

CLOSE-UP: ERIC BASU

Sentek president sets high personal, professional goals

By ERIN BRIDGES , The Daily Transcript
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When he left the Navy, Eric Basu wanted to make his mark in a new way.

After working for consulting companies both big and small, the now-president of Sentek Consulting realized entrepreneurship was his new calling.

He went back to school to get a Master of Business Administration where he met some established business leaders who exposed him to their side of the business world.

"I started getting this seed in my head," Basu said. "I wanted to do this on my own."

But he isn't the type to jump right in without a clear plan.

With an MBA under his belt he had the educational foundation to start a business, but he wanted more. He turned to successful business leaders to find out what worked for them, what didn't work and how he could apply their lessons learned to his own company.

And when the company got going, he kept his faith in the business he built, determined to succeed and win a big contract.

"I had \$30,000 in debt, a wife who doesn't work and kids in private school," he said. "I turned down three job offers, two of which were more money than I'd ever made before because I wanted to see this work."

In 2001, his company received a \$75 million contract.



Since then, business has been good. Sentek, a provider of government and commercial IT security and command and control systems, announced in November that the company received a \$3.5 million contract from the Joint Program Executive Office Joint Tactical Radio System and a \$5.2 million contract from The Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center.

While he is excited about the company's growth, Basu has much bigger plans for Sentek.

"I've got big goals," he said. "My next goal is to take the company up to about 25 million in revenue and go to 50 million in revenue."

"That's a big change, of course, because in government space when you go from 25 to 50 you're going to be losing your small business set aside standards."

With a solid plan and the right team, he knows it is possible.

Just as he did when establishing the company, Basu is looking to successful business models for inspiration and guidance. He also looks to those that were not as successful to learn from their mistakes.

Basu also relies on his "all-star board of advisers" to help him guide the company in the right direction.

He said a key factor in Sentek's success until this point and what will provide future success is the ability to recognize its strengths and find its niche.

Sentek's niche, Basu said, is the low side between warriors and engineers.

"We have folks who understand the business of war, how it's fought, how it's done," he said. "And we have the engineers who understand the technology that makes that happen. The two are usually like oil and water." But Basu found a team that works well together toward the end goal of supporting the warfighter. "I think it gets you the best product," he said. "A lot of work from the beginning has the operation in mind."

Getting the right employees is one of Basu's strengths. Sentek is a small company, which means every employee is integral to success. Therefore Basu settles for nothing but the best.

"I run it like a soft special operation forces --we look for the best and brightest," he said. The best and brightest can take many forms --they could be outspoken leaders who dominate a room or someone who mostly listens and offers good suggestions at the right moment. Basu knows it when he sees it, and those are the people he will hire. He also demands moral and ethical conduct of himself and his employees. "Every day when you're in business you have the opportunity to take the high road or the low road," Basu said. "I think if you continually take the high road ... I don't think you end up any

poorer or any busier than you would have been otherwise."

Basu is a matter-of-fact kind of guy. And the running joke in the office is that he has no poker face. "If someone behaves unethically, especially to my face, I take it very personally," he said. "I have a hard time hiding that."

He also has found, though, that people appreciate it when someone is straight-up with them. He said his ethical and moral standards have established a good reputation for him and Sentek. "I think your reputation is everything," he said. "I find time and again customers come up to me and say the reason we went with you is because of your reputation."

Basu intends to maintain that reputation and his high standards for his employees as the company grows. He acknowledged it could be hard, but said it is "a good challenge." He has met that challenge so far. Sentek soon will open an office in Charleston, S.C. And the company will continue vying for more contracts.

Basu has high hopes for the Navy's Consolidated Afloat Networks and Enterprise Systems small business set asides. And the company is actively pursuing efforts in Asia and Africa as well. At some point, Basu hopes to open an office in both Asia and Africa. There are many challenges to opening a business in a foreign country that he must overcome first.

He already is pursuing the endeavor in the Philippines and expects to start looking at an office in Africa in the next year or so. "If we can get enough momentum, it makes a lot of sense," he said of the Africa office. "It's hard to say we're building systems that have a host nation's needs in mind, but we don't have an office there."