



# The Iron Woman

Jessica Stones talks her **iron-clad** career

by Briana Stewart  
photography by Dave Blackhurst

Jessica Stones stands out.

At Pacific States Cast Iron Pipe Co., she's the HR manager of 210 employees — and one of only 18 women at the Provo company.

"It's a male-dominated industry — no getting around that," says Stones, who's worked at Pacific States for 10 years. "I'm often the only woman in the group, and the men are typically 10, 20 or 30 years older than I am. This is not a stereotypical office job."

Stereotypes be darned.

BusinessQ sat down with Stones to talk small beginnings, big advice and being outnumbered.

## Small town start

Jessica Stones' life (quite fatefully) began in Iron County, Utah. She grew up in Paragonah, a town of around 500 people.

"Everybody knew everybody, which has its charms," she says. "I was a good student — well behaved, shy and studious."

## The second degree

For college, Stones opted for a place where everybody *didn't* know her name — Utah State University.

"My parents always said I went as far away as possible without leaving the state," she laughs.

Stones went on to get both her undergraduate and graduate degrees in human resources.

"I know! I'm actually working in the field I majored in," she says. "Imagine that."

## Working it out

After graduating in 2005, Stones was on the

hunt for a job. Within no time, she landed a gig as an HR specialist at Pacific States — an industrial manufacturing plant heavy on dirt and light on dresses.

"I had started building up my work wardrobe after graduation, but it quickly became apparent that wouldn't be necessary here," she laughs. "This is my uniform."

Stones says the environment isn't for everyone — but it is for her.

"When we're hiring, people either love it or hate it. They're either fascinated by the surroundings or they think it's dirty and antiquated," she says. "I realize I'm completely biased, but I can't think of a better place to work. We have the best people — the most respectful people. Everyone is hard working and committed to their jobs, and they give us the freedom and independence to excel and take ownership. It's the very reason I've been here 10 years."

## Progress matters

Overseeing more than 200 employees has its challenges, but Stones has a fierce dedication to these employees — and seeing them succeed.

"I'm obsessed with seeing people excel and progress. It's my most favorite part of my job," she says. "I've seen employees really develop themselves, work hard and attain higher positions in the company. There is nothing more rewarding than watching that happen."

## Iron men

With less than 9 percent of the company being women, gender issues actually come up less than you'd think.

"It's easy to assume that because I work in a male-dominated environment, my experience is more challenging," Stones says. "I've actually found the exact opposite to be true. What people care about here is how hard you work. I've been treated with such respect — but perhaps that has something to do with me being the HR manager. Yeah, that might have something to do with it." (laughs)

## Generational gap

"Misconceptions of what it means to be a woman in business are fading fast," Stones says.

"I used to get asked a lot if I was a teacher or a secretary — people just assumed that if I was working, that had to be what my profession was.

"Now, those are amazing jobs that companies heavily depend on, but I think it points to the more narrow focus people sometimes have about women in business."

## Tip of the trade

As the expert on all things human (and their resources), Stones is adamant in her advice for women *and* men in business.

"If you want to do well in your chosen profession, you have to show up," she says. "No matter how bright or talented you are, no matter how much you have to offer, be here, be on time and be present. Lay your foundation right." ■