



In the News

Opportunity knocked, she answered

Vani Kola, 41, '87 M.S.E.

Fellow executives may be surprised to hear that one of Vani Kola's most enthusiastic coaches of her business career is her 12-year-old daughter. However, Kola, who built the two companies she founded, RightWorks and Certus Software, into multi-million dollar successes, says that after leaving Certus in August, her daughter encouraged her to try her hand at starting another company, saying she made a "really good" CEO. "My family has never made me feel guilty about my work," she said. "They've always been proud."

Kola has built her career on tracking trends and needs in software and offering good products ahead of the curve. After spending eight years as a manager and engineer at Consilium and Control Data Corporation, Kola founded RightWorks, a company offering e-procurement solutions. When she left the company in 2000, the company sold for \$667 million dollars. In 2001, she followed up that success by founding Certus, which provides publicly held companies with software that helps them comply with the rigorous Sarbanes-Oxley Act, which mandates high levels of financial accountability.

It takes more than a good engineering skill set to build a company, Kola asserted, and said it was her ability to take disconnected "data points" and see a pattern ahead of competitors that allowed her to develop products that have done well in the marketplace. While she is pleased with how well her companies have done, she's not surprised. "I should be surprised, but I'm not. I expected to succeed," she said. "Someone once told me, 'Your doubt is the first step to failure,' and that's true."

After spending some time off with her husband and two daughters and volunteering for various community groups, Kola plans to step back into business, either as an entrepreneurial advisor or with another company of her own. Whatever the challenge turns out to be, Kola says she's ready for it.

"Opportunities don't come wrapped in a box with instructions that gets dropped in your path," she said. "They come when you do something you've never done before."