

Softeach Celebrates 20 Years in Business

Spotlight on Elizabeth W. Brown, Founder & President



By E.T. Robbins

When Elizabeth W. Brown was growing up, she knew that she wanted to own her own business one day.

Elizabeth says, "The only thing was when I was in high school, I was told that women didn't do business and you had to become a teacher."

She followed the traditional path, but never gave up on her dream.

Elizabeth was a computer specialist for the Brookline public school system and a mathematics and computer teacher at a private school. Call it serendipity, but teaching led to the birth of her business.

"When I saw the onset of computers being used in the classroom, it all kind of came together for me that I could help the business community," says Elizabeth.

Softeach was born.

Elizabeth and her Newton-based company are celebrating 20 years in business. While times have changed, Softeach's original mission of doing on-site computer training remains the same. Elizabeth says by doing the training on-site, people are more likely to learn because they're familiar with the location and the equipment.

"The training becomes more relevant to them and it's in their environment, so when we leave them, we know they're actually applying the skills on *their* computers within *their* programs."

Softeach's typical client averages 100 employees, but Brown notes that she works with larger companies as well as sole proprietors. She has over 65 instructors working for her. Most have been with the company at least six years.

Realizing the value of networking, Elizabeth became a NEWBO member 19 years ago. She says, "A friend brought me there and said, 'You're going to learn so much from all these other women.' And, indeed, NEWBO has done that for me. I've learned how to grow my business from NEWBO."

Elizabeth says the friendly learning environment hooked her right away. After serving on various committees and board positions, Brown became NEWBO president in 1994.

"I did it because I thought it would help me grow as a person. I'd meet nice people. It'd help my business ultimately. I knew for the two years [as president] it would detract from my business in certain regards because I wouldn't have the same kind of time — I'd lose time. But on the other hand, what I lost in time I gained in contacts, friendships, and credibility. So it was well worth it. And I learned how to run a larger organization, which was great because mine was teeny."

Elizabeth says the two years she spent as NEWBO president were invaluable.

"As a result of being NEWBO President, I also got to go to a lot of places to represent NEWBO and get the word out there...I wanted us to be a known entity. That was really awesome. In fact, a lot of the connections and people I met then, I do business with now. It's really interesting."

Currently, Elizabeth is on the steering committee for the Women's Enterprise Initiative (WEI), which NEWBO co-sponsors with the city of Newton

What advice does Brown have for young women entrepreneurs today? Simple. Recognize opportunities and have a good attitude.

"Most of the time, opportunities are right in front of you, but you don't realize it...If you have a positive, good attitude, you draw people and then that presents more opportunities for you...The more you can give to others, the more you get back."

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E.T. Robbins is the nom de plume of one of our newest members, Robyn Bradley. Robyn is a freelance feature writer and copywriter who writes for The Boston Globe, The Metrowest Daily News, and The Middlesex Beat. In addition, she teaches a writing course at Massachusetts School of Law in Andover. Check her out at www.etrobbins.com.

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