



June 25, 2015

United States Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship

Thank you Chairman Vitter, Ranking Member Shaheen and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to testify, and I ask that my complete testimony be entered into the records.

My name is Laurie Sayles Artis and I established Civility Management Solutions in August, 2012 as a professional services company that works with the Government and Commercial sector. We are a Woman, Minority Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business, located in a HUBZone area of Prince George's County, Maryland and currently in the process of submitting for the 8(a) Business Development program.

I was born in Chicago and joined the United States Marine Corps in 1982 and served 7 years during the Grenada and Lebanon Conflicts. My job in the Corps was "Maintenance Management" which means I monitored and managed the functionality of equipment for Fighting Marines, like rifles, trucks, tents and radios. I served in Camp Lejeune, NC; Kaneohe Bay, HI and Cherry Point, NC and served 3 years as a reservist in Newport News, VA as the units Platoon Sergeant, and had the honor of preparing Reserve Marines for the possibility of serving in Operation Desert Storm.

My civilian career spans across corporate, non-profit and the public sector, and the first civilian job offered through a staffing company in DC was as a receptionist, which meant I started my 2nd career from the bottom of the Corporate ladder, after serving the Corp at the rank of an E6, Staff Sergeant. However, I have always been an entrepreneur, to include professional modeling during High School, promoting health and wellness, and operating an outdoor fitness boot camp program, to name a few.

My entry point to developing Civility Management Solutions was an opportunity to work in the public sector as a Project Manager overseeing an administrative contract. This opened the door for the next position in contracting, and after completing my Bachelor of Science Degree at the University of Maryland University College in Social Science with a Minor in Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship I moved into the corporate office in which I managed up to 128 staff nationally within 8 government agencies totaling up to \$11.5 million in contracts for a Women Owned Small Business that was both 8(a) and HUBZone.

My experience of serving in the Marine Corps gave me the courage, discipline teamwork, and tenacity that attributed to my transition into the civilian workforce. It was a slow and steady process, and I never became homeless because of my ability to make friends and live amongst them. But the Corps taught me to lead and survive, and what I needed was the business acumen for becoming a President and CEO.

Before I established Civility Management Solutions, I went to SBA SCORE and obtained a mentor. I was amazed to have a Retired Major General, Mr. Fred Elam, what an honor. He is perfect for me, and immediately began walking me through the steps to ensure I had a strong foundation by first asking if my husband, Lionel Artis was in full agreement of me building the contracting business. He assigned courses for me to take with SBA and told me to get an attorney and an accountant, before I needed them. One of the great things I like about SBA SCORE, is if they lack a certain expertise they will readily refer you to another mentor who possess the knowledge. Thus far the highlight of my relationship with SCORE is that I was awarded by the Washington, DC SBA SCORE office as “Client of the Year” for recognition of my Entrepreneurial Spirit and Accomplishments.

My experience at Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (VWISE) was engaging. The networking was incredible as being in a room filled with Women Veterans that are entrepreneurs is both encouraging and life changing. Our country has made great strides in ensuring that we don’t isolate Veterans, as we once did with our Vietnam Veterans, and they too have been instrumental in supporting my business knowledge. However, Women Veterans tend to not self-identify and the movement that is taking place now is helping many to join forces. This makes VWISE not just a program but it has helped develop a strong community. Women Veterans have been trained to work as a team on their entry into boot camp, and with that, the likelihood of them having each other backs as civilians is extremely high.

As a Woman Marine, I still live by “leave no man behind,” as I am known to share information with others, for example: Knowing Kristin Guerrero, the founder of Turbo Pup who has received great benefits from VWISE received an email from me regarding Shark Tanks search for Veteran Entrepreneurs to be on their program. Since my business in contracting / staffing is not the ideal business for pitching or investors, I thought of her and she elected to submit her information, and is now in business with investor Daymond Jones. Hence, programs like VWISE has promoted the bridge that I can cross to support fellow Women Veterans at will.

So, networking with Women Veterans is critical to our support group. While I applaud the efforts of including and supporting Women Military Spouses I would be remised if I did not share that Women Veterans will never acknowledge a military spouse (wife) as a Woman Veteran. Also, I would like to suggest that Syracuse University revisit their title of VWISE as it represents “**Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship**” and this should mean Veterans, Active Duty, Reservists and the National Guard. As a Veteran, we know that all women that wore a uniform will ultimately be a Veteran and the respect will always be regarded. Due to my network of Veterans over the past four years, I can speak on matters regarding VWISE that covers the following:

First, know that all Women Veterans feel that VWISE is a required program and we would like for it to be funded by both private and public funding in order to ensure enough coverage for Syracuse University to broaden the program. For example, being able to keep the VWISE graduates engaged in growing their businesses through the different stages of development and to keep the camaraderie would be always beneficial.

A second point would be that it is clear that VWISE brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to encourage us, along with developing competitions that promotes funding for the Veteran businesses. The sums of monies paid out to participants that take the step of competing in Business Plan Competitions and Pitch Contests is very attractive and rewarding to many, but not all. Women Veteran entrepreneurs that are focused on building businesses in the government space (contracting), or staffing with Fortune 500 companies are not attractive in these competitions. I recommend that VWISE consider competitions for those entrepreneurs in order to level the playing field for competition.

Third is the need of VWISE to maintain the VWISE National Graduate Training Conference, in which all graduates are asked to return for opportunities to learn and grow with more advance training. Having exhibit tables at the Graduate Conference was a huge hit and what a great way to help promote the Women Veteran Businesses. However, more work needs to be done to get us involved with business support partners through their Supplier Diversity offices, i.e., Oracle, Dell, Prudential, Hartford, Adecco and Marriott.

I want to acknowledge the fact that there is a heightened awareness being expressed in our country for Veterans and Veteran Entrepreneurs and it is greatly appreciated; however, as of recently, I have spoken with Fortune 500 companies that have stated it is difficult to find strong Veteran candidates for employment, and Procurement Ready Veteran Owned Businesses for being part of their Supplier Diversity programs. This observation tells me that we need more synergy with building a cohesive strategic effort in promoting Veterans to the Fortune 500 companies, and I will be a conduit in this regard and would appreciate the support of the programs.

My fourth point comes from my experience as an Officer on Vet-Force, an advocacy group for Veteran Owned Small Businesses and offers recommendations and advice to Congress, Federal, State and Local agencies, and other entities on laws, policies, regulations, that affect the opportunities for veterans to start or expand their own businesses or to do business particularly in the federal marketplace. The Interagency Task Force Report from 2012 contained a section regarding Veterans being allowed to use their GI Bill to start or expand their own small business. I understand that SBA and others have supported the idea of Vets using their GI Bill benefits to start a small business if the process can be supervised, i.e. Vet must submit an approved business plan; business development closely monitored; funds to be used in increments; and limit to amount that can be used. Please keep this program for us as I could benefit from this, as I would like to take certifications at University of Maryland University College that will give me an edge on procuring with the Federal Government.

As a fifth point, I observed, along with other Women Veterans the lack of visibility regarding Women Veterans and Diversity in the programming and planning phases of the VWISE program. Women Veterans can be very territorial and there is power in being present with our colleagues that decided to serve our country, and with that, it will add much value to have some visibility of successful diverse Women Veterans in our midst. Whether they are participating in the events, or being a part of the planning discussions. Because there is a need to add a track that focuses on working with the Federal and Commercial space in providing professional services.

Again, thanks for the honor to share my experiences of both SCORE and VWISE and know that their passion for inspiring us is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laurie Sayles Artis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laurie" being the most prominent.

Laurie Sayles Artis
President and CEO
Civility Management Solutions