

Aircraft Engineering Installation Services

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Jack Corthell
Aircraft Engineering
Services, Inc.

Persistence, perseverance, and patience are the major attributes a company must possess to succeed in business and are also very relevant in doing business with the government. Aircraft Engineering & Installation Services, Inc. (AEI) has demonstrated just that. AEI is a Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) that manufactures highly technical aircraft parts, components, and assemblies. The owner, Jack Corthell, served four years in the U.S. Air Force as a crew chief on KC-135 aircraft performing pre-flight and post-flight heavy maintenance and inspections.

After leaving the Air Force, Jack attended Airframe-and-Powerplant (A & P) school and worked as sheet metal cockpit lead man, A & P mechanic, avionics bench technician, and avionics manager until he decided to start his own company in 1993. In October of 1990, Jack was hired as an avionics manager by Duncan Aviation to run an FAA certified repair station at Herndon Executive Airport in Orlando. Two years later Duncan announced that they would be closing the Herndon location. In light of the impending closure and his desire to stay in Orlando Jack started his own company – Aircraft Engineering & Installation Services, Inc. (AEI) was established as a sole proprietorship in May of 1993 and incorporated in August of 1993.

Going full speed ahead, Jack withdrew all of his savings (\$2,000.00), rented an office on the corner of Bumby and Robinson in downtown Orlando and opened for business working nights until Duncan officially closed in October 1993. Initially AEI took on any aviation related job that they could handle and grossed 180K their first year. By 1999, business was doing so well that they were able to purchase a larger facility on Landstreet Road in Orlando.

Taking full advantage of a special program offered by the Small Business Development Center at UCF (SBDC at UCF), AEI won an energy star award by retrofitting their building to meet energy star requirements. The SBDC at UCF was also instrumental in assisting AEI with obtaining a \$75K SBA loan. By September 11, 2001, AEI had offices in three countries, with 49 full-time and five temporary employees and an impressive worldwide customer base, reaching almost \$6M at their peak. However, this was also when AEI's business started to dwindle, within four months after the tragedy of 9/11, AEI's business slowed significantly and eventually the company downsized to eight employees.

At the verge of closing his doors, Jack was able to lease space in his building which provided additional income where he would still be able to operate. Recognizing the challenges within the civilian aviation community he began to research the prospect of working with the government, his research revealed valuable information that allowed him to leverage his service connected disability from serving in the Air Force.

Envisioning the potential opportunities in doing business with the government, Jack targeted the Department of Defense (DoD), specifically the U.S. Air Force. His first step was to assign a champion within his company to pursue this endeavor and he selected his national sales manager, Bill Brownlee. On April 9, 2008 Bill Brownlee met with the local Procurement Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) representative, Tony Espinosa, to discuss how to better position the company to sell to the government. During this meeting, Tony provided Bill with a wealth of information that would assist him with accomplishing his task; they also discussed strategies and techniques that would prove to be beneficial in securing business with DoD. "Tony Espinosa was extremely helpful. He went through our profile in CCR, provided me with suggestions and insights on how to improve our profile, and gave me an outline to correctly evaluate opportunities on the various government search engines. He was above all honest and forthright as to his role as our PTAC officer". The company's SBA profile, which is linked to CCR, is an essential element of the registration process as it provides a brief synopsis of the company's background and is heavily used by contracting officers, small business specialists, small business liaison officers, and others searching for small businesses to buy from.

Almost two years from their first meeting, Bill informed Tony that they won their first government contract, he wrote in an email, "I met with you approximately one year and nine months ago, did what you told me to do and my company finally has its first government contract". On September 27, 2009, AEI was awarded a two-year, SDVOSB set-aside contract to re-engineer the H-3 Mode Advisory Caution and Warning System panel (MACAWS) for the C-130H aircraft; the amount of the contract was just short of 1.2 million dollars.