

## SOLBYUNG (STELLA) YOON COVELEY: Living Her Dream By Carol Sevitt

How did an English major from Korea end up as president and CEO of a high-tech telecommunications company? “Dream your dream, work for it, and it will happen,” says **Solbyung (Stella) Yoon Coveley** (EMBA '99).

After leaving Korea in 1987 to explore the world, Solbyung travelled for four years to experience “the best of the Orient and the Occident.” In 1998, after having lived in Canada for only six years and without any background in engineering, she founded cStar Technologies Inc. “The company’s vision is to connect all computers, IT and non-IT devices in a single, fully-global network,” she says.

cStar’s core competency is wireless data communication that can connect to virtually any piece of equipment. For instance, the company installs sub-miniature radio devices on vending machines which transmit information about the unit’s status. An administrator located at the vending company’s headquarters miles away can see, in real time, how many cans of pop are in each slot, how much change has accumulated, the temperature of the unit – they can even change the price. And if the door opens, or refrigeration fails, alarms are immediately set off so a repair person can be dispatched. Miniature radio devices can be installed on utility and service meters, switching devices, leased equipment, and gas pipelines in remote areas. “With more than 4.2 million vending machines in the U.S. alone, we believe the market for such devices is huge,” says Solbyung.

Going into its third year, the company, which employs 18 people, is beginning to see its first revenue. “We are only now crossing the chasm from being an R & D company to a



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market-driven company. But people should keep an eye on us – within two years I predict we will have achieved success. That may sound like a bold commitment, but I’m confident of it,” she adds.

Solbyung views leadership, especially for start-up companies, as “managing in chaotic circumstances,” and having the ability to turn such situations – where there’s no pre-history to draw on – into opportunities. Her definition of success comprises both money and morale. To achieve this, she believes you must have both passion and compassion. “Don’t undermine people – treat them with dignity. This is part of my business ethic.” Integrating the “3Hs” – head, heart, and hands – is a guid-

ing principle, both for Solbyung and the company.

“I’ve learned a great deal about leadership from my husband Michael – he’s my mentor and advisor, and he has a great heart.” Solbyung is also inspired by her son Luke, age 11, who is “truly a wise boy!”

“I want to show the world that an ordinary person can do something extraordinary,” Solbyung says. “You don’t need to be a technical person to lead a high-tech company. In certain cases, I think it’s better to be a generalist and not biased by a technological background. My job as a generalist is to work with our engineers and foster their talents in the marketplace.”

Solbyung’s long-term goal is to move back to Korea, but not before she’s taken her cStar dream into the stratosphere. **RM**