

## Chapter 18

# Interview with Theresa Cox, President of Native Nations Procurement Systems, Inc.

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### **1. Where did you grow up? Do you think that it has any impact on your life's work?**

I grew up in a very small town in Oklahoma. I recall wanting to leave the small town life very early on. By high school it was one of my top priorities. My perspective was that life there was limiting so yes, where I grew up had a significant impact on my life's work. It made me far more goal oriented and driven to succeed.

### **2. Where did you go to school? Why there?**

I assume you speak of college? I applied, begged for (literally on my knees) and received a full

scholarship to a trade school to study Hospitality & Tourism. I did not have the means to attend an accredited college.

### **3. Have you had any particularly significant mentors in your career?**

I have definitely had mentors. I still do. Some of my employees have been and are mentors! A significant mentor came during my first year in the construction business. To me he was like an angel. Upon our first meeting he agreed to loan me \$5,000 to purchase insurance for my first foray into the real construction world at Texas Instruments. He became a significant investor for several years and mentored me through how to turn my 'mom & pop' company into a larger operation.

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#### **4. How has your career evolved?**

I started my career by hiring some handymen to help me price a job I heard about, marking that up and having them perform the work with me to one year later landing the first job at Texas Instruments, to changing/adding/expanding the type of work performed and services offered. Everything that has become of the organization after the first year is due to the help of others and feeling my way along, learning as I go.

#### **5. Looking back, what do you feel is your biggest contribution?**

Leadership and perseverance.

#### **6. What do the next 10 years hold for you?**

Coming out of the recession the answer to this question keeps changing so I'll say, raising my children and bringing the business through some hard times.

#### **7. How has your view of leadership evolved over the years?**

My core perspective of leadership has not changed much over the years – work smart and others will work smart, give your best and so will others, care about people and they will care about you and your goals. How I lead continues to change and evolve as I evolve and as new generations come into the work force.

#### **8. What problems or hurdles do you perceive in your area of work? How do you overcome/ combat those problems/hurdles?**

The nature of our particular industry is cyclical. As you would for your family, you save when times are good in order to make it through the tough times.

#### **9. How has the structure of the profession affected your career?**

By profession, for me, we're talking about entrepreneurship.....

#### **10. What characteristics do you think are important for a good servant leader?**

I smile because I only partially subscribe to 'Servant Leadership'. Yes I am a servant first and I do believe in a communal approach to many things but I often find myself leading as I parent. I'm not certain that my leadership or parenting roles are the most effective but I am a protector. I believe I ultimately carry the burdens and guide my team to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

#### **11. Is there anything in your career you would have done differently? Any regrets?**

My greatest challenge in business has been effectively communicating. My failures in this area have caused heartache but I have no regrets just lessons learned. I have also made decisions that others might think are regretful from a business standpoint but altering those decisions would change my character and character is more important.

#### **12. What advice would you have for today's newly minted degrees going in to your field?**

An entrepreneurial spirit often has to go into the world with a very open mind to receiving blessings and be prepared to take a leap very quickly. When you actively seek opportunities and you are following your path, they will be placed before you. However, not many people walk into a fully functioning multi- million dollar business. You actually have to lay the groundwork with a lot of help, work, sweat and tears.

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