

Larry Ellison

Lawrence J. Ellison, now one of the richest people in America (nearly rivaling Bill Gates), was born in the Bronx, New York in 1944. After he contracted pneumonia at 19 months, his young mother gave him to her great aunt and uncle to raise. He lived in a lower middle-class Jewish ghetto on the South Side of Chicago in a two-bedroom apartment. As a child Ellison showed an aptitude for math and science, which, he says, he liked because he was good at. Later he would be named science student of the year at the University of Illinois. However, he dropped out after two years when his adoptive mother died. Ellison then moved on to the University of Chicago where, even though he dropped out after one semester, he learned the basics of computer programming. From Illinois he headed out west to Berkeley, where he bounced around from job to job for the next eight years, finally landing a job with Ampex. Here he was a computer programmer and built a large database for the CIA; its codename was Oracle.

In 1977 Ellison and Robert Miner, Ellison's former supervisor from Ampex, collaborated to found Software Development Labs. Eventually Ellison read a paper written by an IBM employee about Structured Query Language (SQL). Although IBM had not found any potential in the idea, Ellison did and used it to create a database program compatible with both mainframe and desktop computer systems. Miner and Ellison then renamed their company Oracle and found their first customers for the program: Wright Patterson Air Force Base and the CIA. In 1981 IBM purchased Oracle's SQL for its mainframe systems, and, for the next seven years, Oracle's sales doubled each year.

Oracle's success can be traced to Ellison's willingness to take risks. Not only did he initially hire a staff that was not qualified for their positions, he promised products with features that did not yet exist. When Oracle went public in 1986, it raised \$31.5 million with its initial public offering, but, because of habitually overstating revenues, the company posted its first losses in 1990 and was on the verge of filing for bankruptcy. It was then that Ellison finally hired qualified professionals to fill most of the positions held by the original staff. He rewrote the database program and it, too, was a success. In two years time, Oracle was a profitable company again and still is to date. America's banks, airlines, automobile companies, and retail giants all rely on Oracle's database programs to run their businesses. This has allowed Oracle to develop into a multi-billion-dollar corporation and Ellison to inherit the titles he has today: billionaire, playboy, world-champion sailboat racer, jet pilot, ruthless businessman, marketing genius, and avant-garde thinker.

Sources:

<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/ell0bio-1>

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/csr/comphist/le1.html#south>

<http://www.computer-schools.us/Larry-Ellison.htm>