

# WOMEN IN BUSINESS


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## Ann McNeill - The Master Builder

BY DAWN A. DAVIS

It started way back, in 1979. To be exact, at 9 p.m. on December 31, New Year's Eve.

Ann McNeill decided to stay home while her husband and friends went out to ring in the new year. She picked up the book *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill, started reading, and her life changed forever.

Today, more than 40 years later, McNeill is the founder/owner of five businesses including MCO Construction and Services, a Florida-based full-service construction management company recognised as outstanding in its field and paving the way for others.

"I'm the first black female contractor in our state operating at the level that I do, focusing on billion-dollar programs," said McNeill in a conversation with Caribbean Today.

Indeed, McNeill and MCO Construction, with 80 percent of its staff being of Caribbean heritage, has been an integral partner to some of the largest

construction contractors in the region providing services on major projects including the American Airlines Arena, CONRAC – Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Scripps Research Institute, Marlins Ballpark Parking Garage to name a few.

But how did it all begin?

### Aha Moment

A young African American mother and wife in 1979 and deeply in debt, McNeill learned the keys to riches and was faced with hard questions from reading Hill's book. She took it to heart, implemented those lessons and began building wealth.

"The first question he asked was, how much money do you want? I never thought about that. Nobody ever asked me how much money do you want? The second question was, what are you going to do to get the money? I had a good corporate job, I thought I was doing okay. Married with one child, with a picket fence and house."

Looking hard at the family finances, she decided to work



**Known as the Master Wealth Builder, Ann McNeill says her desire is to not just to build buildings, but to build lives and community.**

on the debt. Her next move was to bring like minds together as suggested by Hill. She formed a Mastermind group focusing on growth, investing, and positive mindset. Then the 'aha' moment happened.

McNeill and her husband were doing repairs on their home and had the opportunity to purchase the house across the street, which also needed extensive repairs. Combing through library books for construction tips to do the repairs themselves, they realized how much they could save, and learned how much construction workers actually earn.

"So I said I'm gonna' go to trade school. My husband started laughing. But I ended up working on my masters degree, my family,

a job, and I went to our local trade school," said McNeill with pride.

### Exponential Potential

She later took a leave of absence from her corporate job to work with one of the largest construction companies in the United States in order to learn the trade, noting that she had to surround herself with the people equipped with what she wanted to do.

Then, as her business grew McNeill saw the exponential potential of what she could offer. She grew from small contractor to general contractor to construction manager to program manager encompassing all aspects of the industry. Headquartered in Miami, MCO Construction Services offers expertise in engineering, research, accounting, management working with partner companies in building public and private projects.

The inspirational catalyst that began in 1979 led McNeill to go beyond constructing buildings to management to investing to empowerment coaching. Known as the Master Wealth Builder, McNeill is helping women forge ahead, not just in the construction industry, but in wealth, mind, and spirit.

When she founded the National Association of Black Women in Construction it's vision was to help women succeed

in the construction industry through innovative solutions and partnerships. But the association has become much more than an industry-focused entity; it is based on the principles of mastering success in all aspects of life.

"My desire is to not just to build buildings but to build Lives, to build community... You have to have a larger vision of yourself and a larger dream and self-confidence. For American blacks unlike any other black people in the world, we have been so programmed to think we can do nothing. Our dreams have been stolen from slavery. Our bodies are free, but sometimes our minds are still enslaved. And so, the whole idea of self-worth and confidence is to know that in spite of everything I can do this. I have a responsibility to teach"

In fact, in her 40+ years of business the Master Builder has trained more than 100 interns in the business of building and the entrepreneurial mindset. Everything starts with how we think, she proclaimed.

"The future is so bright," said McNeill. But it's going to mean absolutely nothing if we don't have a desire for better quality of life and be willing to work for it, be willing to do the inner work, work on yourself. that's where it starts."



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