

Pioneering unknown territories, tackling complex challenges, and making the impossible possible...is nothing new for Erna Grasz.

Having overcome numerous challenges as a young girl growing up in Texas, Erna knows first-hand the resiliency needed to navigate society's complex systems, and learned first-hand that education was the great equalizer, which enabled her to achieve a successful career trajectory. Hard driving, competitive, and always up for a challenge, she set out to defy the odds and make it in the man's world of engineering, graduating top of her class in a male-dominated field of electrical engineering. As a seasoned executive leader, she gained a reputation for her ability to lead organizations through immense ambiguity, provide structure in the face of chaos, and mobilize global talent, systems, operations, and innovative technology.

Following completion of her Bachelor's degree, she headed to a national research defense laboratory to test herself and tackle the next challenge. For fifteen years, she held progressive roles at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL), where she led multi-million dollar programs focused on cutting edge engineering design and integration. With a rapid ascent into leadership and a career hallmarked by "figuring it out and getting it done," Erna was called on regularly to lead groundbreaking work, such as the deployment of numerous robotic systems for land mine discovery and radioactive material handling. During her tenure at LLNL, she played an integral role as a massive team effort of talented innovators and go-getters who successfully built the world's largest highest-energy laser facility, the National Ignition Facility, a premier international center for experimental science.



Following this success, coupled with a personal decision to test her capabilities in Silicon Valley, Erna spent the next decade turning around under-performing business units and creating high-performing teams delivering results. It was during these formative years where she sharpened her business and financial acumen in pulling the "right players" in to be part of a wide-ranging effort, managed profitable multi-million-dollar P&Ls and global programs, and led start-ups, turnarounds, and large-scale transformation.

Drawing upon her personal challenges in her younger years, coupled with a lifelong commitment to giving back, laid the foundation for her work in co-launching Asante Africa Foundation in 2007 with two equally powerful African women. In the USA, Asante Africa is a 501(c) non-profit organization committed to educating East Africa's youth to confidently address life's challenges, thrive in the global economy, and catalyze positive change.

Today, she brings her leadership and global business expertise to the global non-profit sector, where as Asante Africa Foundation's CEO, she maintains a strong belief in the power of leveraging locally available talent and partnerships to ensure the foundation's success and long term sustainability. In executing on this vision, she leads a global team with a common commitment to creating a "new normal" in collaboration with rural African communities, and to educating the children who have big dreams – but lack the skills, connections and resources. In this regard, Erna recognizes a similar talent and brilliance that others saw in her as a child.

As a bridge-builder, catalyst for change, and visionary behind many of the foundation's innovative programs and practices, Erna has been recognized for her work worldwide, receiving the national Jefferson Award for public service and the Distinguished Engineering Award for innovation in developing countries. In 2018, Asante Africa was honored with the USAID Young Women Transform Prize, receiving recognition for the organization's Girl-Led Leadership and Entrepreneurship Program. In 2019, the organization was recognized Globally in the Top 10 of Drucker Innovation Prize for the "Learn IT -Do It- Teach It" model. The Obama Foundation brought Asante Africa to the table for a Global summit on best practices for giving Girls a voice and being the changemakers in their home communities. To date, the foundation's programs have empowered over **600,000 youth** and teachers directly and through their ripple effect.

As an award-winning speaker and published author, Erna is frequently on global stages traversing the corporate and philanthropy divide, where she presents on executive leadership, innovative education programs, and sustainable philanthropy versus charity. Before entering into the world of technology and social impact, she completed her M.S. in Electrical Engineering and Engineering Management from Santa Clara University and B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Texas Tech University.

***"Trust Your Instincts, Intuition and Intellect.
Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway."***

– Erna Grasz's Philosophy

