

CNSI's B. Chatterjee on managing growth

As president of CNSI, a high-technology services company based in Rockville, Md., B. Chatterjee knows all about managing growth. Since his company's start in 1994, CNSI has grown quickly while developing long-term relationships with key public sector clients. In the following Q&A, Chatterjee debriefs on the infrastructure, processes and procedures needed to deliver value to customers. He also discusses charities close to his heart, and his personal prescription for developing the discipline needed to maintain executive success. What's going on with CNSI today? B.

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What's going on with CNSI today?

B. Chatterjee: Corporate growth is the constant. Growth both in profitability and revenue, but more importantly, growth in hiring the right management and technical talent to support our clients. Now that we have achieved critical mass – and demonstrated success – it has become easier to attract strong performers to be part of our winning team. As a services company, it's all about having the right management and technical resources, and this has helped fuel our growth. We continue to have success in the healthcare industry, and the

same thing holds true on the federal side. Having completed several large projects has allowed us to capture additional contracts in these markets. Our success is all about adding value to the customer. For instance, with the U.S. Census Bureau, we participated in the last census. We provided not only our technology skills, but also our subject matter expertise, and this has led to additional opportunities. Same thing holds true with other clients like the Department of Energy. We've been supporting them for the past seven years, and now we have opportunities to support their enterprise architecture, and other initiatives that cut across their entire enterprise.

What do the next three years look like for CNSI?

B. Chatterjee: We want to continue our growth in the healthcare industry. We deploy automated systems in the Medicaid claims marketplace and we can adopt this platform for other customers, for example the payer community on the commercial side. We can offer them a brand new set of business tools that can really improve their bottom line, but also provide better health care outcomes to their clients, and I think that's important. We're also planning to expand our state and local business. We've been very successful with a growing list of agencies in Maryland, where we not only have a well-established record of success in developing and maintaining IT applications and systems, but also have extensive knowledge of the state's IT environment and business processes. We have found that state governments are interested in ways to lower costs and improve service to citizens. One area where we've seen recent success is in the area of automating vital records systems.

Talk about your approach to partnering up with small businesses.

B. Chatterjee: We are competing in the full and open market, now that we have successfully graduated from the SBA's 8(a)

program. Customers are requiring us to help them fulfill their small business quota, and we are quite open to that. We are currently working with two companies in our mentor program; one company for the Department of Transportation, and another for the Department of Energy. We welcome the opportunity to work with smaller companies. Not only because we owe some of our success to these programs, but because there is some great talent to be utilized.

Is there any advice you would give a small business CEO when you approach a larger company?

B. Chatterjee: The best advice I can give is to know your strengths and be clear about your capabilities. It's also best if you know the business you're approaching. If you know their abilities and where they need support, they'll be more receptive.

What was the biggest challenge you had to overcome to get the company where it is today?

B. Chatterjee: As I mentioned earlier, managing the growth. You have to be selective as to what you bid. You need to look at the competition and have a clear idea of why you think you can win an opportunity. Identifying what to bid and, more importantly, what not to bid, is critical. Also, once you win an opportunity, delivering on that business is critical. You need to make sure that your current customers are happy, as past performance carries a lot of weight. The second part, as your business grows, the cash flow issues become significant. You have to be proactive with these issues. You need relationships and partnerships with banks early on so you have to proper line of credit. You have to manage the relationships with banks and/or other stakeholders.

Can you give us your view on what is going on with mergers and acquisitions in the marketplace in general? What is CNSI's approach toward it?

B. Chatterjee: There's no question that the economy these days is in a bad state. The stock prices of publicly-traded companies are undervalued and volatile. Although there are good deals to be had, uncertainty about the economy is causing companies to hold on their acquisition plans.

Earlier this year, there were certain smaller businesses that got sold for really decent multiples. And I think it boils down to the value-add that a company can offer to another company. M&A activities will continue even in this market, however at a smaller scale and slower pace, as long as there is value is being created.

Can you talk about work-life balance as a CEO and how you manage the demands of your job?

B. Chatterjee: You know it's tricky. The motto in senior management within CNSI is definitely to lead by example. This basically means rolling up your sleeves and working day in and day out with the management and staff. I stay in close touch with the business challenges, and try to be as proactive as possible; I get involved early on, and provide as much guidance as is needed. And most of the time when you look at the senior leadership, we have only one major thing to attain and that is to motivate people. That said, I also value quality of life and feel that to be as productive as possible everyone needs a good balance. I travel a good deal and there are always deadlines, but my family is really important to me and I am committed to spending quality time with my family.

You've also gotten more involved in the community and won an award? Tell us about that.

B. Chatterjee: We understand that CNSI's success was made possible because of the support and assistance of others. Recognizing this, CNSI maintains a strong commitment to the community and participates in a lot of different events and with charitable organizations. I personally support an

organization in India which is called ABLE. It is a small organization that was founded by a retired military officer. He supports widows and their families. If you are a widow in India, you are never going to get remarried. And, if the widow dies, their kids are going to be orphans. So, the ABLE organization supports the widows for 10 cents a month – full etiquette service, from prescription drugs to surgery. If the widows get the support needed to thrive, then the children can as well.

CNSI also participates in The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation three-day walk and supports other important causes including Manna Food Bank, American Red Cross, The Children's Health Fund, Avon Foundation, Make-a-Wish Foundation, and Montgomery County Victims Assistance & Sexual Harassment Program. Tell us what else our readers would find of interest about you? B. Chatterjee: Similarly to many other executives, I am not a very patient person. I consulted one of my mentors about how he's handled this in his career, and got a great suggestion – fasting. Fasting requires discipline and self-control. Exercising control over one's body gives you more control in other areas of your life. I have found this advice to be true and helpful. I make a habit of fasting once a week. It is particularly difficult when traveling and while attending customer lunch meetings, but I have found it beneficial, and recommend it to your readers.