



# The Secret of Success Is There's No Secret

By Stephanie Jeter '06

**T**“TODAY'S THE DAY,” SAID Elizabeth Drake '87.

Drake sat still, arms folded and relaxed. Her fist didn't pump the air in passion. Her voice didn't boom. In fact, she didn't accompany the statement with much of anything, which, of course, means everything.

Intentionality in living is a prerogative in this Aggie chemist's life. She seizes the day, every day.

And now she pressed her point. “I don't think like a normal person,” she said. “I know the only day I really have is the one I'm living. I live every single day like it's my last.” Today is the day.

Since childhood, life has treated Drake to a compilation of medical challenges, from juvenile arthritis that at times kept her bedridden, to a successful fight with cancer as a student at A&M. And, most recently, a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis

occasionally keeps her off her feet.

Occasionally being the key word—because today is the day.

It's a step-by-step method that's led her to victory, both at home as a wife and mother, and in business as the president and founder of one of the 100 fastest-growing Aggie-owned or Aggie-led businesses in the world. Compliance Strategies & Solutions Inc., also known as CS2, works under the banner of developing the best strategies and solutions to meet the environmental, engineering and energy needs of facilities and businesses. The company has an active and extensive list of expertise. From helping facilities develop green energy, assisting in energy recovery, developing best management practices, gas cleaning and purification, recycling, to finding cost-saving solutions, CS2 has experts

This is the third time Compliance Strategies & Solutions, owned by Elizabeth Drake '87, has been honored with an Aggie 100 distinction. She is pictured (top) with her family: husband, Jerry Drake, and daughters Kira, Maggie and Jennifer '12. She stands with her Compliance Strategies & Solutions team in the photo below; Gerald serves as the company's vice president.

with knowledge that literally spans the alphabet—from air pollution control engineering to waste-to-energy operations.

Drake's method of success is simple, she said. “Realize that life is short and that you've got one shot,” she said.

Drake was the only woman graduate with a bachelor's degree in chemistry from East Carolina University in 1984. “The only girl, can you believe that?” she said. She interned in the quality assurance lab of the second largest pharmaceutical company in the world. They offered her the opportunity to continue fulltime, but such a job didn't ignite anything in the passionate Ag-to-be.

No, the job she wanted was in research, and that required a master's degree. So, logically, she said, “I went to grad school.” A&M was her last stop of five prospective universities for her master's. She may have been the only female in East Carolina, but

at A&M, “I felt like I was just like them,” she said. Women were active, the University had research money, and professors were educating students who were ready to place their mark on the world. “I was on campus for one hour when I called my mom and told her this was it,” she said. “I’ve been an Aggie ever since.”

She was on the fast track to a doctorate when the cancer came. “I thought I was going to die,” she said. “That’s what happens when people get cancer, right?” But, she didn’t. “I was a changed woman.” Today is the day.

After graduation, she worked at a commercial hazardous waste incineration plant in Port Arthur. “That’s where I met my husband,” she said. He was the operations supervisor at the same plant. She had been on the job for a while when the company started to fail. She wanted to own her own business for some time; she saw it as an opportunity. Gradually, she started purchasing the tools she knew she would need for her own enterprise.

Then, she quit her plant job in 1997.

It was a home-based business for a while, Drake said. She started making cold calls that weren’t cold at all and quickly landed some huge jobs. Within six months, she moved into an office building. Her college roommate, Jamie Phillips ’87—“she did my taxes at A&M”—became her accountant. Her husband became one of her engineers, and, because of her one-foot-in-front-of-

audits, CS2 was picked for seven of the jobs, outperforming some of the biggest companies in the nation.

She calls it ambition, though the hundreds of students she’s impacted might pick a stronger word for Drake’s drive.

She’s a founding member of the Women’s Former Student Network and

nothing to lose, and everything to gain.”

There are no guarantees for anybody, but you have to believe in yourself.

“My girls don’t think there’s anything they can’t do,” she said. That’s her biggest job, she said, being Mom to three. Kira and Maggie were in elementary school when Jennifer Yang came to live with the



is a frequent speaker at University events. Her talks are most often directed to student chemists, but her story translates to all disciplines. Her words jump past the podium to tell the entire story, not just facts of science—her story.

“Personally, I think I’m one of the luckiest people in the world,” she said. “Good things don’t come to you. You have to go to them. You have to make it happen.

“I have every reason in the world to do nothing with my life. Instead, I saw it as

Drakes. A foreign exchange student from South Korea, Jennifer came to America for opportunity and stayed to be part of the family.

Over spring break, Drake brought all three to A&M for a visit and Jennifer fell in love. Drake recalls Jennifer’s plea: “I want to stay here. I want to go to school at A&M. I want to be an engineer.” Jennifer joined the right family. The Drakes believe in big dreams. Jennifer is now a sophomore pursuing a chemical engineering degree.

“There are no guarantees for anybody. My children don’t think that there is anything they can’t do. I don’t have to tell them.” Instead Drake teaches by showing.

“You’ve got to be a giver. You’ve got to serve others. A&M is all about that. You’ve got to make a difference.”

You’ve got to be a risk-taker, she said. “Take a look at yourself and think, ‘I can do this.’”

And now Drake is writing a novel. “It’s a love story,” she said. Why? “Because I want to.”

Today is the day for that, as well. 🌟

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another business plan, CS2 was founded with no borrowed money.

Her client list is impressive: NASA, Clean Harbors, hazardous waste incinerators, petrochemical companies, pharmaceutical companies, chemical companies, a nuclear facility, and more.

And when the petroleum company BP sent out a call to all the best companies to help run its multilayered environmental

having every reason to do something.”

She’s been called crazy, “but risks aren’t as risky they’re made out to be.” She encourages Aggies to question, “What’s the worst that could happen?” Is it that your startup fails, and you have to get another job? “That’s not a risk,” she said.

“I believe in myself. I walked in here today,” she said. “Because I can walk, it puts everything into perspective. I’ve got

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