

More than Work



Cancer survivor. Faithful believer. Fountain of ideas. Out of place in the corporate world. Stymied in her entrepreneurial career. Karen Hoffman sped down an exit ramp on a St. Louis, Mo. freeway one day in 2003 and realized she was screaming at God.

She had begun to believe that her creativity and the hundreds of out-of-the-box ideas which flooded her mind every day were a burden and were actually impeding the development of her business as an idea coach and entrepreneurial consultant.

"I never get angry with God, but for some reason that day anger was what I felt and I just started screaming as I drove." Hoffman arrived home that evening in time for a scheduled meeting with a woman she had never met. During the meeting the visitor gave Karen Hoffman a book called *The Dream Giver* by Bruce Wilkinson and Heather Kopp. The visitor said, "I haven't read this book, but I am supposed to give it to you."

Hoffman was mystified by what she called the "woo-woo" nature of the way she got the book, but as she read it the phrase "dream champion" leaped out at her. Hoffman's work path was cemented. "I realized I have all these ideas because I am supposed to help people find and fulfill their dreams. That's what I am supposed to do."

I came into e-mail contact with Hoffman when she became keenly interested in my column and decided she wanted to help me "touch as many people as you want to touch."

Hoffman has taken her turn in the corporate world but says she encountered "so much politics and meanness it made me run away and go home." Hoffman also found corporate settings unwilling to accept new ideas. She was constantly accused of being naïve and of "wearing rose-colored glasses." Hoffman now proudly admits her glasses have that positive tint and she thrills in the positive things she can do for people.

She is developing two businesses, her own consulting firm simply billed as "Karen S. Hoffman-The IDEA Coach" and a second business called City Experts which matches speakers with organizations in St. Louis. She is struggling to make both businesses profitable, but her enthusiasm and pride demonstrates a woman of great accomplishment.

Hoffman says she loves working with frustrated entrepreneurs and individuals but she insists she's not a career advisor. "My passion is business. I love to help people start and improve their own businesses."

While ideas come easily for her Hoffman said something I have found to be true. "I give people ideas, but often those ideas come from things the people say which they don't appreciate." I have found the same thing. Often people hold the answers to their own dilemmas, but they don't "hear it" the way an outsider can.

Hoffman especially focuses on what energizes people and what drains them. "Everybody needs to find and exploit the things that don't drain you. When we find the things that give us energy we need to pursue them, but often companies simply don't allow people to pursue the things that give them that energy," Hoffman says.

Accounting and administration tasks drain Hoffman, but she says, "When I'm doing ideas and helping people, I'm in the flow and that's not work." The idea coach insists profitability for her businesses is just around the corner, but she admits that optimism is essential to her personal creed. She says, "You can't be a victim. Vent, but don't be a victim. You have to be positive."

Karen Hoffman conveys such hope, excitement and creativity you want to be as positive as she is. Yet, I can't rid myself of the conviction that until American businesses find a place for the Karen Hoffmans of the world many companies are not going to reach their potential as profitable businesses or as fulfilling workplaces.

TIP FOR YOUR SEARCH: Think about the person in your company who behaves differently from others. Are there ways to take advantage of the ways they are "different" which would enhance the effectiveness of the company?

RESOURCE FOR YOUR SEARCH: Positively M.A.D.: Making a Difference in Your Organizations, Communities and the World" edited by Bill Treasurer (Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2004)

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