

Deborah R. Stairs is an accomplished executive in human resources with extensive experience in talent acquisition, organizational development, and change management. With a solid history of driving performance improvements across various organizations, she has held leadership roles in prominent institutions such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Tennessee Valley, Faith Promise Church, and Oak Ridge National Laboratory (UT-Battelle LLC).



In her role as Vice President of Human Resources and Talent Management at Boys & Girls Clubs of the Tennessee Valley, Dr. Stairs developed and executed comprehensive HR strategies for a network of 31 daycare facilities. Her expertise includes re-implementing HRIS systems, revising recruitment processes, and developing HR policies.

At Faith Promise Church, she served as Executive Director of People Operations, where she spearheaded HR functions, improved employee engagement, and optimized payroll systems. During her tenure at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Dr. Stairs implemented workforce restructuring efforts, saving millions in operational costs, and enhancing diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Dr. Stairs holds a Ph.D. in Experimental Psychology with an emphasis on Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Murray State University. Her career is marked by a dedication to employee welfare, leadership development, and the successful execution of organizational change initiatives.

Debbie also teaches undergraduate programs in the Haslam School of Business at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. At the University, she served on the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship Advisory Board. She served on this Advisory Board from 2013 through June 2024.

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She has held management positions at Blue Rhino, Eastman Chemical Company, Mirant Corporation, Anheuser-Busch, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. The western Kentucky native received her doctorate in experimental psychology from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

She and her husband, Travis Smith, reside in Knoxville, TN.