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DOROTHY LANGER: *Strategy consultant and entrepreneur*

by Amy T. Pfarr

Dorothy Langer's home office on Joy Street is small, but that doesn't mean her influence and obligations are minor. The reputation of this 14-year resident, who is this year celebrating the 10th anniversary of the founding of her strategy consulting firm, Langer and Company, has spread from coast to coast. In fact, just recently she had to turn down a speaking engagement at a conference in Tokyo, Japan.

Despite these inquiries from all over the world, Langer's heart and roots are here in Boston. Langer, 56, grew up in Winthrop and eventually came to Boston as an undergraduate student at Simmons College where she earned her B.S. in chemistry. Though now a business analyst and a venture capitalist, she had her start in science.

"I use my chemistry degree as much as Janet Reno and Margaret Thatcher use theirs," Langer explains.

Langer's MBA, she likes to tell people, is an MBA in IBM. Using the scientific discipline she learned in college in an unconventional manner, Langer entered the then up-and-coming computer field and landed a job with IBM. At the time, Langer recognized the vital place computers would soon hold in the business world and envisioned the business knowledge a large company such as IBM could give her.

"There are a tremendous number of people in the world that are ex-IBMers. Many of us say that you don't leave IBM, you take it with you," said Langer. "It's very good schooling."

Her "schooling" lasted 14 years, during which time she held key management positions in sales, marketing and strategic planning. As the consultant to IBM's corporate vice president of marketing, Buck Rodgers, Langer built the foundation of her strategic planning capabilities — a foundation that would later serve as the support of her entrepreneurial endeavors.

"You did two things in those years — you either stayed with a company like IBM for life, or you jumped off the cliff," explained Langer. "I jumped off the cliff."

Langer jumped because she didn't want to spend her entire life at one company and wanted new, different experiences. She left to join

Gartner Group, a start-up computer market research company that is now roughly a \$250 million company, according to Langer.

Leaving an established company of 300,000 people for a company of 30, Langer gained experience not only in business development, but also in venture capital-backed companies. She built the company's sales and marketing organization, serving as Gartner Group's first vice president of marketing and as a member of the executive committee.

Both Gartner Group and Businessland, a computer retailer for which Langer served as the Director of Northeast Operations, were venture capital-backed companies. With this experience, she was recruited by 3i Ventures to open a Boston office and establish the British firm as a major East Coast venture capital player.

"Probably the best investment I made was in a company called Security Dynamics, which is now a public company very well-known in the Boston area," said Langer, who advised the company's strategic direction as a member of its Board.

Despite a successful five years with 3i Ventures, entrepreneurial desires still tugged at Langer's heart. So she launched Langer and Company, a strategic consulting firm that advises high technology companies on development strategies, in 1990. Since then, Langer has assisted more than 70 clients with strategic alliances as well as mergers and acquisitions. Her client list includes Kodak, Lotus Development, IBM, and American Express Travel Services, just to name a few.

"I feel I am bringing a tremendous amount of expertise and knowledge based on my experiences to this practice," said Langer.

This expertise — in both business development and venture capitalism — has been recognized worldwide and results in numerous speaking engagements. Langer has spoken to both the Massachusetts Software Council and the Massachusetts Bar Association. On the national circuit, she has appeared before The Conference Board. She is a member of the Association for Corporate Growth's Speakers Bureau.

Her enthusiasm for speaking engagements



Dorothy Langer.

and for her work may leave one wondering if writing a book will be in Langer's future. Though she hesitates to say "never," Langer does not want to take the time to write a book at this point. "I have to ask myself, 'Can I make more of a contribution through my work and imparting my knowledge directly to my clients?'"

Extra time is certainly not something Langer has a lot of. She has learned to balance her work with her personal interests. She makes time for movies and exercise, especially walking and yoga. Her goal is to watch one movie a week, although she admits that she fell a little short of that goal last year. She is a member of The Boston Club, and formerly served with the Beacon Hill Civic Association and Dance Umbrella.

As in her company's first 10 years, Langer realizes the future will hold job offers which, as she says, force her to reevaluate where she wants to be. For now, she enjoys her home and office on Beacon Hill, which she refers to as a "quite enclave in the midst of a busy city." She also appreciates how easily the Hill lends itself to having a home office in a residential area.

And she'll soon be able to tell her clients she has a Ph.D in experience.