

NEWS : Advantages**Departments**

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ADVANTAGES™

An introduction to interesting industry players

What's Your Story?

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Q: Where did you go to college?

Medical College of Georgia, graduated Summa Cum Laude in 1980 with a Baccalaureate of Nursing Science (BSN); Medical University of South Carolina, Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), 1987. By working with a variety of different people, I learned the importance of building, nurturing and maintaining relationships. As my career progressed, I held unique, one-of-a-kind nursing and hospital administrative positions, with my last position being a combination of a

COO and CNO of a major academic medical center. Effective leadership in those positions gave me the tools to be an effective executive in sales later in my career.

Q: How did you get started in the industry?

A: I relocated in 1995. My ex-husband owned a small promotional products business with fewer than five employees. The receptionist was unable to come to work one day, so I was asked to come in and answer the phones. I offered to assist the office manager with some product research and pricing proposals, as I had a lot of downtime at the front desk. Over time, I became familiar with the products and suppliers and eventually started making cold calls and selling products. I found I did not really sell products, but ideas. Though I started in nursing and got into promotional products much later in my career, I have always been in the business of selling ideas, motivating change and recruiting talent to see those ideas come to fruition.

Q: What motto do you try to live by?

A: Do what you say you will do, on time, and you will be wildly successful.

Q: What's your biggest selling challenge?

A: Staying abreast of all available options and products out there.

Q: What's so great about a career in sales?

A: You can be as busy as you want to be, and your success is self-directed.

Q: What's the best advice anyone has given you?

A: Don't be afraid to be different or to do things differently.

Q: What makes you successful in sales?

A: My creativity, and I have never missed a deadline.

Q: What do you do to improve your selling skills?

A: I attend national trade shows of ASI and PPAI, read trade publications incessantly, attend leadership and sales seminars, and network among other professionals at local and statewide events and meetings.

Q: What was your biggest order screw-up and what did you learn from it?

A: I once reversed product numbers when ordering 400 zippered, leather padfolios for a customer, and I ended up with 400 non-zippered leather padfolios and had to absorb a majority of the cost myself. Now I

double-check all purchase order details carefully! Because I have such good relationships with my clients, including this one, they offered to buy half of the wrong product ordered at a reduced price. I gave the remaining balance to this client.

Q: What's your best way to deal with difficult clients?

A: Put your customer service into overdrive. Always anticipate your client's needs, remember what they are looking for and stay in touch. Finally, remember the customer is always right.

Q: Best source for creative inspiration?

A: My team is my greatest inspiration. We are constantly talking out loud and brainstorming ideas. We have a white, write-on board we call the "Brain Board." New projects are listed and each time someone walks by it, they put their ideas on the board. It really gets loaded up after weekends filled with free-thinking time.

Q: Where do you see the industry headed in the future?

A: The Internet and importing boom has completely revolutionized the industry. There is so much business to be had. Customer service and offering unique and creative ideas can help you harness that business and help lock in relationships.

Also, I try to keep the high-tech promotional items (such as multi-functional laser pointers and USB flash drives) affordable and applicable to a wide customer base. We are all so computer-dependent.

Q: What do you think was your best sale/idea to date?

A: Grand Ideas recently won a Gold ADDY for the development of the Froo Jean Koozies concept. That has been a huge marketing success and we hope to go further with it. The best single sale was the integration of a local (Charleston, SC) watercolor artist, a Boston framer (Benjamin Martin) and a Canadian banking client for a destination gift in Charleston, SC. I really enjoy creating unique gift ideas for groups coming to South Carolina, especially Charleston.

Q: What do you do outside of work?

A: I am an avid reader, gardener and traveler. I especially enjoy spending quality time with my friends, family and pets.

Q: Is there something about you that might surprise us?

A: I read the sports section of the paper (from cover to cover) each day before I read anything else.

Q: What was your childhood ambition?

A: To be a ballerina! (Thank goodness that did not happen.)

Q: Favorite Web sites?

A: www.grandideas.net ; www.palmettoideas.net; www.foxnews.com.

Editor's note: *If you think you've got an interesting story yourself, please send me an e-mail and I'll be in touch: khuston@asicentral.com.*

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