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Market Yourself

LOCAL PR GURU SAYS WHEN LOOKING FOR WORK, YOU'RE THE PRODUCT



Thanks to a strong background in public relations, Sharlan Douglas, APR, knows what it takes to make a good impression. The president of Douglas Communications Group LLC in Royal Oak is ready to share some trade secrets with those in pursuit of a new profession.

Though Douglas has plenty of PR experience (she worked in TV promotion and at two Detroit public relations firms before moving to nonprofit management),

she says the lessons she's learned from running a small business can steer job seekers in the right direction. When searching for success, she says you need to think of yourself as the product, potential employers as customers, and others who are vying for the same job as competitors.

Douglas says you need to stress whatever it is that separates you from the pack by telling your story in a compelling way. Successful products have a unique selling proposition, and so should you.

DOUGLAS' SIX SUREFIRE SECRETS TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD:

It's not about you.

It's about your customers. Before you send a résumé or fill out an application, research the company online, and find out the name of the person who would hire you. How can you make his or her life easier? If you don't know or can't guess, ask, "What are the day-to-day challenges of your job that you'd like me to help you solve?" Then tell him or her how you can solve them.

Know your competition.

There could be hundreds of people applying for the job you want. Douglas suggests you develop a mental image of a likely competitor. How are you different from him or her? What's your "unique selling proposition?" Articulate those differences in a way that positions you against the competition. Everyone says, "I'm a people person." Better: "I make sure I get a smile from every customer I help."

Think strategically.

"Sometimes I'll work with a small client because I think they have the potential to become a big client," Douglas says. "Could you make a big difference for that new employer, one that would pay off with a bigger salary later on?"

Consider trade-offs to reach your long-term goals. Does the employer offer generous education benefits? Will you be working for a leader in his or her field or someone who is a noted mentor? Will they give you time to participate in a professional association?

Network.

The old boys knew the importance of a network. They took care of their friends, and your friends might take care of you, too. Tell everyone you know you're job hunting. "People like to help," Douglas says. "They're flattered that you think they're important enough to be valuable to you." Besides, she says, people with experience in your field love to share their knowledge. When meeting with them, ask if they'll refer you to another acquaintance.

Make cold calls.

"In public relations, I frequently cold call reporters to pitch stories," Douglas says. "As a business owner, I call prospects to ask for an opportunity to introduce my company and our capabilities." While on a job search, she says you're going to have to do the same. If you don't feel comfortable with the concept, Douglas suggests writing a 10- to 15-second script and reading it aloud until it feels right. "Remember that much of the time you'll be leaving a voice mail message," she says. "Try this: Instead of asking the recipient to call you back if they're interested, tell them that you'll call them at a specific time a few days from now, and ask them to let you know if they'd prefer a different time."

Motivate yourself.

"My client isn't standing over me, reminding me of tomorrow's deadline," Douglas says. "If I don't meet it, I don't get paid. Job-hunting is a job. Work it, girl!" 