



CEO OF THE YEAR HONOREE

SUSAN BERMAN

*President; CEO
Help Group*

Dr. Susan Berman, president and CEO of Help Group, has spent more than four decades leading transformative work in education, mental health, and supportive services. Under her visionary leadership, the organization has grown into one of the nation's most comprehensive and respected nonprofits, now serving over 25,000 children, adolescents, and young adults each year.

Throughout her career, Dr. Berman has navigated the challenges of meeting complex needs within underserved communities. She has led the creation of an integrated network of services that includes nine specialized day schools; therapy and mental health programs; vocational training and employment services; residential facilities; arts and recreation programs; and lifelong learning opportunities. Together, these programs provide coordinated, person-centered care designed to support individuals across the lifespan and help them reach their limitless potential. Recently, Dr. Berman elevated Help Group's visibility through a transformative rebrand, strengthening its identity and positioning Help Group as a leading voice in mental health, special education, and neurodiversity. This allowed the organization to continue to strengthen families through expanded programs and new partnerships.

**LARA SCHMOISMAN**

FINALIST
*Founder & CEO,
Marketing Connoisseur
The Darl*

Lara Schmoisman is the founder and CEO of The Darl, a growth marketing agency that partners with leading brands across beauty, wellness, and consumer goods to build scalable omni-channel strategies. With a background in production and storytelling, Schmoisman has built her career at the intersection of creativity, data, and business growth, helping companies navigate the evolving retail and digital landscape.

As an immigrant entrepreneur, Schmoisman faced the challenge of rebuilding her career from the ground up in a new country. Through persistence, innovation, and a commitment to education, she successfully built The Darl into a trusted strategic partner for emerging and established brands alike.

**DANONE SIMPSON**

FINALIST
*CEO
Montage Insurance Services*

Danone Simpson began her career in insurance in 1998, working for a small agency learning about commercial insurance, employee benefits, property & casualty, workers' compensation, professional lines, and legal compliance.

Simpson opened her own agency, DSI Solutions. She has grown her business and footprint in Southern California and her agency was recently named 11th in the Los Angeles Business Journal. Simpson changed the firm's name to Montage Insurance Solutions to reflect the company's approach to assembling a customized, comprehensive picture of insurance coverage for clients. Her vision and mission reflect her client-first approach.

**SUSAN FRIES**

FINALIST
*CEO
Ecola Termite & Pest Control*

It's not often you meet a woman in the pest control industry, let alone one as multifaceted and accomplished as Sue Fries. Known nationally as "The Termite Lady," Fries has built her career on pioneering eco-friendly solutions while inspiring others to live with purpose and faith.

Fries entered the pest control field in 1980 and became one of the earliest advocates for green pest control methods. Since 2000, she has led Ecola Termite and Pest Control, guiding the company to national recognition while serving on boards including the Pest Control Operators of California, United Against Indoor Pollution, and the Indoor Allergen Control Network.

**JUDY ZHU**

FINALIST
*CEO
Syneer Foods USA*

As CEO of Syneer Foods USA, Judy Zhu has taken what was once a specialized brand and turned it into a staple of the American frozen food aisle. While she has a clear eye for brand strategy, her real impact has been in her operational execution.

Under Zhu's leadership, Syneer pushed through a 2025 expansion into Sam's Club locations nationwide, securing the brand's place in the \$16 billion global dumpling market. In addition to Sam's Club, she has built and maintained high-impact partnerships with major retailers including Costco, Albertson's, and H-Mart, strengthening national distribution and brand visibility.