

PIPELINE

piping systems inc.

COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL/INSTITUTIONAL MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS

SPRING 2012

PSI's Woman-Owned Business Certificate Is Renewed

Piping Systems was recently notified of the successful renewal of its Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) certification. Founded in 1997, WBENC is the largest third-party certifier of businesses owned, controlled and operated by women in the United States. WBENC, a national 501(c)(3) non-profit, partners with 14 Regional Partner Organizations to provide its world class standard of certification to women-owned businesses throughout the country.

WBENC certification is a rigorous, multi-faceted business application and review process that is conducted by a trained Certification Review Committee to ensure that women-owned businesses applying for certification are at least 51% owned, operated and controlled by a woman or group of women. Piping Systems, Inc. has been certified by WBENC as a woman-owned business since 2004.

In addition to renewing the WBENC, PSI was recently notified that the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office (SDO) has renewed its certification as a woman-owned business enterprise (WBE); PSI's business description is listed with the SDO as: Commercial and Industrial Piping including steam, air and water, high-pressure boiler installations, repairs and alterations of high-pressure vessels; holder of ASME Certified S, U and PP Stamp; holder of National Board R Stamp. Piping Systems has maintained this certification since 2005.

This Is My Story...And I'm Sticking To It!

For this issue, I thought I'd share some of my experiences as a woman-owned business in a male-dominated field. I suspect that many of our customers do not know that Piping Systems, Inc. (PSI) is owned by a woman because I believe in leading by supporting, which means that I'm usually managing in the background. I read once that the best leaders are those who support and provide resources for those around them to be successful. This is how I run my business.

Last year marked PSI's 40-year anniversary. Wow! That seems like a long time. Since 1990, when I purchased the company from my brother and my dad, I always dreamed of being certified as a Woman-Owned Business (WOB), also known as Woman Business Enterprise (WBE).

I don't know why really, but it seemed like a goal or a stepping stone that would be worth reaching for, especially in a field dominated by men. Of course, I like men. I like tough guys, nice guys, guys that get satisfaction out of working with their hands, guys who ride motorcycles, guys who are not afraid of trying new things, guys that are comfortable in their own skin, guys in touch with their "feminine side"; you get the picture. Maybe its because I never had sons. Even my two daughters took after their mom; they both ended up in male-dominated fields—one was a software engineer and the other a fire protection engineer.

My dad brought me up to be independent. When I began dating, he advised me to always have enough money in my pocket to be able to take a taxi home in case I got into an argument with my boyfriend or in case he got "fresh." Before my first marriage, I surprised my soon-to-be husband when I told him that I wanted my married name to be hyphenated with my maiden name along with his family name. Needless to say, the marriage did not start off well and it ended after a few years. I'm still friendly with him and his family, and I've since remarried. I don't hyphenate my name anymore, but I use my maiden name as my middle name.

My desire to hyphenate my name also caused problems with the Coast Guard. I served a four-year stint in the Coast Guard Reserves back in the late '70s. It took a while to get my name tag, but I finally did receive one with my hyphenated name. During my last year, I got pregnant. They did not have maternity uniforms for me. I think they were glad when I did not reenlist. I was not your typical Yeoman.

While growing up, I never looked at myself as "female," it was more like I was a "person" who could do whatever she wanted.

During the '70s, it was a revelation to me that it was a big deal that as females we could actually become
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Avoid Eyestrain At The Computer



If you spend most of your workday staring at a computer monitor, you may notice an abnormal number of red blood vessels in the whites of your eyes. Prolonged work at a computer can lead to engorged blood vessels, along with dry, itchy eyes. Here are several tips to avoid computer-vision syndrome:

- Rest your eyes regularly. Take breaks away from the computer.
- Blink frequently to keep moisture moving to your corneas.
- Reduce the glare from your monitor by adjusting the light around your desk, or using a screen filter.
- Place your monitor at or just below eye level.
- Keep the distance between your eyes and the monitor about the same distance as you would when reading a book.
- Check the prescriptions of your eyeglasses or contacts regularly to be sure they are correct.
- Upgrade to a liquid-crystal-display (LCD) monitor or another model with a high refresh rate that flickers less.

Tips For Positive-Minded Managers

Managing people calls for a mix of skills, and any list is bound to leave a few important items off. But these three issues are crucial to leading with integrity and building a positive, productive relationship with your workforce:

- **The golden rule.** Don't adopt a "Do as I say, not as I do" attitude with your employees. If you expect them to be honest with you, tell them the truth even when it feels awkward or risky. Don't tell them to get the job done any way they can and then criticize their methods. Be consistent and fair in your treatment of everyone you work with.
- **The face-to-face element.** Employees need to feel comfortable talking to you one on one. If their only interaction comes through curt emails and brief, meaningless chats, they won't ask questions, make suggestions or alert you to problems when you've got the best chance of avoiding disaster. Be approachable: Keep your door open, symbolically and literally, as much as possible; listen to what they say; and watch for hints that they want to tell you more. Encourage employees to speak their minds, and don't punish them when they do.
- **Everybody makes mistakes.** Employees won't lose respect for you when you're wrong, unless you refuse to admit it. Don't waste time attempting to justify your decisions when they fail to achieve results: Be open about what went wrong, and then move on. Results, not excuses, matter to employees and managers alike.

Brisk Walks Improve Memory

Exercise is good for everyone, but recent research indicates it has special benefits for older people. In a study funded by the National Institute on Aging, 120 people ages 55 to 80 were divided into two groups, with half instructed to walk for 40 minutes a day three times a week. The other half did exercises to stretch and tone their muscles.

After six months, and then one year, the scientists measured the size of participants' hippocampus, a section of the brain that tends to shrink with age.

In the walking group, the volume of the hippocampus had increased by 2% at the end of the year, while in the other group the hippocampus had decreased by 1.5%.

So whatever your age, remember that taking a brisk walk can keep you healthy throughout your life in many different ways.

Cell Phone Civility

Cell phones sometimes seem to create as many problems as they solve. To smooth over the rough spots, *CellPhones.org* has put together this list of common cell phone etiquette tips:

- **Lower your voice.** Don't force everyone around you to listen to your half of the conversation.
- **Avoid personal subjects.** Resist the temptation to overshare where complete strangers can listen to your intimate secrets.
- **Don't take calls (or texts) when talking to someone else.** If



necessary, ask permission before answering your phone.

- **Silence your ringer in theaters.** Put it on vibrate, and don't answer your phone while others are watching the movie, play or performance.
- **Don't get mad about dropped calls.** You'll lose 2-4 calls every week if you make 100 calls per week. Don't blame the other person for a dropped call. It happens.
- **Keep your distance.** Whenever possible, stay about 10 feet away from others when talking on your phone.

SPEED BUMP

Dave Coverly



Trips And Falls At Work Are No Laughing Matter

We joke about people who can't walk and chew gum at the same time, and we laugh when a clown takes a tumble, but in a workplace filled with distractions and potential dangers, a simple trip and fall can cause injury—and a lawsuit. Don't take any chances.

Eliminate these workplace obstacles:

- **Uneven floors.** A half-inch difference between floor levels can catch anyone off guard and cause a fall.
- **Wet floors.** Leakage, spills and rain/snow from outdoors will create a slick floor and pose a hazard.
- **Floor mats.** If not securely fastened, they can curl up or slide unexpectedly.
- **Poor lighting.** If employees can't see where they're walking, they'll run into things.
- **Cables and cords.** Computers, office equipment, power strips and the like can set up a web of hard-to-see tripping points.

Take these commonsense precautions to protect employees, customers and yourself:

- **Keep your workplace clean.** Remove potential hazards wherever you spot them. Don't allow litter, boxes or other debris to clutter the floors. Clean up spills right away.
- **Provide good lighting.** Replace burned-out bulbs right away. As you walk through your workplace, look for areas where lighting may not be sufficient, and install additional lighting as necessary.
- **Post warning signs.** Highlight dangers to watch for—low doorways, areas that may be slippery, uneven surfaces, etc. Make sure your signage can't be missed.

Perspective On 'Useful' Talents

A woman hired a bricklayer to build a wall outside her home.

Talking with him while he worked, she was amazed to discover he was the brother of a brilliant concert violinist whom she'd recently seen perform.

"Oh, you're so lucky to have such a talented brother," she said.

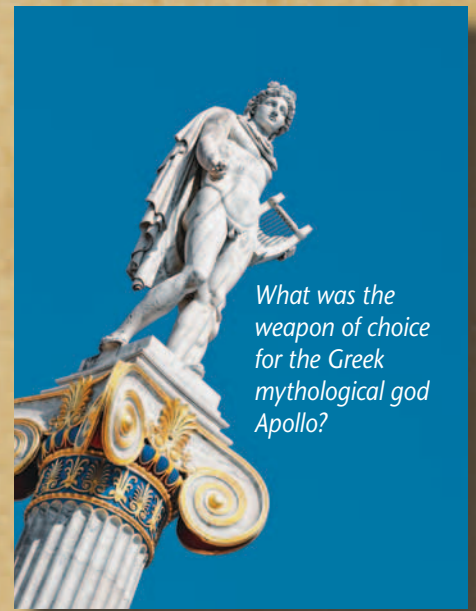
Then, fearing the man might be sensitive about his manual labor job, she added: "Of course, we can't all be equally talented."

"You said it, lady," the man responded earnestly. "Take my brother. When it comes to doing something important like building a house, he's useless."

Eliminate Barriers To Creativity

You can't turn creativity on and off like a light switch. You can, however, pave the way to innovative thinking by clearing out some of the more common obstacles to creative solutions. Eliminate these roadblocks:

- **Defining problems too narrowly.** Look at the situation from many different angles before deciding on what kind of solution you're looking for. A synthetic fiber manufacturer, for example, wanted to reduce the cost of manufacturing a particular product. Instead of solving that problem, however, the workers found a way to increase the sales for that product. By not narrowing their focus to the issue of costs, they identified the real problem—low profits.
- **Judging ideas prematurely.** Instead of discarding ideas that seem impractical or unsuitable at first glance, ask, "What's good about this idea?" By withholding judgment, you may find useful ideas embedded within aspects of otherwise unworkable concepts.
- **Stopping with the first good idea.** Even when an idea sounds promising, don't stop coming up with alternatives too quickly. Often the best, most creative ideas don't appear until after the initial flash of brainstorming activity has been exhausted.
- **Obeying "rules" too rigidly.** What assumptions are you making about the situation? They may not be valid. Often, we ignore good ideas because they don't seem to fit the rules we've always followed; but if you begin questioning those rules, you may find out that you can change them.



What was the weapon of choice for the Greek mythological god Apollo?

Trivial Matters

- 1) What was the weapon of choice for the Greek mythological god Apollo?
 - a) bow and arrow
 - b) spear
 - c) hammer
 - d) lightning bolt
- 2) Which nation was *not* a principal member of the Axis during World War II?
 - a) Germany
 - b) Italy
 - c) Soviet Union
 - d) Japan
- 3) Which NFL team's logo features a collection of shapes known as *astroids*?
 - a) San Diego Chargers
 - b) Pittsburgh Steelers
 - c) New Orleans Saints
 - d) Cincinnati Bengals
- 4) Introduced in 1961, the Cricket was the first brand-name disposable what?
 - a) lighter
 - b) pen
 - c) flashlight
 - d) syringe
- 5) According to company statistics, the average Facebook user has how many friends?
 - a) 5
 - b) 12
 - c) 45
 - d) 130

—from *mental_floss*

Answers: 1) a 2) c 3) b (Based on the old Steelmark logo, the three shapes are yellow, orange and blue.) 4) a 5) d

This Is My Story... from page 1

President of the United States if we wanted to. I just assumed that it was possible. Today, I wouldn't take that job if it were given to me.

When I began seriously working at PSI (cleaning up the office and toilets doesn't count!), I was in my junior year at college pursuing an Accounting degree at what was then known as Southeastern Massachusetts University (now known as UMass-Dartmouth). I began working full-time while finishing up my last year at college; I finally graduated in five years. I don't remember it being a conscious choice to work at PSI, but rather something that I kind of fell into.

My dad was a huge influence in my life and he kept reminding me that the business was a wonderful opportunity for me as an accountant. When I told him I wanted to work in the field, he was a little taken aback and thought I would tire of it fast. I think he realized at that point he had created a monster and he had to live up to what he had been preaching to me—that I could be whatever I wanted to be.

After purchasing my brother's interest in the company and then the remaining financial interest from my father in 1990, I was now the sole owner of PSI. I realized this was only the first step in becoming a WBE. In Massachusetts, one of the requirements to being certified as a WBE was to hold the Master license of the trade in which you were being certified. This meant that I had to earn my Mass. pipefitter's license. This was a stretch, but not impossible.

Eventually, after serving an apprenticeship, I was able to test for a journeyman's license, and passed. In Massachusetts, you must hold your journeyman's license for at least one year in order to apply for a Master's license. After the year passed, I applied to take the test, failed the first time but passed the second. I've held the license since 2005. After that, it was a matter of proving that I was actually involved in my company full-time and was truly "woman-owned," which required tons of paperwork documentation.

In general, it's impossible to gauge how much WBE growth is driven by utilization goals and set-asides. PSI has certainly grown, not necessarily volume-wise but in other, more important ways such as efficiency, productivity, customer satisfaction and other areas. There are some that feel that set-asides have a negative connotation, but as a businessperson, I would be foolish to ignore something that can be helpful to my business.

During my last thirty years, there have been many low points, but they've always been more than outshined by the high points. I've come to realize that PSI is certainly a piping business, but it is so much more. It's a place where we can do our best in satisfying our customers. It means so much to all of us when we get an unsolicited compliment for a job well done.

It also means a lot to us when we have an unhappy customer. It doesn't happen too often, but when it does, I do my best to explain to the customer that we are dealing with people, and that "pipe and fittings" just happen to be the tools we have. People have bad days; human beings are not perfect, but we try our best to correct the situation so that, at the very minimum, we know we've done a good job. The best customer is a happy customer.

PSI is also a place where employees are encouraged to be their best. When I think back, I remember some of the "old school" thinking that it was never wise to compliment employees on a job well done. That might lead to them asking for a raise. I never believed in holding back praise. When someone deserves kudos for a job well done, they know about it and I encourage the managers to give the field technicians feedback—good and bad.

One of the goals that I set for myself about 10 years ago was to create a place where "ordinary people do extraordinary things" and where everyone feels that they, along with their fellow workers, through their employment at PSI, are contributing to something meaningful, allowing them to work towards being the best person they can be. The fact that we've had numerous father-and-son teams (we have three presently) means, I think, that team members believe this is a good place to work. I've learned over the years that the key to having happy customers is to have happy team members.

Some might think of me as being crazy. I may be, and I've also been told that I'm eccentric, but sometimes you need to be crazy and eccentric to stay in business for more than 40 years. I'm telling you that my business philosophies work and that, overall, we've been very successful thanks to all our customers, suppliers and, most importantly, our team members.

—Pauline L. Lally, President/Treasurer

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