

Suzanne Bresette Bresette + Company

2009
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While developing her career as a marketing professional, Suzanne Bresette put herself through college and raised a son as a single parent without outside support. Today, she is president and chief executive of the Portsmouth-based marketing agency Bresette + Company, a firm she launched in 1990.

To say the company is successful is an understatement. With clients ranging from Compaq to Visa, Bresette + Company has grown over 200 percent since 2002.

Bresette has devoted a considerable amount of her time to mentoring other women. Half of her company's workforce is made up of women, as are the interns who spend time at her firm. She has been so good at it, several former employees now own their own firms or have taken senior positions at agencies in Boston and New York.

Q. What made you decide to go into this type of work?

A. I was working in insurance. After I became pregnant with my son, I wanted to work part-time, but they would not allow me to. I was in the lobby, fuming, while the president of the company's ad agency was there. He talked with me, handed me his business card, and said he would hire me part-time. That was in 1975. It was quite a fluke, but a wonderful fluke.

Q. What did you find to be the biggest challenge as a woman on the road to achieving your success?

A. I personally never found it difficult to be a woman in the workforce. I was always treated with respect and given every opportunity a man was given.

Q. What was your biggest mistake and what did you learn from it?

A. When I first opened my own business, I underestimated the complexity of running a business as well as performing all the duties of an ad agency. I learned rapidly that you have to run the company by the numbers, not just with the passion of doing good work.

Q. Who has been most instrumental in your success and why?

A. Lee Baer, the gentleman who first hired me.

He came from Madison Avenue. I'm grateful for the incredible knowledge and network that he exposed me to.

George Silverman really taught me a great deal about how to structure and run a business. He is still a mentor to this day.

Joe Hoffman, the former president of Ingalls Quinn & Johnson in Boston, gave me my first large agency experience.

'It's very important to listen, to be willing to take guidance and really put in extra effort to show what you can do.'



PHOTO BY JOHN HESSION

Q. What advice would you give to young women just starting their careers?

A. I think it's very important to listen and to be willing to take guidance. It's also very important to go the extra mile and really put in extra effort to show what you can do. Do not be timid when given opportunities. Do not be fearful of making mistakes. It may not be 100 percent correct, but your initiative will be respected. — Cindy Kibbe

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'If you really want it, you'll make it.'

Janet Dunican North American Equipment Upfitters

Q. What made you decide to go into this type of work?

A. At the time, my husband was doing a lot of traveling and was spending a lot of time away from the family. I felt it was something my husband and I could do together. I felt if we both had a vested interest in it, it would be more doable for family needs.

Q. What did you find to be the biggest challenge as a woman on the road to achieving your success?

A. The need to get our name out there and to be able to present ourselves in a fashion suitable to a man was a challenge. We were fortunate that Verizon gave us our first order. It's a scary thing to go through. It was a long, hard struggle. We've had our share of hurdles.

Q. Have you found a difference in how women are accepted as successful in their chosen careers as compared to their male counterparts?

A. One benefit of this industry is the tax breaks customers receive from dealing with a women/minority-owned business, which we are. It's cost-effective for our customers.

Our other locations have female management as well. You have to have a certain personality to be out in the shop with the guys. The two women we have now are doing great.

Q. What was your biggest mistake and what did you learn from it?

A. There have been such a number of things that I didn't know and have grown from. I've had bad employees that I've had to let go. There are certain business decisions that could have been better. I learned so much about what to document in HR. Overall, I'm very happy with where we are and what hurdles we've overcome. Every day I learn something.

Q. Who has been most instrumental in your success and why?

A. It's very difficult for me to actually name all those that helped me. You also learn from things in the past, your history and moving forward.

Jeanne Shaheen was inspiring. There was also Eleanor Roosevelt, who was such a humanitarian.

There has not been one mentor, but a lot have influenced me.

Q. What advice would you give to young women just starting their careers?

A. I would have to tell them to strive for whatever their heart desires. If you really want it, you'll make it. When a door closes, a window opens, as they say. I also have to say, if it wasn't for my employees, I wouldn't be where I am today.

— Cindy Kibbe

PHOTO BY JOHN HESSION

Janet Dunican's journey from the financial industry and then teaching to owning North American Equipment Upfitters, a Hooksett-based manufacturer of aerial lifts and bucket trucks, might have been based on the thought of spending more time with her family. But in doing so, she shattered a glass ceiling.

In 1999, she and her husband founded the company, which remains the only female-owned

upfitter in the country.

In the past decade, North American Equipment Upfitters has grown from 12 employees and one plant in Hooksett to 84 workers, with facilities in Syracuse, N.Y., Old Orchard Beach, Maine, and the newest — Colebrook Manufacturing in Colebrook, N.H., which created eight much-needed jobs in the North Country.

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Julie Gustafson Amoskeag Business Incubator

Julie Gustafson, as president and chief executive of the Amoskeag Business Incubator in Manchester's Millyard, not only helps to create jobs, she helps create businesses.

With Gustafson at the helm, the incubator has nurtured the creation of over 80 businesses generating over 500 jobs. She also has played a key role in helping to found five SBA Business Information Centers in New Hampshire, and she has overseen the placement of more than 1,500 students in internships and other career-experience positions.

Q. What made you decide to go into this type of work?

A. I sort of fell into it. While studying for my master's in business degree at Southern New Hampshire University, I was doing business consulting as well as my previous job. I was looking around to see what was out there. There was ad in the paper for incubator manager. It sounded really interesting. You get to wear so many different hats — it takes a unique person to manage an incubator because of that.

Q. What did you find to be the biggest challenge as a woman on the road to achieving your success?

A. I have a family with a husband and three daughters. My biggest struggle is trying to juggle them and the incubator. When one or the other is out of balance, it's still manageable. But when with both are out of whack, it's really crazy.

Q. Have you found a difference in how women are accepted as successful in their chosen careers as compared to their male counterparts?

A. At the incubator, I haven't run across that. I feel like we're equal counterparts. Outside of the incubator, there's a big difference. There's a big difference in pay. Women have to work harder to prove themselves.

Q. What was your biggest mistake and what did you learn from it?

A. I tend to take on too much. I sometimes find it

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hard to ask for help because I feel like I'm being intrusive. I've learned to delegate more.

Q. Who has been most instrumental in your success and why?

A. When we were young, my father decided to open up a ski and sporting goods store. It was very successful. My parents taught me a good work ethic — I grew up watching them build the business.

Q. What advice would you give to young women just starting their careers?

A. If you want to achieve something, and really care about it, you can make it if you want it enough. Be honest and respectful of others. It really makes a difference. It's also important, if you make a mistake, to own it, correct it and learn from it.

— Cindy Kibbe

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