



## Interviews



### **Lena L. West** **A Betty Worth Admiring** by Heather Fischer

Lena L. West is an ambitious entrepreneur, a proud technocrat, and a devoted volunteer. She is also the founder and CEO of xynoMedia Development. The New York-based firm works alongside CEOs to help them make proactive, smart technology decisions. West's company does this by providing businesses with solid information, comprehensive technology consulting, and the seasoned guidance they need to both solve business problems using technology and attain results from their technology investments. West says, "We are able to offer our clients the guidance they need to make appropriate technology decisions based on their unique requirements. Our clients see that working with us is both a direct investment in their companies and their wallets."

After being a freelance technology consultant from 1994 through 1997, West realized she had what it took to be a business-owner. Coupled with this knowledge and her realization of the impact that technology would have on the business world, in 1997, xynoMedia Development was born.

As a certified technical expert, West learned about the intricate aspects of computers and networking while consulting for Fortune 500 companies such as IBM, Pitney Bowes, Philips Magnavox, Hyperion Software, and MasterCard International. After cutting her "technical teeth," she started putting that knowledge to work for clients.

West's hard work has paid off - exponentially. Black Enterprise magazine focused its attention on her, with its January 2002 cover story: "Weathering the Storm!: Three African American Women Take on the High Tech World."

She was also named one of "The 25 Women of Silicon Alley" by *AlleyCat News* for 2000 and, as a result, was featured in an article in *AlleyCat News* in April 2000. Her leading role as the only woman and the only small-business owner on the keynote panel at a chamber of commerce's first, annual e-business seminar, garnered her the cover story in *The Westchester County Business Journal*. In addition, West was the subject of an article in the January 2001, issue of *NV Magazine*, which shared some of xynoMedia's methodologies, and growth strategies and discussed the future of the upward-bound company. West has recently come off "tour" with the multiple-city conference and expo, Tavis Smiley Presents: Blacks in Technology.

A firm believer in the adage, "to whom much is given, much is required," her pro bono work is a full-time effort in and of itself. She is on the advisory boards of the African American Women in Business Conference and The Kindness of Strangers, a non-profit concern that offers free assistance in web site design, and development and technical consultation to non -profit companies.

She is also a volunteer for The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), as well as being a board member and director of technology for the non -profit, women's organization, Sister to Sister International, Inc. (STSI). And, most recently, West joined the Board of Advisors for redIbis, a non-profit technology chamber of commerce.

Since writing has always been a passion for her, West is a contributing writer for *REGINE Magazine*, *Black Tech Magazine*, *The Network Journal*, and *The KIP Business Report*; a contributing editor for *SmallBizTechnology.com*; a monthly newsletter columnist for *Out of the Box Marketing* and *Gots to Have It Marketing*; a former associate content editor for the *BDPA Journal*; and a former contributing technology editor-at-large for *Blacklines Magazine*.

She is also a member of The Westchester Information Technology Consortium (WITC), Working Today, and the New York New Media Association (NYNMA).

Currently, West is conducting research for a book she's writing about the role of women in the technology industry. In the near future, she plans to focus her energy on helping more women to make technology their future.

*Who do you admire? Why?*

I admire two people. My mother because she was a single parent for a long time and although things were hard, she persevered and taught me how to be a person. A lot of parents teach their children how to be children. My mother taught me how to be my own person. I am also a huge admirer of Oprah Winfrey. She's a take-charge, business woman, who's not afraid to be a woman. There is a certain freedom in being able to accomplish the two in unison.

*What did you aspire to do, career wise, as a young lady?*

I aspired to be an attorney. That was really not the career for me.

*What "advice" would you give to young women struggling in today's career market?*

I would advise young women today to take the time to know their industry. Whatever that industry is, know it inside and out. For two reasons: 1) when you have knowledge, no one can take that away from you and no one can deny you and 2) you'll be able to walk into or lead any meeting with confidence if you know what you're talking about. If you can go in there with your head high and talk the talk with the best of them...that's when you get noticed and people start talking. I would also advise them to travel as much as they can...even if it's just to other states. Get out there. See the world. Bring experiences to the table. The first time you're able to land a large client because you happened to visit the same spa or resort as they did, you'll see the value in traveling.

*What do you do to relax?*

I travel to relax. I like to physically remove myself from my office and get out and see the world.

*Can you tell me of one incident that stands out in your memory? A situation that you over came, struggled with.*

I've always struggled with the way I am perceived versus the way people perceive me. I always describe myself as a nice person that has low tolerance for the inane. Others can sometimes see me as strictly no-nonsense and are shocked when I make a joke or poke fun at myself. It's odd because I don't see myself that way. So, in the past I used to struggle with trying to be "nice" so that I could, in some way, counteract the effect it seems my personality has on some people. Now, I just try to be the best me that I can. If that doesn't come through to whomever I'm speaking with, then maybe I don't need to get to know that person and they don't need to get to know me. I'm secure and ok with that.

*How have you overcome discrimination? Male dominated work force? And other woman's jealousy?*

I live by the bible first and secondly by a book titled *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. The second agreement is don't take anything personally. If someone is mean to you, it's not up to you to judge them or correct their actions or their response to you. Their actions are simply a result of their own reality. They have their reality and you have yours. The sooner you realize that you can only live in your own reality, the better off you are. As for being a woman in tech...I don't mind that at all. It makes me stand out and people remember me. It's like wearing red in a sea of black - you really stand out and, since I know my industry and I know my stuff, I don't hesitate to talk with people. When the meeting or conference is over, I'm known as the "woman who knows her stuff" - and that's fine by me. That's what lands clients.

*What haven't you accomplished that you would like to "take on"?*

I would like to open an art gallery one day.

*What is in your future? Projects, goals, aspirations?*

It's kind of odd for me to talk about the future because I believe in "what's for me is for me." But, of course, I have goals and milestones set for my business and myself personally but, it is with God's grace that I am alive today to talk about my future - and today is enough for me.

*What is your favorite book and why?*

*The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz. I didn't start truly living until I read this book. It's a book that everyone should read. I buy it in bulk and give it as gifts. With the application of these four simple agreements that you make with yourself, you can really live life. These simple agreements are unassuming but can help navigate you through even the toughest of times.

*Are you satisfied with the outcome of your career path and achievements?*

I am more than satisfied. I am very proud of myself and all that I am and shall become. I take one day at a time and although I may falter sometimes, I live in the moment.

--Heather Fischer