

SIMPLICITY

EFFICIENCY

DETAILS

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Susan Devereaux
Principal

I am excited to be one of 28 authors included in *The Power of Transformation: Reinventing Your Life* (Chapter 15 - Out of the Box: Into the Ballroom). This book was released on August 1, 2014 at the Professional Woman Network (www.prowoman.net) conference in Louisville, KY. It features coaches and experts sharing strategies and tips for personal and professional transformation and change.



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An Interview with Margaret Lack

Co-Founder of

The Millennium Group International

1. Margaret, I know you have been retired for several years now after successfully building and selling The Millennium Group International (TMG). Would you give our readers a snapshot of your background and what led you to start your own business?

I worked in academia and financial services for 17 years in the areas of organizational development, training, and human resources management. Starting as a Training Officer, I expanded knowledge and skills to include OD and HRM through experience and a Masters Degree, climbing the corporate ladder to top HR/OD positions.

I set the goal of working for myself as a consultant after about 12 years into my career. This goal evolved from working for myself to founding and owning a business, and became more urgent when I herniated a disc and could no longer manage 8 hours of stand-up training or consulting. This was also a time when HR/OD jobs were negative and tiresome — constantly managing layoffs, downsizings, and reorganizations. To be honest, I had had enough of working for someone else, organizational politics, and salary ceilings.

Since I was no longer suited to stand-up work, I apprenticed for a few years with consulting firms delivering outplacement services and learning how to develop business. When I was confident I had learned the "rights" and "wrongs" of running a

consulting business and that I could successfully develop business and like it, it was time to reach the goal.

2. Would you describe the business model for TMG? And, how many employees worked for the company?

Our mantra at TMG was to keep it simple, and we did. Our services were all under the umbrella of developing organizational capacity.....a clear measure for whether a service made sense for TMG or not. Our staffing, other than the two business owners, was 1099.....contractors. The financial model we lived by had only three components, i.e. overhead, contractor payment, and margin.

3. At what point did you and your partner realize that it would be more effective and efficient to engage a Virtual Assistant?

Growth to the point that it was too time consuming and not profitable for owners to do our own administrative work and the business was beyond the inconsistency/inadequacy of using a service vs a dedicated VA. We needed a talented person who understood our business, had good judgment that was consistent with our organizational culture and focus, who could work independently, make suggestions for improvements, and could collaborate on projects.

4. What types of tasks did you outsource?

We outsourced and collaborated with our virtual assistant in event marketing, planning and coordination, polishing and setting up comprehensive proposals, designing and producing marketing pieces, compiling a Standard Operating Procedures Manual, establishing and maintaining an online document library, and compiling and producing high volumes of training and OD manuals and workbooks, producing white papers. Our VA interacted directly with as many as 50 TMG consultants and had to do so with tact and directness. She also interacted with our clients so there had to be a high level of trust that she would represent us consistently with our quality, client-centric focus, and excellence.

5. What, if any, difficulties did you encounter? How were they resolved?

We had difficulties early on simply because we were "green" and didn't select the person who fit the profile outlined in answer 3. Once we identified the right person with that profile, it was

smooth sailing. Any small bumps in the road were addressed collaboratively and solved with little fuss or muss.

6. What words of advice would you offer to a business owner looking to engage a VA?

Take time to identify the talents, behaviors, skills, and personality that your organization requires. Look for someone who meets your profile not only in administrative excellence but in the areas of communication, trust, honesty, and the ability to be discreet. Make sure the person is someone who can work with whoever you identify as the VA's universe, i.e. organizational leaders, employees, consultants, clients. Be clear on your expectations of the VA.....and find out what the VA's expectations are of the organization. Address any misconceptions from the beginning.

7. Any other thoughts you would like to share?

This is a critical part of any business.....TMG suffered in lost time, profits, and frustration before we followed our own advice given in number 6.....understand its complexity and importance to your business and treat your VA accordingly with these in mind.

At S.E.D. Services, LLC we partner with our clients to reduce the amount of time spent on support tasks with the goal of increasing the time available for revenue generating activities.

If you believe this information will benefit a colleague, please feel free to share it.

Sincerely,

Susan

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