



We Found *Excellence*

We did it... You can too... Here's how...

**Successful Case Studies
of Minority and Women Business Entrepreneurs**

by Michael Kaye



Affirmative Market Program
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Champions of the *Affirmative Market Program*



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Lieutenant Governor



Leslie Kirwin, *Secretary of
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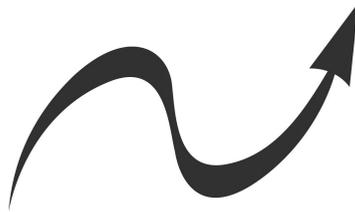
Ellen Phillips, *Deputy
State Purchasing Agent*



AMP Staff

“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan “press on” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”

- President Calvin Coolidge



Nitsch Engineering

Nitsch Engineering

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Judith Nitsch, President

Judy Nitsch started Nitsch Engineering in 1989. Previously, Judy was a principal at the consulting engineering firm of Allen Demurjian Major and Nitsch when a former client purchased the whole company. As per a previous interview, Judy said, “The buyer wanted one other principal besides Larry, one of the original partners. So it was between Jim and me. It was agreed that I’d stay, but then I began to think about starting my own firm. At a meeting one day, everyone went to the bathroom except Jim

and me. He said he wasn’t sure he wanted to work for another company. I said, ‘Great, I’m not sure I want to stay.’ So when everybody came back, Jim and I announced that we’d switch: He would stay and I would leave.” This was when Judy decided to start her own firm.

The company started out as Judith Nitsch Engineering and changed its name to Nitsch Engineering in 2006.

Nitsch Engineering specializes in providing civil engineering, land surveying, transportation engineering, sustainable site consulting, planning and GIS services. The company has grown to become the largest Woman-Owned Business Enterprise (WBE) civil engineering firm in Massachusetts, and is also certified as a WBE in New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Since 1989, they have completed projects in 17 states and five countries.

When Judy and I met in her downtown Boston office on a Friday afternoon, she had just returned the night before from a 10-day business trip. But she was well prepared for our meeting, focused and professional, and I saw the pride on Judy’s face as she spoke about Nitsch Engineering. These qualities, in addition to her enthusiasm, are some of the key ingredients to the success of Nitsch Engineering.

I started out the conversation asking Judy, “What did it take to get where you are?” The first word she said was “perseverance.”

Nitsch Engineering's main goal was to prove to clients that their firm provided top-notch services. They wanted to be used for their capabilities, not only for their WBE status. In fact, Judy resisted the whole notion of becoming a WBE for their first two years of business. Judy said, "We did not want to even apply for WBE status. Unfortunately, the reputation (in some people's eyes) of many WBE firms then was negative – they were considered fronts or outright shams. I was afraid people who had never met me or worked with me would automatically have a negative perception of the firm and of our work."

But Judy had two clients who kept asking her to become certified so she could do public projects with them under Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) set-aside provisions. She finally consented to their requests, got the certification, and made those clients happy. After that, business took off exponentially. There was a very real need then for legitimate WBEs able to perform well on large, public projects.

Judy went on to say that anyone in her position needs to have goals to succeed. Then you should create a strategic plan and a marketing plan that outline how you will reach these goals. You also need check-in meetings to see where you are according to your plan. Nitsch Engineering created their first strategic plan in 1993 and have updated it as necessary over the past 15 years. This planning has worked; the company now employs 60 people and has sales of over \$8 million.

Judith Nitsch Engineering established a strategic goal in 1993 to be the "WBE of choice." Judy said, "And let me tell you, that worked beautifully. We began to work with and gain the trust of the big engineering firms who were our clients. We made sure we kept all of our promises. We did become the WBE of choice and saw our workload grow not only in size but also in complexity. And that was a breakthrough for us in terms of revenue and visibility."

In 1995 for a Central Artery/Tunnel project, Nitsch Engineering insisted on a WBE subcontract that involved responsibility for a "meaningful" portion of the work. As a result, Nitsch's scope included the design of five city streets; now Nitsch Engineering has prime contracts with the City of Boston Public Works Department.

As the author of this book, I can see how the SOMWBA certification process has progressed in their methods used for certification and also in creating credibility. I can definitely see how SOMWBA certified M/WBEs have contributed to the growth of the Massachusetts economy, created thousands of jobs and have also saved the Commonwealth millions of dollars.

From my research for this book, I noticed that Judith Nitsch made a significant speech at Governor William Weld's press conference on Executive Order #390 in 1996. This was when the Affirmative Market Program was established. This is proof that the reputations and credibility of the M/WBE community has grown significantly.

This also shows how Judy Nitsch is more than a Licensed Professional Engineer and LEED Accredited Professional (along with her several other accreditations). She is also involved in the community and believes in volunteering her time. Besides being on several boards, Judy has been very involved in "Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day" for the last eight years.

Judy also said a firm should have a diverse customer base and a diverse project portfolio. For instance, in 1991, WBE work as a percentage of total revenues at Nitsch Engineering was 25%. This grew to 75% in 1993 through 1996. Now the % of WBE revenue is down to 15%. But remember, that 15% is of a much larger total revenue than in those early days. Judy has developed a much more diverse customer and project base which has made Nitsch Engineering a stronger company.

And talking about what makes a stronger company, Nitsch Engineering is extremely people oriented. I can see how the people are supported and, encouraged to grow and prosper at Nitsch Engineering. A testimonial to this is that Nitsch received the following recognitions;

Best Civil Engineering Firm to work for in the United States for the past four years by CE News Magazine.

2006 Employer of the Year from Women's Transportation Seminar International

2006 Employer Recognition Award from the American Society of Civil Engineers.

Judy says she focuses on business development and can help the firm get the first job with a new client. But it is the employees who keep that job and continue to get additional projects for the firm. She encourages each employee to "do a good job with a smile on their face." Nitsch Engineering is also proactive in encouraging employees to grow and develop through their sponsorship of training and seminars, tuition reimbursement and professional society memberships.

Moving forward, Judy feels that one of the keys to success is having an ownership transition plan. Part of this is ensuring that key leaders are seen and known by clients so

that the transition is seamless. This goes hand-in-hand with attracting top employees and the training and development mentioned above.

One strong piece of advice Judy would recommend to other minority and women businesses is to have an advisory board or advisory committee. An advisory board is a paid board that meets four times a year with the Board of Directors. These meetings are well organized and scheduled to address the different issues of the company. “Tackle the hard issues with them,” per Judy. Judy said creating this advisory committee is one of the best things she ever did.

Another strong piece of advice is to establish a strong banking relationship. Many banks do not want to start to work with a start-up business. Judy went through this when she was first starting her business. Then Eastern Bank opened their door to her. Judy has had an excellent relationship with Eastern Bank for the past 15 years. In fact, she has been a bank trustee since 2000.

And speaking about banking, another piece of advice is to get an excellent controller. This is such an important part of the business.

I then asked Judy, “And what other advice can you give both existing and future minority and women business entrepreneurs?”

- Have a differentiator from the competition to stand out
- Be seen... press releases, a good website, be where your clients are
- Be ethical
- Be professional
- Keep clients happy
- Provide excellent service and a consistent quality project
- Enjoy what you do
- Be accounting / business savvy... create an annual budget
- Listen to your clients and their needs, and help them

In summary, Nitsch Engineering has completed over 750 projects for agencies such as MassPort, MassHighway, DCAM, the Turnpike Authority, and MWRA.

Here is a testimonial that reinforces the previous remark:

“Nitsch Engineering has tackled many assignments on behalf of the Division of Capital Asset Management. They consistently perform at a high level, using their creativity and technical skills in delivering cost-effective solutions for even the most challenging engineering and design problems.”

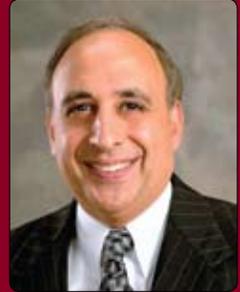
Michael Kimmey
Deputy Commissioner for Planning, Design & Construction

Footnote: 1. I would like to thank Inc. Magazine for the opening paragraph that they wrote in their December 22, 1996 article when Nitsch Engineering was recognized as #172 on the Inc. 500 list

Footnote: 2. I would like to thank Michael J. Reilly, FSMPS, President of Reilly Communications for excerpts taken from the article he wrote Flying with Eagles; An interview with Judith Nitsch, P.E. in the October 2001 publication of SMPS's Marketer magazine

continued

About the author



Michael is the proud recipient of:

- The Governor's Citation, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in recognition of his dedicated service to minority and women entrepreneurs in public contracting.
- The Affirmative Market Program Special Recognition Award, for his efforts and significant contributions to the Commonwealth's Affirmative Market Program through creativity, initiative and commitment to minority and women business entrepreneurs.
- The Best Performance Vendor Award, Affirmative Market Program, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for outstanding record for customer satisfaction in execution of contracts and exhibited the best record in contract performance and deliverables.

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