

Noise Sounds Good To Her

How Michelle Jones proved her worth in environmental management

By: Alexis McCombs

Part 2 of
"A Woman of Power" Series.

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When Michelle Jones, founder and president of the Southern California-based Entech Consulting Group, first met with a potential customer, she was asked why they should bring on a start-up company and deal with someone who appeared to be so young.

Jones, 37, explained that a couple months prior, she had been laid off from a more established firm that provided the same services in environmental construction management. "My boss would have met with you, passed the work on to me and charged you a higher fee. (Now, you can) come to me directly and I can save you a lot of money by eliminating the middle man."

It was preparation for tough questions and well thought out strategy on how to market herself that allowed Jones to seal the deal with the company that would become Entech's first large client in 1996.



Michelle Jones

Prior Jones had worked full time as an air quality staff engineer at Dames & More; an environmental energy group. She and husband Fred, now Entech's vice president and operations manager, lived solely off his salary and accumulated almost three years of income before she was eventually let go.

With a civil engineering degree from the University of Washington and four years of corporate experience, she did extensive research of public files, identified companies that were in violation of government standards, developed a phone script and made cold calls to pitch herself for jobs. She says, "I knew I'd have to start with a list of 500 just to get to 5 appointments, so I kept at it."

In 1997, the company became highly profitable after Jones landed a multimillion-dollar subcontractor deal. Seattle was building construction to connect the light rail, commuter rail and bus hubs in the Puget Sound area of the city. Entech worked under a large engineering firm and managed the environmental aspects of the project.

As a result of the exposure and subsequent referrals, Entech blossomed. Jones was able to carve a niche in the market by specializing in noise and air quality studies and recently purchased an office building after expanding into Southern California.

Despite her track record, Jones says she often encounters opposition from decision-makers who feel that small businesses don't do good work.

To help dissolve that myth, Jones helped create the Calmentor program. The organization works with the California Transportation Department to provide more meaningful architectural and engineering opportunities to small businesses. The program was recently recognized by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and implemented across the state in 2006.

Tony Velasquez, Chair of the program's Steering Committee says, Jones was instrumental in

marrying the organization with large firms that could provide mentoring and contracts for small companies. "Without her participation, I don't know if we would have succeeded in addressing those that questioned why they should be involved and what they would get out of it," he says.

Building upon her successes, Jones' goal is to increase Entech's prime contracting opportunities. Eventually she would like to pass the company on to her sons who are ages 4 and 6. "I hope they'll have interest in it," she says. Things look promising, "they tell me 'mommy I want to grow up and be on email like you.'"

Woman of Power:	Michelle Jones
Company Description:	Environmental Construction Management
Employees:	25
Founded:	Oct-93
Annual Revenue:	\$2.2 Million
Advice:	Find someone who's doing what you want to do, Go to books, immerse yourself in that subject
Favorite Aspect of Being Your Own Boss:	Being in charge, you make it happen
Biggest Challenge:	Overcoming negative comments

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