



Indianapolis
WOMAN

November 2010

Beating the Odds

Michele Meyer nurtures CSCI
Consulting to meteoric success

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AHEAD OF THE PACK

CSCI Consulting CEO Michele Meyer boosts her company to unparalleled growth through a formula of hard work, a belief in the American dream and a few strongly held philosophies

BY SHARI SCALES FINNELL | PHOTOS BY LESLE LANE

It's 5:30 a.m. on a Monday. No, make that a Tuesday. Or even a Friday.

Actually, on any given workday, Michele Meyer already is working up a sweat — even if she more than likely just laid her head on her pillow only five hours earlier.

As CEO of CSCI Consulting, Michele has gained a bit of a reputation among her employees for constantly taking on new challenges in the pursuit of improving herself, whether in the workplace or in her personal life.

Joining an intensive boot camp exercise program run by Indy Adventure in Fishers is just one among the latest routines Michele has added to her already packed schedule.

“That’s the one hour a day I don’t have any excuses. I have no meetings, no appointments,” says Michele while working at the northeast office of CSCI Consulting, an IT consulting business she started in 2002 as a one-woman enterprise.

Michele’s personal philosophy — look for ways to take it to the next level — appears to be working.

In just eight years, CSCI has grown to include more than 100 employees and is projected to earn more than \$13 million in 2010. The company’s growth of more than 400 percent in a three-year period also helped it earn bragging rights as the city’s fastest-growing privately held company as named by *Indianapolis Business Journal*.

“It’s kind of amazing,” Michele says of the

recent recognition. “I already knew we had exceptional growth. Looking at our company in comparison with others, we already knew we were on the fast track. The goal is to keep it there.”

While reflecting on CSCI’s various milestones, Michele points to her employees as the critical ingredient to that success. Her management philosophy — the foundation upon which she built her company — is to treat employees with respect and reward them whenever possible for putting in extra effort to serve the company’s clients.

“If you really want to be happy and do well, you need to do for others,” she says. “You will get everything you need. If you make someone a better person, you will be rewarded for life.” ▶▶▶

LESSONS LEARNED

Early on, Michele had a perception of America as the place where dreams are realized. She grew up as a “military brat” in Berlin from age 3 to 12.

“There was always the expectation to be the best you can be,” explains Michele, whose father served in the military and whose mother stayed at home. “Being overseas, you were quite aware of the American dream. I’ve always had the belief that it didn’t matter who you were. If you work hard, it will pay off.”

As she describes it, life was idyllic on the military base.

“It was wonderful,” recalls Michele, describing an environment in which dreaded cliques were nonexistent. “Everyone seemed to get along. And the people living in the area all made around the same amount of money.”

That all changed after Michele turned 12 and the family moved to the United States — specifically to a small town in Georgia.

Michelle was baffled by what she saw. Whereas she had lived in khaki pants, \$20 blue jeans and similarly plain clothing, the girls at her new school were dressed in “fluorescent stuff, parachute pants and Guess jeans.”

“Those were the Madonna days,” Michele recalls with a laugh.

However, for a preteen trying to fit in, it was anything but funny at the time.

Besides the clothing, Michele stood out in other ways. They all had Southern accents; Michele talked with a New York clip. She wasn’t even familiar with American concepts like fast food.

“I didn’t even know what fast food was,”

she says. “I didn’t know how to blend in. I didn’t even know how to be an American.”

Worse yet, when she walked into the cafeteria she noticed a discouraging pattern — cliques formed along socioeconomic lines. The school was home to students from families with vast differences in living styles. The differences between the rich people and those living in the projects were marked.

“It probably took me a year and a half to get a single friend. It was terrible,” she says. “In Berlin, I never had to seek friends out.”

Those alienating experiences are among the many things that have shaped Michele’s philosophy as a business owner.

“Sometimes those experiences continue to influence me in my decision-making,” she says. “You learn what’s important in life. One of the hardest lessons I think we need to learn is how to be happy and not sweat the small stuff.”

“Most people focus on the goal of how to be successful,” she adds. “The goal should be to be happy.”

STARTING OUT

Though Michele had once aspired to become a lawyer, she abandoned that dream because she couldn’t afford the tuition to go to law school, she says.

Shortly after graduating from Georgia State University with degrees in history and political science, she landed a job at Trane Company, the heating and air conditioning giant.

After about a year, she was promoted to management. Though she was only 23, her superiors noticed her intense work ethic and her ability to communicate well with others.

However, that “promotion,” Michele recalls with a laugh, had a few strings attached.

“I had to go work in Waco, Texas,” with a team that had one of the worst performance records among all the company offices, she says. “This was considered the worst performing group. No one wanted to work with this team,” Michele says.

However, she didn’t care about the baggage that accompanied the new assignment. She accepted the offer. “It was my first ticket out of Georgia,” she says with a laugh.

As it turned out, that challenging situation would lay the groundwork for Michele’s success as an entrepreneur.

When she arrived in Waco, she was assigned to manage a team of 10 women, none of whom had a college degree and all of whom seemed to be significantly discouraged by their working conditions.

Employees jokingly referred to the place where they worked — a dark dungeon-like room — as the “snake pit.”

Worse yet, productivity was dismal. The turnaround time on new orders to be processed through a computer system was 30 days. The methods bordered on archaic. All the women were charged with tackling stacks and stacks of orders that were placed on a long table.

Michele immediately started making changes by moving the stacks of orders to a conference room, allowing the team to work in a better environment.

She then divided the orders into regions, giving each woman complete ownership of a particular region.

She charged the team with making sure their customers were happy. “It was ▶▶▶

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complete empowerment and authority over that region,” Michele explains.

By the end of the year, that 30-day cycle had been reduced to a 3-hour turnaround, with the group winning the company’s Pacesetter Award for having the highest ranking in customer service.

“They had wanted to work hard, but they had been mistreated and beaten down. They weren’t being used to make decisions. No one trusted them,” Michele says.

With an empowerment philosophy put into practice — helping the individuals be the best they can be, Michele says — they became the best.

The experience was priceless, she says.

“Being that young and getting a mess was sort of a blessing. I walked into a pile, and it was great,” Michele says with a smile. “It was a very positive experience.”

DOING IT FOR HERSELF

While at Trane, Michele met her future husband, Roger Meyer, who was later transferred to the company’s offices in Indianapolis. As a result of the move, Michele took a job working as a contractor for the accounting firm KPMG.

Together, the couple has six children, including four from Roger’s previous marriage.

In 2002, Michele decided to launch her own business — a dream that she and Roger had previously discussed. “I looked at large companies, and I saw there was a lot of room for improvement and a lot of opportunities to be an entrepreneur,” Michele says.

She then approached her husband with the question, “What if I start my own company?”

His immediate reply was, “Go for it.”

Michele says she always had confidence that she would be able to pull off a successful venture.

“I knew I could do it and I could do it better than the competition,” she says. “I was very, very confident in that. I also knew how to motivate people.”

So, embracing the philosophy that employees should be rewarded for hard work, Michele launched CSCI Consulting, which became a subcontractor at the Defense Department’s Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

However, she didn’t have anyone to practice that philosophy on but herself for about two

Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard recently congratulates CSCI Consulting CEO Michele Meyer, who is joined by husband Roger and their six children.

years as she continued to work as a one-person force. She recalls many long days and late nights doing everything herself — from billing to marketing and sales.

In October 2004, she hired her first two employees. After that, the company started to grow slowly but surely, she found.

As part of her strategy to continually grow the company Michele focuses on her original goal — to motivate employees. She regularly meets with a group of team leaders to talk about personnel issues and “how to give out ‘atta-boys,” she says.

“When our employees are working a lot of hours, we want to address what can we do extra for them,” she explains.

Team leader Bryan Brown, who was the first person CSCI hired, says Michele’s success can be attributed to a lot of qualities.

“She understands that what makes the company is the people who represent it. She knows how to build relationships, and it’s genuine,” he says. “She has great people skills. She understands the value of people. She also is phenomenal at looking ahead — stepping out of the present and looking to the future to see what actions I take today will help me tomorrow. She’s very good at reading into the future.”

Bryan says he’s still amazed that Michele manages to remember all of the names of her employees’ spouses, children and even pets.

Anne Peckinpaugh, a manager for DeLoitte Consulting in Indianapolis, recalls working for Michele at KPMG. Michele, who was her performance manager, immediately showed a desire to cultivate leadership skills in others, she says.

“She taught me how to counsel people, giving me direction on how to lead people better,” Anne says. “She is one of the best collaborators and best mentors out there. She really looks out for the best for her team and her employees.

“She’s a phenomenal leader, she moves people toward a common goal — motivating, building teams and developing them,” she adds. “She’s proven that more by building her own company.”



MIXING WORK AND FAMILY

The Meyers say their working and personal relationships work well because of their common interests.

“We absolutely love working together,” Michele says. “We’re both workaholics. We sit down at night and talk about work for a couple of hours. That’s our idea of a good time.”

When they’re not talking about work, the pair likes to travel for enjoyment. One of their recent destinations was Berlin. “That was awesome,” Michele says with a smile. They enjoy outings with the family crew that includes Rylen, 9; Brye, 10; Josie, 13; Rowan, 15; Jessie, 18; and Dani, 19.

The couple also likes to spend time on the golf course, most of the time with Roger driving the balls and Michele driving the golf cart.

Roger says he always knew that Michele would do well with her own business. She constantly worked on gathering knowledge and striving for excellence, he says. From the

beginning, she wanted to focus on employees.

“She learns very, very quickly,” says Roger, who later joined his wife at CSCI Consulting, where he now holds the position of Business Development Manager. “She’s also very open to constructive feedback. If someone is doing something better, she immediately says, ‘Great. Let’s do it that way.’”

One of Michele’s latest self-improvement efforts actually took him by surprise, Roger admits.

He always thought of his wife as a night person. “If you had told me that she would be getting up to work out at 5:30 in the morning, I would have said, ‘No way. She’s not a morning person by any stretch of the imagination.’”

But she’s been doing it every day, he notes.

“She saw the boot camp class as a way to improve herself,” he says. “That’s the type of drive she has. She always wants to be better. That goes for both business and personal. She has a hunger in her for that.” W

ROOM TO GROW

CSCI Consulting CEO Michele Meyer subscribes to the philosophy that there is always room to grow and things to learn.

One of the keys to her success, she says, is talking to employees at all different levels of management when starting out at various companies.

“It didn’t matter their role, I talked to all of them,” she says. “I would take people to lunch or I would randomly talk to them to get advice and insight. There’s no need to reinvent the wheel. Having strong mentors is definitely important, and you’ve got to believe in what you’re doing.”

She also enjoys reading business-related books. “My absolute favorites are *A Journey into the Heroic Environment* and *Zapp! The Lightning of Empowerment*,” she says.