



# Honoring Michelle Boswell

BY DAVE WELCH

Michelle Boswell is a breast cancer patient. She's been fighting it for eleven years. She's been lovingly quiet about it. Recently the disease completely took over. Two weeks ago her brother Robert said, "Michelle understands that the cancer isn't going to be beaten back this time."

I met Michelle in the summer of '98 at the technology employment show at the Holiday Inn. House of Brick was looking for its first engagement. I introduced myself to Michelle as she stood alone in the CTG booth. That, by the way, is my first and last memory of Michelle in a booth without prospects in it. Michelle looked over our team's resumes and on the spot told me she wanted to place us into ConAgra Frozen, an account she'd been trying to get into. Within days, House of Brick was on-site at ConAgra Frozen for a week and a half engagement—House of Brick's first. Michelle quickly went on to place four more people at ConAgra.

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**Michelle Boswell** *continued...*

It's significant that Michelle arranged House of Brick's first gig eight years ago. We soon found out Michelle was a perennial volunteer on the board of the Association of Information Technology Professionals Omaha chapter. In no time, Michelle had us speaking annually at the regional infotec® technology trade show.

Michelle eventually left CTG and went to work as the Omaha office manager of Solutions Point in Papillion—a technology staff supplementation shop. Shortly thereafter, Michelle invited us onto the infotec® speaker selection committee. Early in our relationship, Michelle revealed her sales secret: "I beat people over the head with a pillow until they say, 'Yes!'" The first time I met Sandy Deane was at the Solutions Point office. It became apparent to us pretty quickly that Sandy and Michelle were a professional team. The 2001 recession loosened the tight technology employment market. A corporate decision was made in Kansas City, and Michelle had the unpleasant experience of laying off her staff and closing the office.

We'd been under professional advice that when someone like Michelle becomes available, grab them if you can, even if you didn't think you had a position open. So we went after her. I believe the only call I took on my family vacation that year was from Michelle. She said she had an opportunity she was going to take to develop a staff supplementation business line. I knew that was her specialty and appreciated how attracted she'd be to the opportunity. Just the same, I told her I still saw her eventually at home in our team and wasn't done trying to sell her on the idea. A month later the phone rang at about three in the afternoon. It was Michelle's first day on her new job. "We need to talk," she told me. Within an hour we were at Village Inn

at 108th and L. She just toyed with her soda. The meeting was a check-off because we both knew we were already in agreement. Okay, and yes, I did enjoy the cherry pie while I listened to Michelle talk. Back at the office we felt like we'd just hired infotec®, and maybe we had. We knew there couldn't be very many people in town who had more professional relationships within the IT community than Michelle. Now with two people on the HoB sales team, Michelle leaned toward cold calling and Nichol Case toward maturing existing contacts.

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Michelle quickly learned our team's marketing message and then helped refine it, but she had to make some adjustments to work with us. There was the time we'd all pre-scoped an engagement with the customer at a week and a half. David Woodard

got on site and within the first hour noticed an easier way to do things. Nobody had noticed it previously and everybody agreed to go that route. He finished up the engagement about two billable hours after he started. At first Michelle had some concerns about that sort of thing, but she quickly got used to it and accumulated those kinds of stories to sell with.

About three months after Michelle joined the team, she invited me over to the Blimpie sandwich shop at 117<sup>th</sup> and Blondo. She tearfully told me she had been diagnosed years earlier with breast cancer. It had just about taken her life. She related how at one point they had her in an isolation tent in her home. The cancer had been in remission for years, but was now an issue again. Last week her husband Dan told me how she'd been told that once she'd been in remission for five years, she was in the clear. When Michelle hit that five year mark, family flew in from all over and they had a big celebration. But a year later the cancer was back.

Five years ago when House of Brick was known to just a handful of customers, we signed up for the idea of a quarterly brown bag that Nichol branded "Solid Foundations". Michelle took the calling lead as she and Nichol did what became known as "the blitz". They'd pepper the region with their calls and commit people to come to the seminar. Attendance was always at least thirty and often

as high as seventy. Oracle corporate colleagues marvelled as they were having trouble getting even thirty people in a room for a marketing event in a much larger metropolitan area.

One time, Michelle and a colleague were taking Halloween candy pumpkins into offices all over town. At one point, Michelle determined they needed to divide and conquer. Michelle handed a pumpkin to her teammate, pointed to a manager's door and said, "Take this pumpkin in there." I don't believe the teammate had ever met that manager. Michelle knew when to push all of us.

Michelle's relationships go beyond professional convenience. Just one example: once, when a teammate had an event at their home, Michelle was there to cook. Occasionally at our team Christmas dinners Michelle handed our spouses bracelets she made as a hobby under the brand "My Michelle".

*"Michelle's relationships go beyond professional convenience."*



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**Michelle Boswell** *continued...*

An example of Michelle's influence: Midlands Business Journal was doing a pre-infotec® article on some topic. They called Michelle to ask who the experts were on the topic. In no time I was looking at my mug in the article line up with other professionals who I would consider part of the "who's who" of IT experts in the region. I understood I was in the lineup because of Michelle.

Michelle has great respect and trust in her medical team. A year ago Michelle, David Woodard and I went to Kansas City together. During the drive Michelle told us, "Everyone knows what my prognosis is." I told her I didn't mean to be insensitive, but I didn't want to make any assumptions. She said, "People with my diagnosis don't live into their 50's." She told us about other cancer patients she'd met through her support group and had become dear friends with. She told us the average life expectancy of people with her diagnosis and how she had outlived that many times over. She told of the grieving that everyone including the care givers and medics went through when one friend in particular passed away.

There came a time when Michelle felt the need to prospect into Kansas City. She took Mike Stone to the Kansas City Oracle User Group and reported there were eighty people in his session. Michelle stayed overnight with her aunt once in the Kansas City area, and cold called her way into various large businesses. Today we have a significant customer base in Kansas City.

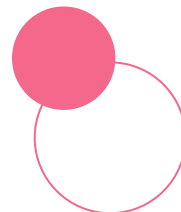
Two and a half years ago we were feeling the need to add a full time administrative assistant and office manager to staff. I suggested Sandy

Deane, as Michelle and Sandy had always worked so well together. When we made the suggestion to Michelle, she disclosed Sandy is actually her aunt through marriage. We thanked Michelle for the disclosure, then said on the spot we weren't concerned based on the separation Michelle and Sandy had obviously maintained on that issue over the years.

One of the highest professional compliments we've received came from within. Michelle tells us frequently, "I believe in my product." Here's an example of what Michelle accomplishes because of that belief. Two years ago Michelle had scheduled a trip with me up to Toronto to further build relationships with the Oracle Direct Sales team. At the Omaha airport she was told she couldn't fly to Canada using her driver's license alone and she'd need either a birth certificate or a passport. She couldn't come up with either so I traveled alone. I'd thought I was going to be presenting to maybe five people. Based on Michelle's relationship with her

Oracle Direct contact, I wound up presenting to fifty sales people!

*"Occasionally at our team Christmas dinners Michelle handed our spouses bracelets she made as a hobby under the brand 'My Michelle'"*





My single most enjoyable HoB engagement was the one Michelle sold to her mother. Rose Ann Knowles has a history of working in and building technology consulting businesses in Omaha, including CTG. Michelle made it known to us early on that she learned just about everything she knows about IT and business from her mother. They talk frequently. Appleton City is population 1,300 and I'm betting that number includes the cows. Michelle's father Jay wanted to run an auto parts house in Appleton City, so he and Rose Ann uprooted and went for it. Rose Ann landed the director position over the women's division in the West Central Missouri Community Action Agency. WCMCAA is the largest employer in town with 80 employees and a remote staff of 300. Rose Ann was telling Michelle about WCMCAA's IT integration challenges and Michelle said HoB could help. After all appropriate disclosures of Michelle and Rose Ann's relationship were signed, Mike and I hit the ground. Soon Rose Ann was walking the halls of the state capitol in "Jeff City" with WCMCAA's infrastructure audit assessment in hand. WCMCAA is now a model agency for IT integration within Missouri state circles.

*"A week ago Michelle and the family asked us to contact people...and let them know about her situation."*

During the WCMCAA engagement, Rose Ann told Mike and me a lot about Michelle. We heard about how just as soon as existing drugs seemed to no longer be useful, prayer would lead to a new drug. Rose Ann calls Michelle the "miracle girl". Mike and I told Rose Ann the partners are absolutely convinced one of the reasons Michelle has lived as long as she has is due to her native cheery temperament.

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**Michelle Boswell** continued...

*"People ask what they can do. Dan and Michelle have taken particular pleasure in the cards and notes..."*

A year ago at our monthly team dinner at Anthony's, Michelle told us her disease was progressing. She was matter of fact about it, and reminded us she had always been up front with us about her disease and always would be. She said she was going to need chemotherapy treatment each Friday. We made business adjustments to accommodate that.


Until we kicked off our Remote Managed Services business line a year ago, we had focused our marketing activities on our local region. We were torn as to whether we should take our booth and sales staff to IOUG 2005. Michelle felt strongly we should and she prevailed. All of us came away feeling it was the single most worthwhile booth event we'd ever participated in.

Michelle is giving and open. She dedicated weeks to introducing new Oracle field reps to their job and the territory. That included introducing them to key prospects even though there was risk those introductions could lead to a competitive situation.

Michelle introduced us to Matt Geiger. She and Matt had been doing some very out-of-the-box thinking on how to deliver Oracle classes. It wasn't long before Matt's organization's national management was asking questions as to what was going on in the Omaha office with the positive Oracle numbers. It was about that same time House of Brick and Oracle University finally came to agreement. We gave Matt our notice.

Shortly thereafter Michelle suggested we bring Matt on board. We all understand Matt is on our team at Michelle's behest.

In March of this year, Michelle attended a Breast Cancer symposium in Colorado on scholarship. Rose Ann was sponsored by her work. My wife and I happened to run into Michelle at the airport when she was coming back from the conference. She was very excited about the conference. Michelle had taken extensive notes and did what she could to get the information to both her medical team and other cancer patients.

Michelle loses herself in her work to stay distracted from her illness. Occasionally I've asked her, "Are you in pain?" Most often the answer is no. I'm not certain she'd want to acknowledge it even if she were. 

This year Michelle missed infotec® due to illness. It really bothered her as this was the first time she'd missed in ten years. The cancer episode deteriorated. Rose Ann called me April 28 and said Michelle was going on full time medical leave. Sandy told us family and friends had taken the initiative to pull together a benefit July 29 for the Dan and Michelle Boswell family. Finally, two weeks ago, Michelle's medical team told her she was terminal and they had no new curative treatment plan for her. We don't know how much longer Michelle has to live. Michelle's care givers are doing what they can at this point to give Michelle as much quality of life as possible.

In the weeks before Michelle finally had to leave full time employment, Matt and I agreed that we should probably prepare ourselves for the possibility of taking a few in the chin from Michelle as she dealt with the emotion of losing control of her professional environment and her health. To Michelle's credit, nothing like that ever happened.

In the hospital, one of the Bergen Mercy Oncology nursing staff told Michelle's brother Robert, they'd never seen this level of family support for a patient. That doesn't surprise us. Michelle reflects the stock she comes from. Our first exposure to Michelle's extended family was three years ago when Michelle came into the office, laughing and worn out. She'd just spent



*"Michelle reflects the stock she comes from."*

the weekend with two of her "wild, crazy aunts". One of them showed up shortly after that and we got the first-hand experience!

There are other memories that are too personal to include here given Bricks' wide distribution. We'll share those with Michelle and her family.

A week ago Michelle and the family asked us to contact people Michelle has had significant professional interaction with and let them know about her situation. We understood in doing so we were part of a much larger effort. The outpouring of support and expressions of concern have been no surprise given Michelle's reach in the community and the positive nature of her relationships. People ask what they can do. Dan and Michelle have taken particular pleasure in the cards and notes that are coming in. Dan reads them to Michelle every day.

Michelle, we understand you're determined to have a restaurant lunch with the team one more time. We're looking forward to it!



# Michelle Boswell

## Benefit Dinner

Dinner served from 4pm - 8pm

Saturday  
July 29, 2006  
4pm - Midnight

The event will be held at the Papillion Legion Post #32, one block west of 84th Street on Lincoln Street in Papillion.

Food \* Drinks \* Music \* Prizes

Buy tickets online—search for “Michelle Boswell”  
[www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) and use the “Buy it Now” feature.

Want to send a cash donation? Make a check payable to the  
“Michelle Boswell Benefit Account” to:

Pinnacle Bank  
1200 Golden Gate Drive  
Papillion, NE 68046

Do you have an item you would like to  
donate for our raffle? Want to bake a cake  
or volunteer? Call Mark at 402-212-0375,  
or Sissy at 402-896-1195.

*All donations and assistance are  
greatly appreciated.*

Questions? Call Mark at 402-212-0375,  
check out the listing on [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com), or  
look for the link on [www.deanefamily.com](http://www.deanefamily.com).



### *A Survivor's Story*

Ten years after surviving a stem-cell transplant, life-long Papillion resident Michelle Boswell discovered that her cancer had returned. This time, she's battling tumors on her bones, many in her spine. After enduring numerous radiation and chemotherapy treatments in the last four years, her condition has recently worsened significantly and she is now unable to work.

Michelle, her husband Dan, children Megan and Daniel are facing the future with courage, but courage doesn't pay the mortgage. Her friends and family are throwing this benefit dinner to help raise money to ease their burdens and let them focus on enjoying time with their family and loved ones.

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