

Outside the Box

Life sciences company founder says 'We solve problems'

Julie M. Donnelly, Date: Friday, February 4, 2011



When **Meg Spencer** launched Beverly life science solutions company Hamilton Thorne Inc. in 2001, it was her third time as founder of a startup. The company is a provider of laser systems and instruments for in-vitro cell applications in the regenerative medicine research and fertility clinic markets. The tools are designed to speed up research in stem cell, embryo and living cell procedures. Spencer talked to **Julie M. Donnelly** about problem-solving and finding the right path.

What is a good day for you?

A day when we solved some problem. We're a life sciences solutions company — we solve problems. Recently a client gave a talk at a conference and said we had increased productivity in his lab at the Weill Cornell Medical Center by ten-fold. He said, "I gotta tell you, I love that laser." That's a good day.

What trait gives you a competitive edge?

The ability to think in new ways. I wouldn't want to start a company making shoes. I have to dig a trench sideways. Determination, persistence. Also, I don't want to sit up and be the big boss. I want to work together.

Hamilton Thorne doesn't sound like the name of a life sciences company. Where did it come from and did you ever think of changing it?

That's like saying that about [Hewlett Packard](#). We were thinking about changing it at one point. But we have a really good reputation. We were urged to go to a fancy naming company, but we decided against it. Hamilton is a name we picked out of the phone book, and Thorne comes from one of our investors, Daniel Thorne.

You studied philosophy. It's an unusual background for a life sciences CEO, isn't it?

I also spent some time at veterinary school. I eventually dropped out of the program but continued on to do research. The first company I started was Hamilton Equine Systems Inc., a high- tech veterinary products company.

What's your favorite book?

"What is life?" By Erwin Schrodinger.

If you could have dinner with three people, who would they be?

The physicist Niels Bohr, Nelson Mandela, and the physicist Enrico Fermi. Fermi would blow your mind, but he would also be entertaining and fun.

What are your three greatest passions?

Solving problems, finding new ways to do things and this company.

What about outside of work?

I enjoy mountain climbing, walking in the woods, writing, and being with my husband, who is super terrific and funny.

Do you have a motto?

Never ask anyone to do something that you aren't willing to do yourself.