. Ferm, my specialty is dealing with dominant big shots. They're usually very good at what they do, but they're not always as great with people. What I teach my clients — I usually work with senior executives — is to be direct but also to be courteous and to be effective.

Swedes are very friendly but very direct. My husband usually makes fun of me, because he'll say, "If you ask a Swede how this looks, they'll tell you. So be very careful."

Our clients come from Dubai to Kansas. It's different cultures. It's different people. I

work with non-profit agencies to Fortune 100 companies. It isn't about the business — it's about people. People are the same.

I've had many different jobs. I was in party planning. I had my own fashion show company. I had a muffin shop when I was seven. I had 118 absences in high school — I had other things that I was doing. My high school psychology professor didn't think I would live past 30.

One of the most interesting places to travel is Dubai and Abu Dhabi. It's so different. I like to travel places where I don't know anything about where I'm going, so I have to study up on it and I have to learn something.

My dream is to one day work in the food [industry]. I'm going to Ireland for the first time this summer, which I'm really excited about. I'm going to do a two-week cooking vacation in County Cork.

My biggest pet peeve is lack of customer service. That could get me going for hours. I think nowadays in the world client service is going to be the one thing that distinguishes you from the rest — and it doesn't cost anything.

One person I admire is my husband. He was a lawyer, a litigator for 10 years, and he just said, "I want to be a full-time artist." He gave up something — he loved the law — but he knew he had to paint. He has just never wavered in that. To be committed to a passion is pretty amazing.

The best advice I've ever received is you don't get into situations — you put yourself there.

Is there a Columbus resident you'd like to meet in Alive & Unedited?
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