

# Renee D. Parker

## Doing What's Needed

When Renee Parker graduated from high school, she was ready to do whatever it took to get out of Culpeper, Virginia. Through her formative years, she had always been one to stay up late into the night, putting in long grueling hours to finish her homework. After observing her parents' work ethic growing up in a lower middle class neighborhood, she knew she had the willpower to succeed, even as her classmates dropped out of the advanced coursework when the going got tough. "I dreamed of growing up and moving away from Culpeper," she says. "I didn't know where I wanted to go because I hadn't experienced life too far outside of Culpeper, but I knew I wanted to leave."

The small town had been a good place to grow up—a close-knit community and a modest yet supportive home environment that emphasized hard work, good citizenship, and the importance of church. But Renee was ready to see the world beyond, so she joined her cousin in signing up for the Air Force as their ticket out of town.

Several months later, they hadn't heard anything about their enlistment, but their aunt was living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Renee and her cousin decided to move up to the nation's capital and get their own place, embarking on an adventure far beyond the city limits that had defined their youth. "I was terrified when we got a call from the military after we settled down," Renee remembers. "However, we were able to get out of it. Later I signed up for flight attendant training, and they wanted me to come down to Tallahassee, Florida, for the course. Fortunately, the paperwork hadn't been binding, so we were able to keep the new lives we had made for ourselves."

Now the founder and CEO of QuTech, an IT firm providing services to the federal government, Renee has spent the last three

decades building that life into a force to be reckoned with in the Washington D.C. area. Yet one of the most rewarding aspects of her success has been the opportunity to reconnect with the home she left behind all those years ago in incredibly meaningful ways, whether she's donating computers and training classes to the church she attended as a child, or buying land to build a senior facility in the community. "I want to give back in these ways because it's needed," she says simply. "I do what I do at QuTech because it enables me to go beyond myself, and do for others."



Specializing in system integration services, cyber security, helpdesk and user support, and cloud and web-based services, QuTech has developed a large portfolio of business and services in the 26 years since its inception. It began as a commercial firm, but over the years has picked up government contracts with agencies including the National Park Service, the Army Corps of Engineers, the

Department of Health and Human Services, and the Smithsonian, which now comprise the majority of its work. With a team of 165 employees, QuTech is headquartered in Largo, Maryland, and has another office in Falls Church, Virginia. Revenues were in the neighborhood of \$25 million in 2014, and the company recently secured an office in Abu Dhabi, signaling a promising future in international services.

QuTech is dedicated to doing quality work and providing responsive service with integrity and honesty. "We go all out and do whatever it takes to do our job with excellence," she says. "In a way, my company has come to define me. It's the avenue through which I do good for my family and my community. I live and breathe this company. It means so much to me."

For Renee, one of the greatest measures of her business's success is the warmth in her

mother's voice when she says she's proud of her. Indeed, it's a level of achievement Renee grew up believing she could attain, though she didn't know exactly what it would look like, as she had never seen it firsthand. Her father was a crane operator for a granite quarry, while her mother began as a housekeeper and then got a job in the deli at Safeway. Her mother had a ninth grade education level, while her father only made it through sixth grade. "They were always working," she recalls. "Mom would work at night, leaving Dad and me to cook for the family. They were committed to having all four of us finish high school, and they said they'd make sure I got to college if I wanted to go, though they couldn't afford to make the same guarantee to my brothers."

Quiet like her father, and giving like her mother, Renee always loved being around friends and family. She grew up the second oldest of four children, but the only daughter. Her parents made clear that they could only afford to help one child get to college, but that the money they used to help would need to be repaid. They offered this privilege, honor, and responsibility to Renee, who immediately grasped the importance and was always steadfast in making the most of her education. In between studying, she found time to get a job at a fast food burger restaurant in high school, using the money to help her parents and brothers.

When Renee graduated and settled down in the Washington D.C. area, she enrolled in night classes at Northern Virginia Community College and got a day job as a secretary at Systems Development Corporation. In that position, she began to notice the bright opportunities all around her that could be unlocked if she developed her tech skills. With that, she spent a year taking classes at the Computer Learning Center and earned a certificate in programming, landing her a promotion to the firm's programming department. Setting her sights on more education for more opportunity, she decided she would obtain a bachelors degree, and in 1980 began to take classes as time would allow. Ten years later, she completed her undergraduate studies and earned her degree in Applied Behavior Sciences from National Louis University's campus in McLean, Virginia. No longer would she work alongside colleagues, performing the same tasks with the same proficiency but earning less because she didn't have her college degree.

Through that time, Renee accepted a position at Computech, where she became the manager of several projects under an immigration naturalization contract. She preferred technical work over management, however, and decided to leave. "I didn't want to be responsible for anyone but myself," she recalls. "I can't predict what other people are going to do, but I know exactly what I'm going to do, and I wanted to get back to focusing only on that."

Renee had always wanted to work in downtown DC, so she decided to take a position at a New York-based company that had a Washington office. As luck would have it, they put her on a Department of Education contract that had her working in Arlington, Virginia, and she quickly rose to a project management role once again. In that capacity, she was directing a number of independent contractors making twice her salary, and she had long ago learned that she didn't have to settle for such status quos. Instead, she decided to go out on her own. "I had confidence in my capabilities," she recalls, "and I knew that if it didn't work out, I could always go back and get another job."

Renee formally left Computech and was then hired by a former manager as a consultant. The firm preferred to work with companies over individuals, so she used her maiden name to incorporate in 1989 as Davis Research and Development. Then Renee, who had tried all her professional life to march to the beat of a solitary drum and remain a one-woman force, found herself accruing so much work that she had to hire two individuals after the first six months. Several months later, she hired four more, continuing to grow slowly over time.

Without mentors or an expansive network, Renee spent those early years bootstrapping her success. She learned business through advice from her accountant, her lawyer, and other professionals she worked with along the way. "I quickly discovered that you win more bids when you build relationships with people because they get to know your capabilities and character firsthand," she recalls.

Renee changed the company's name to Quality Technology in 1993, shortening it to QuTech. She was deeply engaged in the firm's day-to-day operations until 1999, when she gave birth to her twin boys. The company's revenues dipped substantially in 2013 when deep

sequestration cuts hit federal spending, but it has since recovered to an all-time high. Now, as the CEO of the burgeoning business, Renee directs the overall strategy of the venture, guiding its direction and working closely with the firm's current President, Jeffrey Hamilton, and Chief Financial Officer, Rodney Whitfield. As a leader, she works to find the best employees she can and then provide them with the best resources so they can do the best job for QuTech's clients. "Our personnel are our number one asset, so it's crucial that I hire managers who treat people well," she affirms. "We have good people in place now doing a great job for the agencies that put their trust in us."

In advising young people entering the working world today, Renee underscores the importance of identifying your passion and then going all in. "To get where you want to be, you have to invest in yourself and put in the hard work to get there," she says. "If you half-step or side-step, you won't succeed. I wish I had learned it sooner, but now that I know, I'm all in, all the time."

This level of commitment leads to tangible results which Renee distributes amongst the people, organizations, communities, and causes important to her and those around her. It's the love and legacy woven between the lines of the company's balance sheets and into the fibers of its

mission statement. In its purest sense, QuTech is the means through which Renee empowers a thousand ends—her children's school, the church in her hometown, the Culpeper seniors in need of assisted living facilities, and the military families to which the firm donates. "QuTech allows my employees and me to make a living so we can make a difference," Renee says. "I love my work because it allows me to do what's needed, and there's a lot I need to do before I'm done."

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President and founder of Bernhardt Wealth Management and author of Profiles in Success: Inspiration from Executive Leaders in the Washington D.C. Area, Gordon provides financial planning and wealth management services to affluent individuals, families and business-owners throughout the Washington, DC area. Since establishing his firm in 1994, he and his team have been focused on providing high-quality service and independent financial advice to help clients make informed decisions about their money. For more information, visit [www.BernhardtWealth.com](http://www.BernhardtWealth.com) and [Gordon's Blog](#).

