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## SOFTWARE FIRM BUILDS LOYALTY THE WARM 'N' FUZZY WAY ENCOUNTER: CRITICAL EDGE GROUP

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SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

**W**hen Sandra E. Glick started a business to provide companies with accounting software 20 years ago, she was looking for a flexible work schedule that would allow her to work at home and have time for her young children. The company she began as Glick & Associates is now called Critical Edge Group, based in Hamden.

How has Critical Edge Group grown and evolved in a volatile field?

I think I had to make every stupid mistake there was. The trick is to not make the same mistake twice. I was able to make all these mistakes and still be in business because the focus was always on customer support and customer service. It's not product, it's how well you care for your customers. The honesty and integrity with which you approach every conversation, every action makes a difference. I am very proud of the fact that the employees here always feel they can do the right thing. That's very important to me. We're always going to give the customer the truth instead of what, in the short run, is going to be the most profitable.

How does your business foster customer loyalty in the fast-moving field of technology?

A person here always answers the phone. There is no automated system and that makes a big difference. It starts with that - we answer the phone. We calm the clients down if they're upset and we give them the warm,

fuzzy that we are going to take care of it. And we always find an answer.

Yes, we are profitable and yes, we have to make money every year. But the first question is: What's the best way to deliver our services to our customers? Then, we have to figure out how to make it work and still make money.

Why did you recently start a networking group for women in Microsoft-related technology companies in the Northeast?

We were at a quarterly partner briefing for Microsoft managed partners in New England. There is always a small reception after the meeting to network and I looked around the room and there were hardly any women there. The guys were all networking and talking to each other and the women who were there were standing on the outskirts.

In other situations it really isn't like that any more. And in this business 20 years ago, when you walked in a room, it was 50-50 men and women. Women were embracing technology in the '80s and early '90s at the same rate as men and I realized now women aren't owners and aren't even employees in a lot of cases. I'd love to know why this is.

I just know women bring something to the technology industry that is valuable and the fact that there are fewer and fewer of us is not good.

What are the goals of the networking group?

It has three focuses. One is educational. Sometimes guys know the technology and we don't, and sometimes we are intimidated to ask. Then, there's just plain old networking so we can be with other people like us. And the third component is mentoring other women to encourage them to come into this industry. We want to start small and grow organically.

Women are deluding themselves if they think the old boys' network is not alive and well. Sometimes they'll let women in if they act like a boy, but I don't want to be a boy. I want to be one of the old girls. I do think the way we approach business is complementary to the way men do and we should encourage that.

As a woman, how has your perspective contributed to the success of this business?

For women, one of the things I find is that we take things personally. I remember sharing with a male business owner a problem we were having with a client and his response was: "That's business." A woman's response is: "What did I do wrong? How can I make it better? What do I do to improve?"

It's really personal and we also have a much more nurturing approach. We tend to look for more feedback from a customer. We look for confirmation that what we are doing for them is working and they understand what we're saying. We're more relationship-oriented.

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