

Fall 2019

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# enterprising Women

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## Making it In America

## More insight from Celeste Ford

*Celeste Ford offers the following guidelines in seeking out and retaining highly specialized professionals. Her pursuit of an employee-focused company has resulted in 100% of its clients saying Stellar Solutions satisfied a critical need for them:*

**Inclusion:** Your employees are your eyes and ears. Encourage them to inquire, listen and identify new critical needs and help in the strategic planning process. Tie goals to individual bonus plans and reward success. Every person has valuable insights, and everyone can have a stake in the future of the business.

**Mission-Driven:** In Silicon Valley, many companies are “built to flip,” a disincentive for engineers who don’t see themselves as an “asset” to be sold. Knowing that Stellar Solutions was “built to last,” team members are incentivized by the pursuit of discoveries that advance and protect the human condition: cyber-defense, technological connectivity and Earth science improvements. QuakeFinder, our humanitarian global research and development initiative, is expected to unlock the algorithm for forecasting earthquakes in a matter of years.

**Knowledge-Fueled.** Employees are hungry for information and wisdom. A comprehensive training program throughout their careers keeps engineers and professionals of all ages engaged and excited to discover and innovate in fast-changing industries. Also important is a commitment to lifelong learning.

**Accomplish the Impossible.** Keeping our professionals motivated by working in their dream jobs is a key part of retention. Millennials in particular are attracted by – and make job acceptances based upon – technological challenges. That’s why “solving the impossible” is what keeps our people excited and energized each day.

# Celeste Ford

Stellar Solutions, Inc.

## The Journey of a Woman Rocket Scientist



2019 has been a milestone year in space exploration—from the historic celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing to NASA’s plans to have astronauts step onto the lunar South Pole by 2024.

I began my career in 1978 as one of the very few female aerospace engineers in control centers launching satellites, and it’s been thrilling to see the frontier of opportunity for women – and men—expand dramatically over time.

I believe that people and their search for knowledge are at the heart of our future success; and this led me to found Stellar Solutions, Inc., a global systems engineering provider, almost 25 years ago.

The rapid escalation of technology advancement since then has transformed the entire industrial landscape and has enabled game-changing agility and the proliferation of new participants in space exploration, transportation, defense, intelligence and communications.

Government agencies, commercial enterprises and entrepreneurial disruptors are competing and learning from each other as they tackle critical issues that affect us all – like weather prediction, wildfire monitoring, national defense and cyber-security. And all of this is happening with the integration of technologies on the ground and in space.

This convergence of discovery and innovation is leading to a remarkable future in which new satellites can enable us to take better care of our planet. They are also bringing the Internet to the sky so we can stay connected in a multitude of ways anywhere on Earth and even beyond.

This progress has been fueled by a diversity of talent – across genders, nationalities and career backgrounds – that unleashes the intellectual capacity, curiosity and passion needed to accomplish the impossible every day.

Companies like Stellar, with its boundless reservoir of expert engineers and visionaries, are key partners in creating this exciting future.

Starting out in Palo Alto, CA, I built this company on the proposition that our engineers and scientists could solve the most complex issues that commercial and government clients face. Our value was rooted in our talent, so they became a core part of our vision: to satisfy our customers’ critical needs while realizing our dream jobs.

This was a radical notion at a time when top-down, command-and-control hierarchy was the norm in most corporations and government agencies.

It was also a time of very few women entering the aerospace industry. I recall standing alone as a female engineer in

the mission control center, acutely aware of the sound of my feminine voice over the loud speaker and the importance of delivering an impeccable job performance. I knew I needed to strive not only to advance my own career but to ensure that the doors would be open to other women who followed.

Rather than be deterred, I focused on being the best I could be, and actively sought to learn from co-workers and customers at the top of their class. After becoming a mother of three, I eventually realized that my professional destiny was to create my own company – a flexible and highly entrepreneurial workplace where talented people could thrive and contribute outsized results.

I launched Stellar Solutions as someone already well accustomed to blazing new trails along unbeaten paths. I knew that to succeed as a “small” company in an ultra-competitive and complex field, we would need the expertise of extraordinary engineers, scientists and inventors. And we would seek to retain them for years

as they deepened their experience and passed it along to the next generation through mentoring.

We did this by engaging them with exhilarating challenges, entrepreneurial freedom and professional recognition they might not find elsewhere. One example is our humanitarian effort, QuakeFinder, in which dedicated scientists are pursuing the ability to predict earthquakes in the days or weeks before they hit, ultimately saving lives.

As the company grew, I also wanted to avoid the rigid silos that stifled communications and creativity in other places. We established a company practice called “crossing the boundaries” among our civil, commercial, international, defense and intelligence programs. Our people could access experts and ideas in every aerospace sector, leading to a cross-pollination of ideas that unlocked problems that no one else could solve. Likewise, our clients could access experts across the company regardless of their industry.

This was an early model of today’s dynamic workplace that prizes access to knowledge and employee satisfaction. Not only has it proven sustainable for us as we have expanded globally, it has also created a rewarding pathway for women. I am proud that Stellar Solutions cultivates a robust pipeline of female engineers, scientists and strategists from entry level to senior management, all making significant contributions to our innovative solutions and our customers’ outcomes.

NASA’s next program to take humans back to the Moon has been named Artemis, after the sister of Apollo in Greek mythology. As we continue as a civilization to explore the possibilities for our connections and horizons on Earth and in the heavens, I am heartened to know that women and others traditionally underrepresented are playing a prominent part of this incredible journey. ☺

CELESTE FORD is Chair and Founder of Stellar Solutions, a 2017 winner of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.



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