

The success challenge

Most women executives put focus on customers, employees rather than the bottom line

See WOMEN EXECS, B7

Women execs

By Rosemary Winters
The Salt Lake Tribune

Sue Rice started her own business three years ago because the risk gave her a rush and she wanted to compete - and win.

Dolores Gossner Wheeler boosted revenue at her Logan dairy company in two decades from \$38 million to \$165 million by focusing on people, not the bottom line.

The motivations and management styles of these Utah chief executives are consistent with those of most women business leaders, according to a new study by the Women's Leadership Center at Babson College in Wellesley, Mass., and The Commonwealth Institute in Boston.

Because most management literature is based on male executives, the study was undertaken to profile female leadership, says principal author Nan Langowitz. Women surveyed picked customer satisfaction (97 percent) and employee satisfaction (92 percent) as their most important business priorities over profitability, market share and sales growth.



Sue Rice , of Cavanaugh Services (third from left) talks to her staff (from Left) Mark Manzanares, Leah Walsh, David Pitt (standing) Amanda Harding, and Andrew Drom. (Paul Fraughton/The Salt Lake Tribune)

"That's different from standard business wisdom that focuses on the bottom line," says Langowitz, director of the Women's Leadership Center. Women "believe that if you get [the people] part right, it will lead to the financial results and business performance desired."

It appears to be a successful strategy. The women surveyed reported average revenue of \$28 million, and 54 percent experienced 5 percent growth or more from the previous year.

"You have to keep your customer happy. That's the main [component] of any business," says Wheeler, president and chief executive of Gossner Foods Inc. "If you don't have happy customers, you're not going to succeed."

Debunking some stereotypes about women, the study found that few get into business out of economic necessity. Most are seeking a challenge and personal achievement. The survey of 215 chief executives in Massachusetts also found that



Sue Rice, of Cavanaugh Services Group Inc., owns a company that transports hazardous waste from environmental clean-up sites. (Paul Fraughton/The Salt Lake Tribune)

women direct businesses in a variety of industries.

"The presence of these women-led businesses in virtually every sector of the economy runs counter to what many people expect," Langowitz says. "Often people assume that women can only be successful in businesses about things . . . such as fashion, food or cosmetics."

Rice packages and transports hazardous material from environmental clean-up sites, primarily through contracts with the federal government. In just three years, she has built Cavanagh Services Group Inc. into a \$10 million business. She gave the company her mother's maiden name and painted her rail and truck containers purple to emphasize that their owner is a woman.

"The business I'm in is extremely male-dominated," Rice says. "That just motivates me more because I'm the underdog and I want to show them that I can do it, too."

Like Wheeler, Rice says customers and employees are her top priorities. She tries to give clients especially good service to stand out from her competitors.

Rice only has eight employees, but she covers half of their health insurance plans, provides retirement benefits, has a bonus program and pays above-average wages for the state.

"It's critical to survive in business, but if you . . . focus on customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction, the money will come," Rice says. "You have to take care of the people who are taking care of your bottom line."

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Profile of women's business leadership

Profile of the typical woman CEO

* 27 years of experience

| 13 years in her current position

| 77 percent also founded their companies

| Generates \$28 million in company revenue

| Oversees more than 100 employees

| 54 percent increased revenue by 5 percent or more from 2003 to 2004

Women's most important

business priorities:

Customer satisfaction - 97 percent

Employee satisfaction - 92 percent

Company culture - 81 percent

Work/life balance - 67 percent

High profitability - 64 percent

Rapid sales growth - 48 percent

Personal financial reward - 46 percent

High market share - 41 percent

Women's motives for

becoming executives

Personal achievement - 85 percent

Challenge - 80 percent

Autonomy - 65 percent

Flexibility - 62 percent

Financial reward - 58 percent,

Implement great idea - 51 percent

Avoid glass ceiling - 33 percent

Economic necessity - 27 percent

- Source: 2004 Top Woman-Led -Businesses in Massachusetts by Babson College and The Commonwealth Institute



Sue Rice of Cavanagh Services meets with her employee Amanda Harding. (Paul Fraughton/The Salt Lake Tribune)