

Environmental Consulting for Public and Private Sectors



Rebecca Rubin
President & CEO

Launched in 2002, Marstel-Day is a rapidly growing environmental consulting enterprise. Marstel-Day's locations across the US – in Fredericksburg and Alexandria VA; Baltimore, MD; Oakland and Oceanside, CA; Dallas and San Antonio, TX; and Colorado Springs, CO – locate the company strategically throughout the US. The company delivers successful innovations to clients in the public and private sectors in the areas of climate change business risk analysis, community resilience, sustainability, and natural resource conservation planning.

Marstel-Day has been named to both INC Magazine's 500/5000 and Zweigwhite's HOTFirm list of rapidly growing firms for the past five consecutive years and has garnered awards that include the 2013 Environmental Business Journal Gold Medal for growth, the 2013 Alliance for Workplace Excellence (AWE) Eco-Leadership Award, and the Sierra Club's 2013 "Living Green" award.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: Ms. Rubin, what was the vision when you started Marstel-Day?

Ms. Rubin: To bring together a small cadre of individuals who would join me in the company; together, we would come up with interesting solutions in the arena of natural resources conservation and climate adaptation. That vision remains unchanged. However, we have grown from the original idea of having a close knit circle of eight or nine people to a staff of about one hundred and thirty individuals. So we are larger than expected or intended, but the mission is still the same.

CEOCFO: Was it a natural progression? Did you wake up one day and say, "We want this to be a real business?" What was the impetus for the change in direction?

Ms. Rubin: Yes, certainly a natural progression. It happens. You win contracts and then you hire talented individuals to support those contracts. If you are lucky that is how it goes and certainly, we have been fortunate. In addition, it's apparent that the prognosis for our natural environment – and the businesses that rely on it for such resources as water and energy -- is increasingly dire. Therefore, the more people that we can involve in finding solutions and helping to realize the realities of working with nature and not against it, the better off we are. I think of our company as a "force multiplier" for environmental solutions.

CEOCFO: Would you give us an idea of some of the more common projects for you and what might be something that you would consider out of the box?

Ms. Rubin: Common projects for us have to do with developing climate adaptations plans, and working with communities and businesses on what we call climate resilience, meaning ways to respond and adapt to the risks of climate change and to overcome those risks. Dealing with issues like water scarcity, for instance, is profoundly challenging and concerning to communities and businesses alike, because they are now having to contemplate a world in which the number one public good that we depend upon – water -- is increasingly difficult to access. We also perform traditional environmental consulting work such as environmental assessments, environmental impact statements, and environmental benefits assessments. We look at the way encroachment and urbanization affects installations and facilities, and we work with communities to envision ways to use green space and conservation partnerships to provide buffers. More recently we have also done a lot of work in helping communities partner with federal stakeholders to identify cost savings innovations and partnerships. What is "out of the box" is the way we put it together to offer such a comprehensive array of services.

CEOCFO: What has the company learned over the years that might have resulted in a different approach today than you would have had ten years ago?

Ms. Rubin: This may sound counterintuitive, but we spent several years trying to make ourselves work out as a virtual company. You can imagine why we wanted to do that. People would normally associate that with a much lighter carbon foot print, greater energy efficiency and so on. The reality was that is not what happened. We ended up with people all

across the country. Those people were not well connected. We ended up having to drive or fly to be together and it did not make sense. We spent a number of years trying to make that situation work and when we finally went to bricks and mortar, which is a pretty conventional approach, I would have to say that it was a significant improvement. We still have some remote employees. However, in general we find that company offices are like learning centers. People need to be together and exchange information. Therefore, if I had it all to do all over again, I would probably have gone more quickly to co-location of employees instead of trying to make it work as a virtual experience.

CEOCFO: *How do you reach potential clients or do they come looking for you, at this point?*

Ms. Rubin: Obviously, once you have clients, there is a certain percentage of them that will become recurring clients based on the good work that you are doing. And, you want to cultivate those relationships. However, it is also important for the vitality of the company not to do the same thing over and over again. You either need to clients who have variation in their portfolio or you have to reach out and engage new prospects. For us, because we are a small-sized firm, that is almost always a cold call. It means being willing to say, "You may not have heard of us, but here is who we are and here is what we do." The reality is that we are not a big name, but we are proud of our company ethics and values and it's easy to explain why hiring us – as a socially responsible and environmentally innovative company --is a good move.

CEOCFO: *Is there a typical "aha" moment when a prospective client understands the difference at Marstel-Day, that your approach is superior or that you certainly have a different focus than many other companies?*

Ms. Rubin: I think that it takes time. We appreciate it when our clients also have the opportunity to work with other firms and to compare the way that we think about things versus the way that another firm might think about things; I think that when offered that chance for comparison, then clients appreciate us all the more.

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CEOCFO: *What is your geographic reach and how have you decided where to have your physical locations?*

Ms. Rubin: The first two location decisions were easy. Those were: Alexandria VA where I started the company years ago and where I lived at the time, and then Fredericksburg, where we made a corporate decision to locate the company headquarters for many reasons, including very good cost of living, affordable corporate rentals, lots of green space in the community, and access to a rail line with an easy commute to DC one way and Richmond VA on the other. Our Oakland, California office happened as a result of a lucky break. We brought on board a business partner who had happened to be located in those office at the time. We took his company's flag down and hoisted our flag up and suddenly we had an office in Oakland. This was fortuitous, because there are so many environmental issues in California. Our other offices in Oceanside, California and Baltimore, Maryland and Colorado Springs, Colorado and Dallas and San Antonio, Texas, were all a result of client projects or clients needs to have staff located in those areas.

CEOCFO: *Do you prefer the government clients to private companies or is it just that there are more of them in the types of projects you work on?*

Ms. Rubin: I think it is good to have a balance. It is not really a question of preference. The way that I think about it is that we like to work with our clients to develop ideas. Sometimes you just have a year where government is a better venue to do that. Sometimes you have a year where the private sector is a better place to do that. If you are really lucky you might have a year where you get some of both. Therefore, I think it is less a question of preferring one or the other and maybe more of a question of where the most interesting questions and ideas are coming from.

CEOCFO: *Where is that today?*

Ms. Rubin: At the moment, the federal government has been more of a leader on climate change than the private sector. That has definitely lured us much more to federal work. However, that may be changing, I think that the private sector has gotten some very abrupt awakenings, particularly over the past several years. Some of the changes have been driven by the insurance industry, which has been the first to sort of shake the private sector out of its stupor and say, "Look, no kidding, we are going to stop insuring all of these catastrophic effects of climate change. It is unaffordable." That has the private sector waking up to a new reality. I think the big corporate players on Wall Street are the first to awaken, probably because they have the most assets at stake. I think the medium and small sized businesses will be next. They will follow, thereafter.

CEOCFO: *Marstel-Day's presence on the Inc. 5000 shows that business is good; how do you keep the trajectory?*

Ms. Rubin: First of all, unlike many businesses, we do not have growth targets. Many companies will say, "We have to hit this financial target or we are not doing something right." We have never done that. We have always said that it is not about growth; it is about getting good work. If that means that you grow in the process, great! I think that attitude has

helped us, because then the employees are not pressured to feel, “We have to hit the target.” It might be a different situation if we were a publicly held company and if we had shareholders. We would not have quite the same latitude. However, we are privately held and we get to make those decisions for ourselves. That strategy has worked for us.

CEOCFO: *For people who do not really believe in climate change and think a lot of environmental concern is nonsense, make the case. Why should people pay attention to the environment?*

Ms. Rubin: I would say that you do not have to. Proceed at your own risk! Whether you believe in climate change or not, it is pretty obvious that Mother Nature always wins. She is far stronger than we are.

BIO: Ms. Rebecca R. Rubin is the President and CEO of Marstel-Day, LLC (www.Marstel-Day.com). She founded Marstel-Day in 2002 as an expression of her commitment to the conservation of natural resources, especially habitat and open space, energy, water, and the resolution of issues at their intersections in the face of climate change factors.

In 2013, Ms. Rubin was named by the White House as a 2013 Champion of Change for Climate Resilience.

She has a BA in history from Harvard University and an MA in International Security from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. She is a frequent writer, speaker and collaborator on issues of climate change, sea level rise, and community resilience, and in recent years also launched a series called “Vital Voices of the Environment” to interview thought leaders on critical environmental issues of our times.



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