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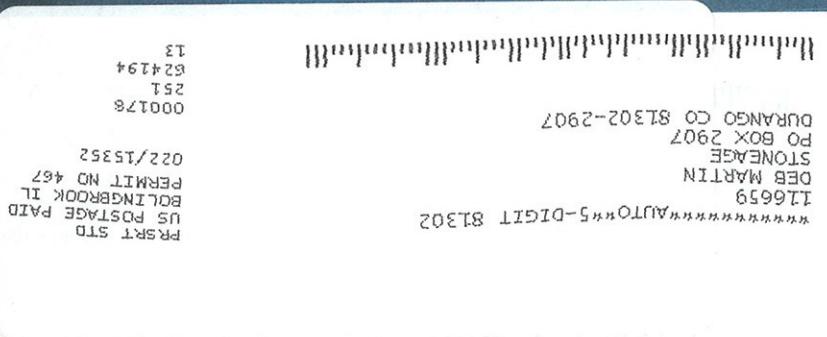
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**Kerry
Petranek**
StoneAge, Inc.



WOMEN IN
THE INDUSTRY



RISK TAKER...
DREAM CHASER...

KERRY PETRANEK

by April Hirsch

At least once in a lifetime, we should follow a dream. Kerry Petranek, CEO of StoneAge, Inc. in Durango, CO, did.

During her fifth summer as the Operations Coordinator/Project Manager at a large manufacturing company in Austin, TX, Petranek decided to make a big change. "My mother lived in Durango...and every time I visited her, I dreamed of how I could move here," she explains.

"So, I finally took the risk, quit my job in Austin, packed up all my belongings, and drove back to the state where I grew up," says Petranek. "I didn't have a job, and I didn't have any idea what I was going to do...but it was where I wanted to be."

As soon as she got to Durango, Petranek began looking for a job. She applied for the position of General Manager at StoneAge. "I was under qualified for the position," she says. Yet after meeting with John Wolgamott and Jerry Zink, the two founders of the company, and the management team, Petranek was hired.

"I didn't have all of the experience they were looking for," says Petranek. "I do believe that my education, my work experience, my desire to learn, and my drive helped me get to where I am today."

To her affiliation with StoneAge, Petranek brought experience in manufacturing, as well as a degree in engineering and business. She began with the company in January 2007 as its Director of Operations, moving to General Manager in June 2008 and then, CEO in November 2010.

"Although we have been in business for 33 years, we still operate very much like an emerging company," says Petranek. "Our goal is to stay nimble and flexible, even as we grow."

The vitality of the company begins with its 63 employees. "It's important to us that we have happy, healthy, engaged, and empowered employees," says Petranek. It takes time to understand the talents of each person. And

she spends a significant amount of time talking with employees to learn their strengths.

"My typical day starts off with a hard workout and two cups of coffee," says Petranek. "I am a big believer in exercising as a stress management tool, and I make sure that I workout daily."

Petranek emphasizes that she is not a micromanager. But she is involved in every aspect of the business so that she can properly assess and plan. On one day, dealer relations and expanding

"I believe in authenticity, honesty, and accountability and that's what I drive here," says Petranek. "When we make mistakes, we are accountable. When we say we will do something, we do it."

Petranek chose the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, CO, for college because it gave her the opportunity to study at one of the best engineering schools in the nation and to play collegiate-level softball. She was awarded both academic and athletic scholarships from the institution.



global reach might be her focus. The next day, it could be pricing strategies or new product development. Monitoring sales numbers, analyzing markets by products and regions, checking activity on the shop floor, and consulting with the human resources manager may all be part of a day. Certainly, there is no typical day.

"I believe in managing by walking around," says Petranek. Her management approach includes an open-door policy, which means any employee can walk into Petranek's office to discuss concepts or concerns. Openness and honesty guide all interactions. It is possible to be both professional and kind, even when engaged with difficult decisions or conversations, she explains.

A high school calculus teacher put Petranek on a path to engineering by suggesting she attend a "Women in Engineering" program at the University of Colorado in Boulder during her junior year in high school. The program hooked her.

Today, Petranek shares her expertise with others, not only in the formal business setting, but also through professional service to the WaterJet Technology Association (board member), La Plata Economic Development Alliance Executive Board (chairwoman), and Southwest Colorado Growth Company Initiative CEO Network (executive board member).

The Centennial State offers a welcoming business atmosphere, says

Petranek. It affords a great quality of life that attracts talented employees. And Governor John Hickenlooper is pro-business, which enhances the environment for small businesses.

"It's important for our customers to know that they can always rely on us to develop innovative new tools and to give the best customer service in the industry," says Petranek.

"We believe in working hard and playing hard and Colorado is really just a huge backyard," says Petranek. "I am an avid runner, mountain biker, snowboarder, and crossfitter."

Petranek is also an avid reader. She reads both fiction and nonfiction books to challenge her thinking in different ways. "I just finished the novel

Shantaram by Gregory David Roberts, which was a fascinating and heart-breaking story. I couldn't put it down."

And on the nonfiction side, there are two books she would recommend to business colleagues right off the top. She explains that she read *First Break all the Rules* by Marcus Buckingham at the beginning of her management career and it helped mold her. "If you manage people, read this book," she says.

Petranek also recommends *Good Strategy Bad Strategy: The Difference and Why it Matters* by Richard Rumelt. "[The book] challenged my views on strategy and helped me develop my vision for StoneAge's future," she explains.

Reading and role models both inform our development, of course. And one of the most important models for Petranek was her mother. "My mother is a teacher and with the risk of sounding biased, I'd say she's the best teacher I have known."

Not only did Petranek's mother illustrate how to break down and understand complex subjects, she also helped inform her daughter's understanding of what it means to lead. "She taught me at a very young age how important

it is to be accountable for my actions," says Petranek. "She wouldn't jump in and solve my problems for me."

By visiting several customer sites each year, Petranek gains a ground-level understanding of how tools are being used and might be used in the future. We asked her to share one example of an interesting visit.

"One of the most fascinating customer sites I've been to is Syncrude Oil in Fort McMurray, Alberta," says Petranek. "StoneAge is assisting Syncrude and CEDA, a high pressure waterblasting contractor, clean the largest coker units in the world. Our engineers, alongside of CEDA, were tasked to remove coke out of these massive units without damaging the refractory.

"To clean without damaging the refractory, we had to design a lower pressure, high flow waterblasting system," she continues. "The volume of water we were pushing through CEDA's pumps and our tools was a sight to see. We have gained so much knowledge from this project and we are applying it to new designs and solutions."

By seeing and hearing what customers needs are, StoneAge is better able



to provide the exacting tools that its customers require. Tools for surface preparation, pipe cleaning, tube cleaning, tank and boiler cleaning, as well as rotary couplings and nozzles, fittings, and reels are among the highlights of the product roster.

"We are proud to announce our new shotgun tool, the Spitfire," says Petranek. "This new product captures us perfectly. It's tough, versatile, innovative, and it will make our customers very happy. That's pretty much what StoneAge is about."

An enthusiastic advocate for her company, Petranek is also passionate about the entire industry. "StoneAge has been fortunate enough to have grown up in the waterblasting industry," she says. "Its founders, John Wolgamott and Jerry Zink, have seen great transformations throughout the years, and although I have only been with StoneAge for five years, I've also seen many changes. This is a fascinating industry with great growth potential."

Change at the company never overrides the basics, however. "It's important for our customers to know that they can always rely on us to develop innovative new tools and to give the best customer service in the industry," says Petranek.

In her free time, Petranek has a family focus. "I spend time with my husband, playing in this amazing place we live," she says. "But to be honest, even when I am not at work, my mind is at work, coming up with ideas and working to solve the puzzle of business. It's the best sandbox ever."

Petranek is also heavily involved in several economic development organizations and initiatives. "I believe that healthy businesses make for a healthy community," she explains.

It's impossible for Petranek to narrow down what she most enjoys about her professional life. "Everything," she says. "I love the people I work with at StoneAge, our dealers, our customers, and the industry. I get to do something different every day. We make products that have a huge impact on our customers' businesses. We treat our employees well. What's not to love?"



When she recalls quitting her job in the Lone Star State and heading to Colorado—taking a risk, Petranek concedes it looks a bit "crazy" in

retrospect. "But I believe that amazing things happen when you are willing to take a chance and go after your dreams." *cr*

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