

TECHNOLOGY

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Too much is never enough for IT icon O'Rourke

BY JOYE MERCER BARKSDALE



Pamela Chambers O'Rourke
President and CEO

Down to Details

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Pamela Chambers O'Rourke is proud to admit it — she's a hell-on-wheels woman. So it's fair to say she had some challenges in the traditional workplace, where employees tend to "go along to get along." The boss said she was too driven — too outspoken — too fast ... too much. But as president and chief executive officer of ICON Information Consultants, the company she started 10 years ago, "too much" is never enough.

"I do the work of about five people. I have a lot of energy and I'm very detail oriented," O'Rourke said. "When you're as driven as I am, a lot of people will try to beat you down to get you to be like everyone else. Well, I'm not like everyone else, and I'm so glad I'm different."

She knew it was time to do her own thing when her boss at an IT consulting firm told her to stop spoiling the clients.

"I said, 'Isn't that what we're supposed to be doing?' Then I got called in again, and the boss said, 'You're making so-and-so nervous because you move so fast.' I said, 'Well, he needs to refocus his energy.' Those things happen to you when you're a top producer."

O'Rourke knew that finding something that was a better fit for her style and her business philosophy meant starting her own business.

"I built my company around how I operate. You never tell a customer 'no.' If you don't know the answer, you follow up until you find the answer," she said. "That's one thing that's made me successful: the customer service I provide."

ICON provides IT consultants for a variety of clients, including Fortune 500 companies such as Shell, ExxonMobil, Hewlett-Packard, Halliburton, PepsiCo and Pitney Bowes. The company specializes in filling high-turnover positions and providing human capital solutions for temporary projects and periods when a business' demands are higher than usual.

O'Rourke created iSolutions, Ltd., ICON's sister company, to do project management and to handle everything from formulating a project's initial scope and definition to detailing task development at each stage and handling the post-implementation phase.

Twenty-seven people work in her company's Houston offices. Approximately 700 consultants bill for ICON throughout the United States and O'Rourke projects the company will post \$80 million in revenues this year. But O'Rourke doesn't take a salary as a president. Instead, she's paid on commission.

"I figure, you need to be hungry. Otherwise, why would you get up and go to work in the morning?" she said.

Since the beginning, her business exceeded her expectations and has outgrown any plan she's ever written.

"In my first year, I thought I would do \$70,000 in business. I ended up doing \$2.5 million alone," O'Rourke said. "Yes, it was scary going out on my own. But I had a dad who always believed in me. I ran with it. Being an entrepreneur was the best decision I ever made because I have the freedom to create a lot of opportunities for myself, my family, and the company. Plus, I'm a Chambers. Chambers don't fail!"

A number of organizations have recognized O'Rourke's success, including the U.S. Small Business Administration, which named her the 2005 Women in Business Champion of the Year. *Fast Company* magazine has named O'Rourke one of its Top 25 Women Business Builders and she's been honored for running one of Houston's fastest-growing businesses as well. However, O'Rourke considers the Women's Business Enterprise Star Award the icing on the cake — and the perfect way to celebrate her 10th year in business. It's certainly a coup for her, she said, but more importantly, it helps to underscore how much progress women-owned businesses are making and what they can accomplish.

"You know, nobody really has the confidence to do this at first," O'Rourke said. "But you just have to take that first step — and believe."