

Doris Wong Courts Clients on Service, Reputation

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Doris Wong's advice for a successful business sounds simple enough – work hard, focus on the business and its goals, join associations and network.

But scratch deeper into her 40 years of Doris O. Wong Associates, and you'll also find the elements of excellence, dedication and vision for the firm that today provides full-service court reporting: deposition taking, litigation support, taped transcription and videoconferencing.

You'll find, as well, a deeply personable woman at the helm as president.



Wong stepped out on her own in 1967 after years of working with the foremost court reporting firm in Boston at the time, Philip H. Burt Co. “I thought, I’ve been at this for 10 years. I think I can try my own hand at this,” she says.

She was one of a very few women nationally to run such a firm – “I was liberated long before it became fashionable” – but that didn’t stop clients from using her services.

Things did start slowly, Wong admits. “I was very careful not to solicit people I worked for while with Mr. Burt. To me, that’s a major no-no.”

Instead, she relied on the reputation she had built for being accurate, dependable, trustworthy, always available and one to produce a great product.

On the accuracy piece, Wong earned national acclaim in speed-writing contests, topping out at 280 words a minute. That, combined with dependability and availability, soon had her working “eight days a week, as I like to say.”

Back then, Wong points out, all it took to open an office was “a stenotype machine, a typewriter, a dictating machine, and a place to sit yourself down and wait for the phone to ring.”

Wong was hardly sitting and waiting, however. Demand for services grew so that she added a court reporter, then another and another. “I was doing everything in the business,” she says. “I took the jobs, typed or dictated them, assigned the extra jobs, paid the bills. I call it being the whole piano.”

When Wong had eight reporters on staff, she asked her sister, Josephine Moy, to switch from typing up transcripts at home to running the office in Boston. “Once she was here, we grew even faster because we no longer missed any calls we might have missed with the answering service.”

Wong has maintained the integrity of the business by personally training her court reporters, going out with them on the job, proofing their transcripts and making suggestions.

“That’s how I developed my talented, professional and dedicated reporting staff who have helped me build my business and maintain my loyal customer base,” she says.

In fact, Wong chose to hire staff rather than rely on independent contractors as some firms do because she wanted the control over the standards of customer service.

The values of diligence, responsibility, honest dealings and attention to detail that she has infused into her business, Wong says, were learned while working in the family hand laundry in Portland, Maine.

The seventh of eight children, she pitched in as her siblings had done before her, keeping the business and family together when their father passed away. She was 7 years old when he died of World War I related injuries.

Her parents, Wong says, came to this country looking for what is called in China “The Golden Mountain.” “They found out when they got here the gold was in your labor.”

The thriving business, the cohesive family and the children’s success in life earned her mother the awards of “Maine Mother of the Year” and “American Mother of the Year” in 1951. “All the hard work I did as a reporter was nothing new to me,” Wong says. “It’s what you do, right?”

Becoming a court reporter, however, was “serendipity,” Wong says. A customer at the laundry suggested she take up stenotype to get a good secretarial job. That appealed to her, as did the fact that the school was in Boston. On her first day in class, the teacher asked who was going to be a court reporter.

“I asked myself, what’s a court reporter? All the hands went up but mine. The ironic thing is, at the end of nine months, I was the only one who graduated. I just had the aptitude for it.”

After graduating, Wong knocked on doors asking for a job. She began as a secretary at Philip H. Burt, answering the phone, putting together transcripts, talking to the court reporters and taking any overflow jobs. “I absorbed like a sponge,” she says.

Passing the Superior Court test cinched her reputation as a good reporter. Once she started Doris O. Wong Associates, taking on the most challenging and difficult of hearings, trials and depositions for law firms, corporations and top higher education institutions solidified the firm’s reputation.

As well, Wong not only joined professional organizations, she also served as president of what is now the Massachusetts Court Reporters Association and the National Court Reporters Association.

The networking and contacts, she says, have led to the referrals she knows will provide her same standards of excellence for her clients needing services in other states. Although her staff has traveled internationally for jobs, most of the firm’s business is in Massachusetts.

Over the years, Wong has stayed ahead of the curve in terms of the latest in court reporting, something else she attributes to her professional organization affiliations.

The first in Boston to use computer-aided transcription, Wong says the new technology was not without its difficulties. Name recognition and punctuation were some of the problems in translating the stenographer's code into English, and so she served on a vendor group to help make the product work.

The advent of the computer allowed Wong to give clients disks to use on their cases or to combine with other cases. Instead of a 300-page transcript, she can now hand them a condensed booklet. Exhibits can be scanned and linked to a transcript. And videoconferencing, with its international reach, has the firm accommodating clients around the clock.

Wong's nieces, Moy's daughters, Constance Moy Psaros and Linda Moy Fifield, joined the firm in the late 1970s after graduating from college. Today, they're the office manager and technology expert, respectively. They'll carry on the business someday.

Wong, however, is not ready to retire. She did stop her work out in the field last year, although she loved doing it. She remains involved in major decision making in the firm and still networks with the outside organizations, keeping her finger on the pulse of the business and the trends.

A challenge she'll be facing, Wong says, as all other owner-entrepreneurs face, "is when to take the finger off the pulse. I don't feel at all ready yet to do that, but I'm hoping I will know before somebody has to tell me," she says, laughing.

Wong is grateful to be a U.S. citizen. Her mother grew up in a peasant village without any education, and she expects the same would have been her fate. "Obviously I had the drive, but I'm not sure what I could have done by choice," she says. "I'm still loving my work. It's been good to me. I appreciate it every day. I have been truly blessed."