

COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

THE CENTRAL OHIO BUSINESS AUTHORITY

VOL. 25, NO. 43

| EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT |

JUNE 19, 2009

| A CONVERSATION WITH ... |

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Since 1994, Ann Gallagher has worked as a strategy and communications consultant with clients ranging from Fortune 500 companies to trade associations. As owner of her firm, she works closely with senior management, CEOs and boards of directors on strategy and leadership development.

Gallagher, 41, previously worked for Limited Brands Inc. in public affairs and for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce in communication in political education. A native of Columbus, Gallagher has a bachelor's degree in journalism from Ohio State University and has Coach U certification.

How can a consultant truly be a business partner?

All consultants say they are business partners. Be cautious of “true partners” who give you recycled work with other clients’ names on it. True partners are collaborative, industrious, intelligent, creative, market-savvy, invested and fiercely loyal. Consultants who are your real partners believe the only measure of success is your bottom line, not theirs.

What is executive branding?

It's the process of developing and packaging the best attributes of an individual and positioning her to achieve her goals.

How do you do it and how do you get started?

Like traditional commercial branding, the first thing you do is define your personal brand descriptors – strengths, talents, values, passions, characteristics, experience, goals, and aspirations. After that, you need to strategically position yourself among your key stakeholders. The best way to make sure you are in the right place at the right time to advance your organization is by developing and implementing a brand communications plan, or an executive positioning plan.

How does executive branding affect the bottom line, especially in this economy?

Products and services do not make money. It's the people who create the products and sell the services who make money. No matter what the economic climate, relationships will always be the most valuable business currency. The top officers of an organization are directly responsible for the majority of relationships that drive the bottom line. By increasing their visibility, they increase visibility and credibility of the organization. People invest in, work with, buy from and do business with people they like and trust.

How can a mid-level manager conquer the fear of public speaking?



Janet Adams | Business First

Executive consultant Ann Gallagher helps her clients brand themselves, not only as a professional development exercise, but to improve business operations and the bottom line.

It's no secret people fear public speaking more than they fear dying. You have to be competent; you don't have to be the next champion orator like Barack Obama. Also, remember that you only have to deliver two or three main points. If you try to do more, the audience will be confused. It's also important to honor your style. Whatever style you have is fine as long as you are sincere. Finally, practice out loud. There is no substitute for that.

What is “forward thinking” and why is it important? How is it accomplished?

It's the ability to anticipate future outcomes based on past data and expertise. In other words, it is creating a strategic vision. The best way to become a forward thinker is to develop empathy. Get out of your office. Talk to people who are different from you in every way – age, race, gender, education, income, etc. Also, learn from those who are not in your industry. If you can understand the world from a variety of viewpoints,

you will have the perspective necessary to be a forward thinker.

How does understanding the trends help a business person succeed?

Knowing the latest trends doesn't just make you look hip, it gives you a strong competitive advantage. Having insight into behavior and attitudes can help you improve communication with key stakeholders. Trends are rich sources for new business ideas. Applying trend information also enhances your brand.

How can you find time to chase trends?

The best way is to be aware of your surroundings. Become a people watcher. What are they reading, eating, drinking, watching and saying? Another way is to keep an eye on the media, especially those which cover business and your industry. There are also some terrific Web sites: harrisinteractive.com, trendwatching.com, inconoculture.com, springwise.com, and google.com/trends.