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Cindy K. Andreotti

President of Enterprise Markets, MCI
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There aren't too many people who can say no to Cindy K. Andreotti, president of MCI Inc.'s enterprise markets, the group that sells telecom services to the biggest companies and governments in the world.

No big client did say no when she asked them to stick with the company, then called WorldCom, through its 21-month bankruptcy and the accounting scandal that precipitated it. And if someone had canceled a contract, she probably would not have accepted it.

Andreotti, 48, talks quickly and with passion. She describes her life this way: Needs only three or four hours of sleep. Travels every day. Commutes weekly between Ashburn and Los Angeles. Makes personal time for her husband, her dog, golf (18 handicap), skiing and playing violin.

She sums up her leadership style thus: "Give 120 percent. Excellence is a standard. Patience is a virtue, just not mine."

She double-majored and double-minored in business subjects at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minn. She came blazing out of school in 1978 and headed straight for Northwestern Bell's management development team just before the AT&T breakup.

She joined AT&T Corp.'s sales team in 1982 and started calling on clients, one of which was Dayton Hudson Corp., the forerunner to Target Corp. The retailer was interested in buying automated touch-screen terminals for bridal-registry purchases. Did Andreotti have anything like that?

She didn't, but she didn't see why she couldn't. She schemed to get AT&T's hardware supply arm, Teletype Corp., to take an IBM dumb terminal, retrofit the screen with touch-screen technology she knew was being developed by another company, then wire it into AT&T's network. Insta-product.

But her bosses at AT&T said they couldn't see it succeeding. So she called Teletype's executive vice president and pitched her idea, asking him to build a prototype. The answer was no. She traveled to Skokie, Ill., and sat in Teletype's lobby, telling the receptionist to call the executive vice president and tell him there was a young female in the lobby who wouldn't leave. He stormed down with four systems engineers and told her to present her idea, complete with technology specs, a business plan and revenue forecast. She had it all. He still wasn't convinced, so she took him back to Dayton Hudson's Twin Cities headquarters to meet with the senior vice president for marketing. He promised to buy 5,000

terminals.

She got her prototype. Teletype built it for \$100,000. Andreotti didn't tell her bosses at AT&T what she had done until she had the prototype in hand. Then she took it across the street to Dayton Hudson, which promptly put in an initial order for 3,000 units. The retailer was so impressed with the technology, and with Andreotti's ability to deliver, that it decided to replace its IBM back-office equipment with AT&T's.

Andreotti made 455 percent of her sales quota that year. She was recognized as AT&T's No. 1 salesperson, a first for a woman. She was quickly promoted to branch manager. She was 25.

"Give me a good challenge," she recalled thinking at the time.

It wasn't long before a headhunter approached her on behalf of MCI and its chief, Bert C. Roberts Jr. He asked her to build the telecom upstart's national accounts business.

Roberts told her she could live anywhere, so she left Minneapolis for California. Then began a steady march of corporate reorganizations, and with each change Andreotti ended up with a bigger chunk of the country to run. She had moved up to senior vice president of global accounts when WorldCom's Bernard J. Ebbers arrived on the scene.

Andreotti said she didn't get caught up in the corporate contretemps in Clinton, Miss., WorldCom's headquarters. She looked at the WorldCom merger as an opportunity to sell an even wider range of services.

"They were low-end wholesale and we were high-end retail," she said. She could now sell customers local and long-distance services, across the street and around the world, and every inch of the backbone was owned by WorldCom, allowing her to offer aggressive prices and be assured of quality execution.

Andreotti said she never was asked to report financial results that weren't accurate. "We sent in our projections and forecasts, but we never saw anything back from Clinton," she said. And then, when the corporation would project 12 percent sequential growth quarter to quarter, Andreotti recalled, "many of us were asking, 'Where did that come from?' We asked a lot of questions. We got no answers."

Until the big answer: an accounting fraud that ballooned to \$11 billion in size.

"It was a tough, tough time," Andreotti said. She stayed, she said, because she felt a personal obligation to her clients and to the team she had built.

She and her husband moved into a home in Great Falls two weekends ago, so she can lose the commute and grow deeper roots at MCI's new headquarters in Ashburn. Asked about her next challenge -- would she one day want to run the company? -- she replied: "I'd love that opportunity at some point in my career."

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