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Q&A WITH ENTREPRENEUR SANDY SLOANE

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Sandy Sloane is the owner of Solutions by Sloane, a special events/workforce training, and development/public relations consultancy who helps companies grow their businesses. She has been a journalist for over 3 decades writing for local, regional, and national online and print publications and has authored and published several children's picture books. She lives by the philosophy, "If someone doesn't have a smile, give them one of yours!"

Can you tell our readers about your background?

I've had a bountiful life, living all over the country and working at several different careers from white water river rafting guide to marketing director, from journalist to occupational therapist, from meeting planner to book author, from mommy to business owner of Solutions by Sloane, my special events/workforce development/public relations consulting firm where I help companies grow their businesses utilizing comprehensive communications programs.

What inspired you to start your business?

After many years working full time for a variety of high profile clients in major markets including New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, and Denver, we moved to upstate New York and I decided to focus on using my experience to help small companies. My diverse background has included marketing and special events positions with electronic and print media, non-profits, sports and entertainment companies, retail establishments, telecommunications corporations, and public relations agencies.

Where is your business based?

Solutions by Sloane is based in Rochester, New York although I have clients all over the country. We are so fortunate to have the internet and the ability to work virtually from anywhere at anytime.

How did you start your business? What were the first steps you took?

When we first moved to Rochester, I didn't know a single person except for my husband. I began researching business networking events to make contacts and to see what was already out there to inform my decision about starting a business versus seeking full time employment. At the very first event I attended, I began talking to a gentleman and after some small talk, it turned out his company needed help with their special events....one of my main areas of expertise. We met two days later and he hired my company! Solutions by Sloane was officially launched with my first client being a nationally ranked, top 40 CPA firm. Getting that first client and exceeding their expectations yielded a great deal of credibility from other potential clients. My reputation grew from there and almost five years later, my company continues to enjoy success and growth.

What has been the most effective way of raising awareness for your business?

Networking, networking, networking! If people don't know who you are, they cannot do business with you. Meeting people at networking events has proven to be my best way of letting others know I'm out there. As part of my company's workforce development abilities, I teach networking classes to everyone from college students to business owners to seasoned professionals. I cannot stress strongly enough how important networking is to growth. I am also active in several charities and organizations as a way to give back. I am a lifelong volunteer and work hard for causes I am passionate about. I offer my help with whatever needs the groups have and as a side benefit, other volunteers get to know me personally and then hire me professionally. It is very true that "You do well by doing good."

What have been your biggest challenges and how did you overcome them?

Not being a numbers person, managing accounting for my company has been a big challenge for me. Thankfully, I have an incredibly patient and brilliant CPA!

How do you stay focused?

I work on so many different projects simultaneously so it is often challenging to turn off one project and turn on another. I rely on good old-fashioned color coded notebooks in which I religiously take notes about everything I'm working on. Time tracking apps like Toggl also keep me on task.

How do you differentiate your business from the competition?

There are few companies who have as many different areas of expertise as I do and none locally. I make sure to oversee every project personally and when I am hired as a trainer, I never farm that out to others. I always do the trainings myself. So, competition has not really been an issue. I do brand myself as "a small company with big company capabilities, all at a fraction of their cost." That really says it all.

What has been your most effective marketing strategy to grow your business?

Again, I would have to say networking. But not just meeting the people who might need the services of my company....following up with them, too. One of my most popular seminars is called "The Fortune Is In The Follow Up" and I take my own advice. I always send an email as well as a handwritten note on my own branded notecards ensuring my follow up doesn't get lost amongst 3,000 other emails.

People are so happy to get personal correspondence that is not a bill or junk mail!

What's your best piece of advice for aspiring and new entrepreneurs?

View everyone as a potential contact for new business. Even if they cannot use your services, you don't know who they know, who might be able to! Be nice and kind to everyone you meet. My favorite saying (courtesy of my mother who was beloved by everyone) is "If someone doesn't have a smile, give them one of yours!" If you say you are going to do something, do it. Your word is your bond. And try to help others, always.

What's your favorite app, blog, and book? Why?

App: Toggl time management app, easy to use and free!

Blog/website: MarieForleo.com for sage business advice with a woman's perspective,

Books: **You Are a Badass by Jen Sincero** which helped me see and embrace my strength, resiliency, goodness, and intelligence and **Purple Cow: Transform Your Business by Being Remarkable by Seth Godin** which is described as a manifesto for anyone who wants to help create products and services that are worth marketing in the first place.

What's your favorite business tool or resource? Why?

My favorite business resource is other people. Interacting and sharing ideas and information with others saves me from redundant, unnecessary work. And it makes what I'm doing a lot more fun, too!

Who is your business role model? Why?

I have so many role models but Gloria Steinem is one of the top. Because of her determination and courage, women have the ability to work, thrive, do what we want, and have it all. At the age of 83, her continued commitment to her beliefs is an inspiration to me and to all women. Her strength, despite the odds, reminds me to keep going even when it seems most of the world is against me. If you're doing what's right and what you know to be your truth, you will eventually prevail.

What do you have planned for the next six months?

I have several exciting new clients that are all very different so I will be very busy! To name a few, one is the preeminent organization furthering the optics and photonics industries and I will be producing a series of events for them. Another is a tourism based organization that I am working with to get local influencers to recommend our wonderful city as a great destination for conferences and trade shows. A third is a female financial advisor who is trying to gain more awareness and exposure for her Women, Wealth, and Empowerment speaker series. Those are in addition to my existing clients whom I am doing trainings and events for. I will also continue to write my weekly Woman to Watch column in the Democrat & Chronicle, the Rochester, NY Gannett newspaper. I have just written two more children's books and will get them illustrated in the next few months. I will then have 6 children's books to market and give to children's charities. Hopefully, I will have some down time, too, to spend with my family and friends!

How can our readers connect with you?

To find out more about me, a visit to my website is best. SolutionsbySloane.com

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