

2012 WEST Leadership Awardee



Pam Reeve
Founder and CEO of Lightbridge

“Don’t Wait For The Opportunity To Present Itself. Create It!”

What achievement in your career are you most proud of?

It was a thrill to take a crazy idea (offering software as a service) to a nascent industry (cellular) and grow it into a real company. We were an upstart and created services that giants in the industry (AT&T, Nextel, Sprint, Telcel in Mexico, etc) grew to depend on and pay us for! Going public was a major milestone. Surviving the telcom/internet meltdown was an indication of the company's resilience. For me personally, it was privilege to grow the company to nearly 1,500 people and to have the kind of culture I wanted to work in.

What advice do you have for young women in science and technology careers who want to expand their options?

Women are encouraged to be givers, which is fine—it's one of our wonderful attributes. But I'd also strongly urge women to be takers: (1) Take charge—of your career and life. No one is going to give you all the credit you deserve; your work is not simply going to stand on its own. You need to be your own advocate and be conscious of how to be successful in your environment. (2) Take action—don't wait for the opportunity to present itself. Create it! (3) Take risks—when I started Lightbridge, I had two kids about to go into college, two youngsters at home, sick and elderly parents, and a husband who'd had a heart attack. So I took a 70% pay cut and let her rip. (I have to admit that it didn't feel all that risky at the time.) I always ask myself "How bad could it be, and is that really so bad?" (4) Take time for yourself. You have to re-charge your body and soul.

What significant obstacles did you have to overcome?

Creating a new space in an evolving industry was challenging. Because of the way we delivered our services, we had the chance to blow it every day; so we were constantly proving our worth to clients. Many of the experiences I had were new to me; so despite having the CEO title, I was learning quite a bit on the job; so going public, dealing with the scrutiny and second-guessing, making acquisitions (and making them work), establishing international partners, were challenges and thrilling to accomplish.

What was one of your major accomplishments?

I felt we needed to make a major acquisition to develop a strong new revenue line, since our internal efforts didn't achieve scale. I successfully negotiated the purchase of Authorize.net, pulling my board of directors across the finish line and dealing with some thorny issues at the last moment with the seller. This acquisition alone provided tremendous value to shareholders (sold less than three years later for more than 5x the purchase price, and opportunities for staff.)

What mentor had the biggest effect on your career and why?

I have been fortunate to have a number of people provide advice and counsel along the way. I would have to cite the debate and drama teacher/coach who singled me out in high school and set me on a path that was completely different than the one I expected. I learned so much from her: work hard towards a goal, be in a team environment where individual and team effort is required, win and lose with grace. These lessons have served me well.

Can you describe your career progression and what roles were significant in getting you to where you are today?

Mostly I would say I never did the job I was hired for. Either my dumb luck in choosing flexible organizations to work for, or my naiveté to grab whatever I felt was important to do, allowed me to build a variety of experiences that leveraged me forward. I feel very lucky that way. And having a few flops along the way, while painful, can be really helpful, too!

How do you balance your work and life?

This is so hard. I was at Boston Consulting Group for eleven years. Long hours and lots of travel. Being the CEO of any company, and certainly a public company, felt like a 24/7 gig most of the time. I have been fortunate to have a supportive family and support structure to help me along the way. And mostly, I have been able to hold certain things sacred—making the key events in my children's lives (well, most of the time...) and taking time off, even if a long-weekend where they are the center of attention.