



LIFE AFTER PR: THE STORY OF ANGELA

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WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT WOMEN IN SENIOR COMMS POSITIONS AS THEY FIND NEW CAREERS AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN THEIR LIVES?

There are few gifted women in the communications field that have followed their instincts and taken the risk to create a business based on their insights. In the many cases where I have tried to recruit outstanding women to consider jobs that involve asking their families (including children) to support a major change in their lives, the answer is overwhelmingly a "no." There is virtually no appetite for risk no matter how rewarding the opportunity appears to be.

As I describe the exceptional female executive in this story, be aware of how unique her path has been. She succeeded in building an outstanding career and a successful business. When she realized that she had done what she set out to do by her mid-fifties, she decided to make a change.

It was time to close the door on that chapter and give herself permission to take time to consider what "next" would look like. For now, she is enjoying a pause. That in itself is new for someone who was so busy that she never had time to reflect on her accomplishments or think about shaping her future.

<http://www.jc-a.com/life-after-pr-series-angela-part-1-what-are-the-factors-that-affect-women-in-senior-comms-positions-as-they-find-a-new-career-and-a-new-direction-in-their-lives/>

WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF AN "A" TEAM FEMALE COMMS EXECUTIVE WHO ABANDONED AN ESTABLISHED CAREER TO FIND A NEW DIRECTION IN HER LIFE?

"Angela" came from a well-educated and gifted family on the East Coast. She was supported and encouraged by her parents to tackle challenges. She grew up expecting that she would succeed in whatever she decided to do. Angela attended a small, rural college in the Northeast with an excellent reputation for providing a broad liberal arts education. She then received a Master of Science degree in Public Relations.

Extremely bright, she graduated with honors writing a thesis that immediately led her in a direction she would follow for the rest of her career. The topic was about emerging technology companies in Silicon Valley. That was where she headed to begin her career.

With her advanced degree she ranked in the top tier of communications graduates and was quickly hired by one of the major public relations agencies in the country. She progressed rapidly from an entry level job to an Account Supervisor. Instead of jumping too quickly, which is often the case in the beginning stages of a career, she stayed for 4-years. She had no trouble keeping up with the pace of the "action."

This was an exciting time to be building a career in tech PR. There were agencies forming, companies looking for PR talent to promote products, and venture firms looking for the next "big" idea. Silicon Valley was ground zero for what was happening. Failure was not an option.

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HOW DID ANGELA ADVANCE INTO LEADERSHIP ROLES IN A BOUTIQUE TECH AGENCY AND WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTED TO HER DECISION TO BECOME AN ENTREPRENEUR?

She was recruited by and joined an up-and-coming boutique tech agency founded by two women. Their mix of clients suited Angela since her client contact was frequently one of the top officers (or the head of the company). This was a wonderful opportunity for her to quickly develop her capability as a counselor to senior execs. She was also able to develop a network of confidential sources revealing industry shifts when only a handful of insiders knew what to expect.

Her perspective and judgment were spot on. If that were not the case, her career would have taken a different track. She was innately curious about technology, followed trends and identified businesses that were "hot." She became an industry "insider" trading the latest "intel" with industry analysts

She was there for almost four years which is normally the critical time for agency executives to decide if they are interested in moving to a corporate position. The agency "Director" title translates to a mid-level corporate role so there is a natural fit for a transition and an adjustment to corporate values.

For Angela a corporate job was not an option. She was an entrepreneur at heart. She would never have been happy working in a corporate setting. It would have been constraining, too slow-paced and too bureaucratic. She needed to run a race and the Valley was the right place to see if she could "win."

She loved the variety, complexity and intensity of working with agency clients. Instead of looking for what she considered a "safer" corporate job, she saw the potential to build a firm based on her values and the solutions she could offer start-ups as well as more established companies. One of her insights was about the scope of services to offer. She understood the power of PR as a tool for her clients but was not limited to one solution. She was an early adapter of digital and social media to contribute to an overall strategy.

<http://www.jc-a.com/life-after-pr-series-angela-part-3-how-did-angela-advance-into-leadership-roles-in-a-boutique-tech-agency-and-what-factors-contributed-to-her-decision-to-become/>

HOW DID THE ROLE OF AN ENTREPRENEUR IN THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS SPACE LEAD TO A DECISION TO EXPLORE NEW WORK OPTIONS?

In June 1991 she founded the company in her name and evolved it over several years, describing it as a Digital Communications Group. While considered a boutique, the business grew with offices in San Francisco, Seattle, New York and Boston, among other cities. Its reputation was built on representing emerging growth companies in the business-to-business (B2B) and consumer tech space.

In order to add value to clients and remain relevant in one of the fastest moving sectors of the marketplace, Angela was constantly challenged to keep up. She needed to be ahead of changing conditions, identify trends and have an opinion about why. She was successful in maintaining a reputation as an opinion leader throughout her career.

She developed a network of analysts, venture capitalists, journalists, lawyers--attended conferences and appeared on panels to keep up with developments. She could not risk falling behind, and she loved the challenge although the pace was exhausting. Angela lived on both coasts.

It was not an easy schedule, that included heading up several offices, but she said she always anticipated and planned ahead for setbacks to make it more manageable. There were times when she faced major issues relating to operating the business. She also had family obligations.

When she felt it was time to stop, the solution was to find a buyer for her agency.

<http://www.jc-a.com/life-after-pr-series-angela-part-4-how-did-the-role-of-an-entrepreneur-in-the-digital-communications-space-contribute-to-her-decision-to-find-a-new-career/>

HOW DID ANGELA DECIDE TO MAKE A LIFE CHANGING CHOICE AND SELL THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS FIRM SHE HAD ESTABLISHED? WHAT WERE HER THOUGHTS ABOUT HER FUTURE?

Making that decision to sell her business was a challenge but there was no other viable alternative. It was based upon how she felt about the personal toll it would take to maintain the business. It was not a decision she came to without a great deal of thought, but she faced it honestly. Practically, to extract the value she had created in her business, this was the only route to take.

She was working all the time and knew that was the price to pay for her success. There were personal factors to consider. If she wanted a life on her terms, the only way it could happen would be if she were no longer running the company. Once she made the decision to sell her firm, she did not hesitate.

She had built a valuable organization and, with the help of an outside consultant, confidentially looked for a buyer. After being in business for twenty-four years, the firm was sold to a top-tier marketing communications company. With the acquisition, that company's high-tech practice became the largest within the organization. Angela contracted to stay while the assimilation and transition took place.

We connected for a thoughtful conversation about her plans three years after the acquisition when she was no longer in a management role. Here are highlights.

"How did I do what I did? Do I say it took courage? I have a derivative of courage that describes my action and that is, being vigilant and never taking my eye off the ball. Do your homework, be smart. Never be afraid.

"I need to figure out what's next. How hard do I really want to work? I want to have time to enjoy life and my family. I (still) want to stay in the flow (of the market) and what will that look like? I have a wonderful opportunity to say and do what I want to do. I worked very hard and now I'm on the other side (of all that work). I'm taking time to process this change (of my company) to the new owner.

"I'm incredibly grateful and happy, I can pinch myself.

"I count my blessings, I don't rest on my laurels, I keep my eye on the ball."

<http://www.jc-a.com/life-after-pr-series-angela-part-5-how-did-angela-decide-to-make-a-life-changing-decision-and-sell-the-digital-communications-firm-she-had-established-what-were/>

WHAT ARE KEY PIECES OF ADVICE ABOUT CAREER TRANSITIONS BASED ON ANGELA'S EXPERIENCE?

Angela was blessed with many gifts that led to her success. Among them two stand out — an uncompromising objectivity to understand the truth of a situation and the ability to take action based on that insight. As we wrap up the series, here are key pieces of advice she shares. For many professionals making the decision to start a new chapter in their lives and then implementing that decision is one of the most difficult actions to take. Angela didn't hesitate once she knew what was right for her.

- "I had three years to adjust the rate at which I get things done. I'm wired to get things done and now I ask, 'why hurry?' I don't need to rush!
- "Whatever I do it will be different in some way. It may solve a problem, or fill a need and reach a broad audience. It has to have an edge in whatever field that I might be in.
- "Be bold, stand out, ask questions, that was expected of me. My parents said there is no free lunch.
- "As the CEO I had no down time to reflect; I had to get up and do it again, every single day.
- "Most people define me as a calculated risk taker. I never looked back; I'm very analytical; I leave no stone unturned. I'll look at something I am interested in 100 times to understand it and assess its risk or viability.
- "I care about some things (issues, charities). I need a period of doing nothing and letting things come to me. It comes to me naturally as a thread. I keep thinking about that more and more.
- "I was asked to support a non-profit paper art gallery in Brooklyn. So much love goes into paper art and they asked me to help as Treasurer, so I took on the role. I feel great, I'm making a difference.
- "I was told to write a book about me as a single mom and CEO, Now that I have the time, I have embarked on that journey and want to tell a story that will help others avoid my mistakes. I want to help other entrepreneurs, and mentor young women building their careers.
- "We are in an age of extremes: violence, politics, climate. It continues to be volatile. We are in a transitory period where everything is being questioned.
- "Our industry is in a period of change. We need to help people get through these changes.
- "PR, what is it? (the) Art of PR is relating to different publics through all the channels available to us: social, digital, written, and spoken.
- "Agency business models are threatened by corporations trying to do the work by themselves. What does that mean for consulting firms?"

<http://www.jc-a.com/life-after-pr-series-angela-part-6-what-are-key-pieces-of-advice-about-career-transitions-based-on-angelas-experience/>