

## Small Business Success: Growing Forward While Giving Back

During the 2008 financial crisis, small businesses were hit especially hard, and many did not survive the crisis. In spite of the setback, strong entrepreneurs figured out a way to keep their business striving. One such entrepreneur is Corliss Udoema of Contract Solutions, Inc (CSI). During the past three years, CSI has graduated from a home based business to a corporate office located in Manassas, Virginia.

The growth has not come easily for CSI. However, by following a philosophy and personal commitment to customer excellence, service to the community, and helping others, CSI has increased its client base in the federal sector. It is refreshing to see how a one person business, has turned into one of Prince William County, Virginia's more successful startups. Contract Solutions, Inc., has grown into a multimillion dollar staffing company headed by Corliss Udoema as President and CEO. The fascinating aspect of CSI's success is how the company focuses on the employees, the community and giving back, vice the company's profit margin. Determined to give the best to its clients, CSI has set a high bar for all who join the team. No doubts about it, all are expected to give their best, and that best must result in excellence. The company's over 50 employees enjoy many benefits including 401k with a company match and profit sharing. In addition to ensuring that CSI' employees know they are valued, Ms. Udoema also ensures that the community knows they are valued as well.

Ms. Udoema continually describes herself as an "old lady" and while she is in fact a senior citizen, ask her staff, clients, family, and friends about her and they will be quick to tell you that her energy is amazing. However, as energetic as she is, more noteworthy is her passion for excellence and her love of helping others. As a Prince William County business, CSI has been actively involved and committed to supporting the Prince William County Winter Homeless Shelter over the past seven years on a year round basis. Another effort very close to Ms. Udoema's heart is her desire to employ veterans. While some companies or organizations are required to meet an established quota, CSI voluntarily engages in very proactive strategies to ensure that those who served and sacrificed are provided assistance in transitioning into private sector employment. CSI's veteran commitment is evidenced by the fact that 22% of CSI's staff are veterans. During the last quarter of fiscal year 2015, CSI hired 7 veterans (three of which are service disabled). A further commitment to helping Veterans is the Business Battle Buddy program (see <http://www.businessbattlebuddy.com/>). The mission of Business Battle Buddy is to offer free counseling, and support to help veteran-owned small businesses understand how to successfully navigate through the government contracting process.

CSI is a company that understands that success is not based on what the company receives, but rather what it gives. The current year has been quite busy for CSI, "we have been actively growing our client base and concurrently developing new lines of business" said Ms. Udoema. Currently, CSI has satellite offices in Denver, Colorado and Washington, DC with staff located in more than 10 states. In September CSI was awarded five-year contracts with the Department of Labor and the US Agency for International Development. The company also received a multi-project award from the Department of Treasury and an award from the National Park Service. CSI has also expanded their existing support to the Department of Agriculture by providing staffing support to the Office of General Counsel in Washington, D.C., Denver, Colorado, as

well as San Francisco, California. In addition to staffing support for clients in the Washington, DC area, CSI maintains a national presence supporting clients and providing support nationally.

Never losing sight of what is an important aspect of business management, Mr. Eugene “Doc” Murdock joined CSI as Vice-President of Government Relations in July. In this capacity, Mr. Murdock serves as the interface with CSI’s government clients, and ensures that the contract is operating smoothly, and the customer is receiving excellent service. He is also available to CSI employees addressing any concerns they might have. Also, as a part of CSI’s strategic initiative for calendar year 2015, two additional staff members joined the CSI team to pursue and develop business opportunities with the state, county, and as well as the private sector. In recent meetings with Senator Mark Warner’s (D-Va.) staff and Mr. Maurice Jones, Secretary of Commerce of Virginia, CSI has one consistent charge .....to learn, grown and pass it on.

In this era of dwindling federal contract dollars, and various other challenges to small business success, “establishing a solid business strategy that includes helping others and community involvement,” is the key to success said Ms. Udoema. She points to her company’s beginnings in her home and smiles when she recalls the days when her employees, one or two part-timers, came to her home to work. “It is my desire to help other small businesses who are trying to get started.” I am committed to paying it forward. We ask that our people give their best, and we as a company are determined to give our best stated Ms. Udoema.

If you ask Ms. Udoema her secret to success, she will tell you, “although much has changed in the nine years since I launched this company, three things still work well for me – prayer, planning and patience! I feel that our company’s purpose is to inspire and, to give confidence to others that they too can accomplish their goals ---it’s not a matter of if, it’s a matter of when. This is an exciting time for CSI and we wanted to thank our employees, our clients, our strategic partners, family, and friends for making our success possible.

Contract Solutions, Inc. (CSI), headquartered in Manassas, Va., is professional staffing and management support services firm that supports federal, state and local government, private and non-profit clients.