



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B

Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-5947

Fax 888-656-0661

www.nwsi.com

Breaking the Gender Mold



Sonal Shah

President

Northwest Software, Inc.

Beaverton, OR



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B

Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-5947

Fax 888-656-0661

www.nwsi.com

Sonal Shah, President and owner of Northwest Software, Inc. (NSI), broke the gender mold of the culture she was born into. She has broken through many barriers by believing in herself, and in others.

Shah was born and raised in Mumbai (formally known as Bombay), India. Mumbai, one of India's most westernized cities, has a population of approximately 13 million people. The city is a major industrial and financial center, which generates 35 percent of India's GNP. The economy of Mumbai consists of light and medium engineering industries as well as oil refining and petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, publishing, tobacco, leather, timber, ceramics and jewelry.

Shah comes from a family of professionals and business owners. Both of her parents were well educated; her dad is a Chemical Engineer and her mother has a degree in Economics. Her dad also owns a small manufacturing company that makes electroplating compounds. During her childhood, she frequently visited her dad's plant and learned many lessons through his business. The most important lesson was the ability to build long term staying power, regardless of any adversity that a business might experience. This lesson would come into play later on in her career.

Her parents, who worked hard and smart to achieve their goals, inspired Shah and her six sisters. In the male dominated society of India, her parents made the girls believe that women can achieve and make great contributions to society. Her dad discussed role models like Helen Keller, Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher. Her parents also encouraged the girls to pursue advanced education and to make a difference in the world. All seven sisters received advanced professional degrees. Shah became a homeopathic doctor.

After graduating from Mumbai University, Shah worked as an intern in a hospital and helped her father with his business. Shah's training in hospital emergency cases taught her about 911 responsiveness. Responding to emergency situations would be a useful tool in her future business endeavors. Hospital work was always exciting for Shah, "One of the most exciting moments for me was when one of the surgeons I was working for invited me to his home to meet his nephew, Chetan Shah. The rest is history." Subsequently in 1985, she married Chetan, who was based in the United States.

In 1986, Shah arrived to the United States to join her husband. Since Mumbai is considered to be a mini New York, Shah was used to the western ways of doing things. In order to be successful, Shah worked hard to overcome communication and cultural differences. Shah's husband helped her with the transition. During the same year, her husband was offered a senior marketing position at Intel Corporation.



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B
Beaverton, OR 97006 USA
Phone 503-629-5947
Fax 888-656-0661
www.nwsi.com

Intel also sponsored her husband for the Executive MBA program at the University of Oregon. She and her husband decided that she should also enroll in a similar program. The quality and timing of the classes at the University of Portland suited Shah's requirements. Studying business allowed her to make a smooth transition from her medical career to that of the business world.

While studying for her masters in business, Shah worked in sales for a pharmaceutical company and as a product manager for a medical instrumentation company. The idea of starting a software consulting business did not come overnight. According to Shah, "My husband and I discussed several business concepts and did a lot of research. The final decision to start an information technology and software consulting business was based on our respective strengths. My husband had an advanced degree in computers with years of experience as a software engineer. My work with healthcare companies gave me a strong background in business development and marketing."

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and the Service Corp of Retired Executives (SCORE) assisted Shah and her husband with the initial stages of their business. Shah said, "SBA and SCORE provided a lot of hand holding. We attended numerous SCORE workshops on various aspects of starting and running a business. The information was useful and helped us to get started."

In 1988, they started their home based business, Northwest Software, Incorporated (NSI), with an initial capital of \$1,000 from their personal savings. With industry contacts and effective networking, Shah made sales calls on several corporations. "After six months of persistence and thousands of rejections, we were blessed with our first customer, a small software technology company, and a \$25,000 contract for consulting services. We focused on a creating a positive experience for this client because this was the key to future success," said Shah.

In the early stages of NSI, Shah and her husband wore several hats and did whatever was required to achieve business results. As NSI grew, they reinvested the profits into organization infrastructure and personnel and defined their roles. Shah focused on business development, marketing, sales and people management. Her husband focused on technology development and finance. Under her husband's leadership, they innovated in the staffing industry, competed with large, national Fortune 1000 companies as well as public sector businesses and moved into larger offices in Beaverton, Oregon. NSI's mission is to be the premier provider of staffing across all disciplines and providing high-level consulting to organizations. The consulting focuses on taking a commodity-based approach to reduce human capital procurement cost, while increasing overall quality and responsiveness. Qualities that set NSI apart from other companies are innovation, diverse and skilled talent, quick and accurate response to matching staff and solution needs, and a broad base of Fortune 1000 and public agency customers.



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B

Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-5947

Fax 888-656-0661

www.nwsi.com

Services and Innovation

NSI offers two kinds of services staff augmentation and project solutions, which means that NSI employees design, architect, build or debug a large custom software application in two ways:

1. At the clients site and under the client's technical supervision (staff augmentation)
2. At the NSI site and under NSI's supervision (project solutions)

Shah finds innovation is the fun part of developing a successful business. NSI developed EZRecruit, a new patent-pending product that automates the entire recruiting process for temporary and full-time employees from candidate selection to final hiring. It's powerful search engine works around the clock to identify qualified people from many different sources, freeing recruiters, executives and managers to spend their time on decision-making. A recruiter or hiring manager can post a job on a web site, walk away and let EZRecruit find interested, available and qualified candidates automatically. Built-in features make it easier to create an employer brand, track candidates, build relationships and use the knowledge base to improve talent acquisition and retention. "With EZRecruit our customers have the potential of saving millions in their temporary and permanent staffing programs, while enhancing overall quality and responsiveness," said Shah.

"When we decided to invest in EZRecruit, we were wary about taking the risk. The investment in time and money was significant. However, this was one of our best decisions as it has helped us compete with larger, national companies and increased our value proposition to our customers. EZRecruit is a true competitive advantage that makes it fun to call on customers," said Shah.

Diverse and Skilled Talent

Gender has definitely helped Shah. As a 100 percent woman-owned business, she is able to open new doors through diversity programs at Fortune 1000 corporations and public agencies. According to Shah, "Woman-owned or diversity status gets the bid, but the ability to do the work gets the business."

Shah's biggest challenge in running a business is people, " Acquiring, managing and motivating people is the overall biggest challenge. We look for people who challenge the status quo and constructively confront conflicts. We are in a people business. People will have strong work ethics, dedication and loyalty only if we take care of them." NSI's employees are dynamic, highly skilled and motivated. Shah specifically strives to have a diversified work place.



Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B

Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-5947

Fax 888-656-0661

www.nwsi.com

The help you need

Shah's determination and persistence helped her to survive the early years of business with a minimum budget when business and support was low. She capitalized on her strong sales and marketing experiences and focused on developing her business. After years of putting in 50-60 hours a week, Shah earned contracts from several major companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Tektronix, and IBM to name a few. She built rapport with her customers as well as a reputation for a quality service provider. Under her leadership, NSI has been nominated as the "Top 50/100 fastest growing companies in Oregon across all industries" for the last consecutive 6 years. Under her leadership, Northwest Software offers a unique value proposition to Fortune 1000 customers and competes head-on with larger national staffing companies. From the Beaverton headquarters, Shah's company serves customers in about 20 different states.

Meeting Adversity

Shah sees adversity as an opportunity to learn, change, and improve, "The sudden downturn in the market caused our company to take a step back and try to figure out a way to keep things business as usual. We discovered, through our brainstorming efforts, that we had 3 advantages despite the downturn: solid relationships with some very large customers, a substantial value proposition to save money while increasing quality, and a strong team environment."

While many of their competitors were laying-off employees, NSI hired experienced sales people to tackle their existing and potential customer database. They worked hard to give quality service to their existing customers. In the soft economy, the team environment became a real asset. Innovating, enhanced value proposition and focused sales became the name of the game and everyone pitched in to help.

The true test of an organization is its staying power in the presence of extreme adversity. Under Shah's leadership, NSI's management took a constructive approach, re-focused its energies, put in place many strategic alliances with diversity businesses across the country, and focused its offerings on total cost-savings – an issue that rapidly became an increasing priority for everyone affected by the soft economy.

Shah finds that developing a successful business is fun and exciting. She enjoys the opportunity of being creative in her industry and reaping the fruits of innovation. Shah also loves giving back to her local community and helping youth to find their potential. She has won numerous awards including SBA's Oregon Entrepreneur of the Year. Shah has achieved with the power of belief and is making a difference in the world. "It is gratifying to note that my company is making an impact, even though it is small," said Shah.



The help you need

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B

Beaverton, OR 97006 USA

Phone 503-629-5947

Fax 888-656-0661

www.nwsi.com

Lessons Learned from Sonal Shah

1. Believe in yourself, and in others.
2. Women can make a difference in society.
3. Be patient and persistent.
4. Business is asked for not just earned, so meet as many customers as you possibly can to ask for business.
5. Create a positive experience for your customers.
6. Show flexibility to customers, every proposal needs to be win-win.
7. Innovate and find a way to differentiate and enhance customer value.
8. Use diversity.
9. Hire talent that challenges the status quo and constructively confront conflicts.
10. Take care of your employees.
11. Do not compromise on additional costs of quality and ethics for profits.
12. Consider every adversity or failure as an opportunity to learn, change, and improve.

Sonal Shah, President

Northwest Software, Inc.

1800 NW 169th Place, Suite 150-B

Beaverton, OR 97006

Telephone: 503-629-0303

Email: nsi@nwsi.com

<http://www.nwsi.com>