



## **WBE certification: What gain for what pain? Examining the process, benefits and opportunities**

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Being WBE certified can have significant advantages in the construction industry as the business opportunities and relationships made available through certification can be leveraged to become "force multipliers" for woman-owned companies. My direct experience is that the connections to business opportunities and the camaraderie of being lent a helping hand from other women inspire me to push myself to new heights of success while being grounded at the most basic level of commonality-my gender.

### **The Process-in a word-Exacting!!**

Although the certification process is oftentimes described as "painful," I found it more to be exacting than painful. Granted it is time-consuming!! The process requires the submittal of detailed information and the organized presentation of corporate records that any woman business owner should know about or be able to put her hands on in short order. Of critical importance is that the company's records, including its bylaws, reflect the woman's (i) unequivocal majority ownership, (ii) active involvement in growing and running the business and (iii) final decision-making authority. So, for example, if the woman owner is the majority shareholder and the CFO (not the president), the bylaws of her company must clearly state that in her role as CFO she has the final decision-making authority and responsibility within the company, and her decision cannot be overruled by any other officer, shareholder or board member. Other than that, active involvement, majority interest and authenticity are the only essentials

In as much as it's seemingly "impossible" to keep good records, particularly while in "start-up" mode...let this be a word of advice from one who operated under the misconception of what was "impossible"...take the time to keep your house in order...give up that Saturday night hanging out with friends and forget about "life balance" for the time being...keep your eye focused on growing your business and keep your records orderly and up to date...Period!! This advice applies whether you do the application yourself or outsource the process.

### **The Gain-Part I**

#### **New Business Opportunities**

The enthusiasm women have for other women business owners is infectious, inspiring and awesome!! Their genuine interest in knowing about your business...how you started it...what clients you service...what your growing pains have been...are simultaneously about giving empathy to you and taking lessons from you...a seamless "give and take." The personal introductions to prospects, as always...are best. Not to be undervalued, however, are at least three other ways of using certification to help grow your business: (i) Advocates: as in the case with some women certifications such as M/WBE, an advocate is assigned to you, and her/his purpose is to help you grow your business by way of introductions to qualified prospects. Make full use of your advocate!!

(ii) Exclusive Member Lists: are available for purposes of fostering business development between members. Learn about and respect whatever regulations may be in place regarding soliciting from the list, and likely you will achieve a greater percentage of positive responses as compared to a conventional, purchased list. (iii) Diversity Registrations: all major corporations have a registration requirement for WBEs to make themselves known to procurement officers. So...its tedious...repetitive...and generally worth the trouble even if only one out of twenty registrations result in a sale.

#### The Gain-Part II

##### New Learning Opportunities

Among my favorite things is to pursue a lifestyle of learning. Be osmotic!! Absorb life lessons and business tips from friends, colleagues, competitors and workshops. Being a WBE puts you in position to attend conferences at which you meet workshop leaders, keynote speakers, big thinkers and women just like you who may have businesses that can support your growth by becoming either a strategic ally, a referral source or a supplier. More intense learning opportunities are available by joining "peer to peer" business councils where business owners are provided an opportunity to present their issues and receive support and constructive criticism in a safe and confidential environment.

#### The Gain-Part III

##### New Communications

##### Opportunities

Among the most valuable tools provided by being WBE is the emphasis on effective, quality communications. Going beyond the obvious external communication opportunities such as SEO, SMO and retailing on Second Life, I'm referring to internal communication opportunities and the impacts of "active listening," team building and spreading financial literacy throughout the organization. Being WBE and participating in the myriad opportunities afforded me as such has helped me improve my listening, fiscal discipline and team building. I believe I have become a better person and my company has become stronger and more resilient as a result.

In short, if you 're qualified to certify as WBE - in my opinion the Gain outweighs the Pain. Wouldn't it be fun to check in a year from now and see who leveraged the "force multiplier" effect of being a certified WBE by generating the most new profits from their certification!!

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