

Sue Sylvester

President, Absolute Resource Associates



Sue Sylvester graduated with a degree in environmental science and began her career when clean water regulations were new and the environmental testing industry was rapidly growing.

After working in and managing some of the nation's largest environmental companies, Sue and her husband acquired Absolute Resource Associates (formerly Resource Laboratories) in 2000. Under their leadership, the company has experienced steady growth, tripling in revenue, staffing and facility size.

What motivated you to become an entrepreneur?

Two events: the business I helped build was sold to an owner who destroyed it, and my disappointment when a lab owner changed his mind and didn't sell the business to me. In order to stay in this industry, I needed my own business to control my destiny! Absolute Resource Associates is a woman-owned business, but what makes us successful comes from who we work with – our employees, customers, vendors and associates.

Did you find the federal procurement process difficult to navigate?

At first, it was very difficult to navigate. It is an entirely different way of finding opportunities, bidding on a contract and doing the work. There is a lot to learn, but there are also a lot of excellent resources.

Why do women-owned businesses struggle to get federal contracts?

Women-owned businesses need the infrastructure in place in order to work in the federal markets,

the time to invest in the marketing and an unwavering determination to break into the market. Many don't have all three. If they don't have the infrastructure and they win a bid, they are setting themselves up to fail and may never be called again. They also need to accept that it is going to command a lot of time. Mapping out a plan and delegating other tasks helps free up the time necessary to break into this market.

How has sole source contracting opened the door to growth opportunities?

Sole sourcing has definitely given us another "foot in the door." The sole source program gives contracting officers the ability to "try" smaller contractors like Absolute Resource Associates for niche services or smaller jobs, and this gives small companies the experience needed to further compete.

Advice for young female entrepreneurs?

Don't give up! It is a long road and not for the faint of heart. If you commit your business plan to doing federal work, be prepared to invest the time, work, sweat and tears to make it happen for your company. Surround yourself with supportive, positive people who are committed to the plan, and use all of the available training and resources. ■