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## **SJ Technologies -providing Solutions for Business Transformation to Government Agencies, bringing Legacy Systems into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**



**Karen Lawton**  
Founder & CEO

**SJ Technologies**  
<https://www.sjtechcorp.com/>

**Contact:**  
**Karen Lawton**  
**(800) 574-4518**  
[karen.lawton@sjtechcorp.com](mailto:karen.lawton@sjtechcorp.com)

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

“We have done a breadth of different technical solutions with a breadth of different customers from DOD, to civilian to commercial. As a small business we have taken on big challenges. We have always delivered.” Karen Lawton

**CEOCFO: Ms. Lawton, what is the overall concept behind SJ Technologies and is there a particular focus for you right now?**

**Ms. Lawton:** SJ is an IT service provider for government typically, we have done some commercial work but the primary focus now is in the public sector. Our solutions include what the government now calls business transformation, modernization, helping organizations take legacy systems and bring them into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Security is a big piece of this as well.

**CEOCFO: Are there particular agencies or types of projects you look to undertake**

**Ms. Lawton:** It is fairly complex explaining how to get into government business, as it is complicated and has a lot of nuances. We initially started working with the civilian side, the US Treasury being one of our first customers and then from there we expanded into the DOD. We now work with the US Army, Navy and have supported the US Air Force as well. Each time we won a contract with an agency, we took that past performance and bid on other contracts within other agencies depending on what their needs were. We target specific opportunities based on what the Agency’s initiatives are and how they align with our core capabilities. That is essentially the approach.

**CEOCFO: When you are bidding on a contract, how do you craft a solution that might not be the ideal solution you can provide, but there are budget or technology limitations?**

**Ms. Lawton:** This is one of the fundamental things you find when working on government contracts and an area where we shine and have

had much success. Our mantra is "We've Got This." What we try and do is listen to the customer, listen to their pain points, listen to how they are doing things currently but more importantly really understand what it is they are trying to accomplish. What we find is there is usually more than one way to get things over the finish line.

Once we have understanding of what the mission is, we develop ways to create efficiencies, adjust processes and identify more cost-effective ways to get the job done. This is where we have the most success and is one of our biggest differentiators.

**CEO CFO: *How do you get that across when you are first looking to contract with an organization or is it something they are going to recognize after they have worked with SJ Tech?***

**Ms. Lawton:** I think it is something that they recognize after they take a chance with you. As a business owner you have to rise to the occasion and prove that you can do it. The proof is in the pudding, it is all about service delivery excellence and making sure you come through on the promises that you made. If the promises you make are realistic and you deliver on them, they stay customers for a long time, which is what we do.

**CEO CFO: *When you are talking through a project with either a prospective contract, or when you have the contract and crafting the solution, what do you look at about what you need to create, that less experienced people do not recognize is important?***

**Ms. Lawton:** I would say look at the big picture. Look at what is working currently, and try to hone in on where there are challenges. Go through the seven levels of why it is not working. It is almost like a puzzle; you can look at something over and over and try to get the same puzzle piece in but if you turn it or look at it from a different perspective or shift things around we find there are good ways to gain efficiencies which we then present to the customer as potential areas to improve. We do this with a plan of action in mind, but the mindset with our approach is not to be afraid to ask or suggest new ways to do things.

**CEO CFO: *I see on the SJ Tech site that one of the services you provide is technical debt. What does that mean?***

**Ms. Lawton:** That is the when development teams choose speed over the developing something the right way, which then results in the need to re-do something again in the future.

In the long run, it becomes more costly and ultimately snowballs because you are putting a band aid on things but you are not actually getting to the root of the problem. There are ways to help minimize this such as a DevOps methodology which is something we are well versed in implementing. It helps to slow down the accumulation of technical debt by building a framework to address technical deficits as well as add more quality control.

**CEO CFO: *Has being a small woman-owned business helped you?***

**Ms. Lawton:** It has not yet. We did have our 8(a), which is another SBA certification and not women-owned specific but we just graduated from that program. The government is looking to have more women-owned

small businesses compete on things so I am confident given our track record and past performance that we will win some WOSB set-aside opportunities in the future.

**CEOFCO: *Have the challenges of today's world had much impact on your company?***

**Ms. Lawton:** It has had some affect. Some of the contracts were reduced because of budget constraints and that was tough in terms of trying to make sure that I could keep all my employees and not downsize. The fact that we are not able to meet our customers' in-person anymore changes things quite a bit as well. But we adapted and weathered the storm without having to let anyone go because of Covid.

**CEOFCO: *What do you look for in your people; what is important?***

**Ms. Lawton:** I look for people who are self-starters, versatile, coachable and work well in a team. I believe these traits suit a small business really well. The rest can be taught.

**CEOFCO: *Are you finding it as difficult as most companies are to attract talent or do people like your approach and want to work with at SJ?***

**Ms. Lawton:** We were voted twice as one of Atlanta's Best Places to Work. We are very proud of that because my philosophy has always been to take care of my employees. Happy employees also make happy customers. It has gotten harder because people are more expensive these days, however we continue to try and set ourselves apart.

**CEOFCO: *Would you give us an example?***

**Ms. Lawton:** We embrace the concept of career growth opportunity, work/life balance and a fun and exciting culture. We also offer hybrid or remote work and have flexibility in terms of work and life schedules. We provide excellent health benefits, especially for a small business. Internal communication is a huge focus as well, so using programs like SLACK and another corporate social media platform called Hi BOB to keep everyone engaged. This helps bring people together and make it more of a community versus just working on your computer in the middle of nowhere.

**CEOFCO: *The tagline on your site is "Resources, Responsiveness, Reliability." Would you touch on that and how it plays out daily?***

**Ms. Lawton:** We try to be resourceful, understanding that budgets are tight and how we can do more with less. We take our responsibility seriously and when we sign up to do something, we do it. We deliver on our promise. I have always felt that being responsive is one of the biggest benefits for customers. Even if things are going sideways we make sure that we do not make people wait to hear from us, instead we approach it head on to fix the problem.

**CEOFCO: *Are there particular types of projects that you would like to work on given a choice?***

**Ms. Lawton:** I cannot think of anything in particular. We love to problem-solve. We like to dig-in and find the path forward.

**CEOCFO: *Are you able to take on as many projects as come your way? Can you expand as needed?***

**Ms. Lawton:** We are. We are poised for growth at this point. We have our operations in a great place and access to great technical resources beyond what we already have, and that is a magic combo. We are ready to take on more.

**CEOCFO: *Why choose SJ Technologies?***

**Ms. Lawton:** We have done a breadth of different technical solutions with a breadth of different customers from DOD, to civilian to commercial. As a small business we have taken on big challenges. We have always delivered. Because we are small, we have the capability to have a more intimate relationship with our customers than a large company. The resourcefulness provides some out-of-the-box thinking for our customers at better value.

