

The Write Touch



Randi Lewis (left) helps client, Dawn Resh, find the right job.

RANDI LEWIS' RESUME BOUTIQUE MAKES PROFESSIONALS LOOK GOOD ON PAPER

BY LINDA L. ESTERSON

PHOTOGRAPHY REBECCA GARDNER

Dawn Resh spent 12 years working in mergers and acquisitions, financing and strategizing deals with bankers and lawyers, often with travel away from home.

Four years ago, she enrolled in law school to become a litigator. She had her first child during second-year exams. Her second child was born last December during her clerkship with Judge Alan M. Wilner.

With Judge Wilner set to retire in January, Resh suddenly found herself looking for a job for the first time in more than a decade.

"I had worked all over the world but never with the legal community in Maryland," says Resh, 36.

Upon a friend's recommendation, Resh solicited the help of the Resume Boutique to make her resume "pop."

"The way I phrased my business career didn't pop for a legal career," says Resh. "It looked like I job hopped when I hadn't."

Within hours, owner Randi Lewis sent a revision to Resh and it "was perfect."

Lewis also provided coaching on interviewing techniques and talking points. Resh landed a position with the law firm of Rosenberg, Martin, Funk & Greenberg — her first choice — to begin in January.

"I had a huge business background, and changing careers, I wasn't sure what the expectations would be," she says. "Once she worked on my resume, everyone was all of a sudden interested in me."

Lewis was a litigator in Los Angeles for 13 years before returning to her Baltimore hometown to be closer to family. Her daughter was an infant; she was in her early 40s, and she had not taken the bar exam in Maryland. She was realistic in her hunt, and she landed a position with the law firm of Miles & Stockbridge as director of diversity and professional development. For the last eight years, she's run the recruitment department, interviewing countless students, lawyers and paralegals and reviewing thousands of resumes.

"I have been the one interviewing, hiring and reviewing resumes," says Lewis. "I know what people like to read, and I know how it should be presented."

She opened the Resume Boutique in January, making what she had been doing for the last few years official. Her clients vary, from career changers to law school graduates to high school students applying to colleges. She strives to counter the belief that the more experienced professional need not have an extensive resume, and

she condenses the plethora of material the younger set tries to include.

"They may have had a stellar high school career with awards and honors," she explains. "They don't know when to give that up."

For her, it's really about the pleasure she gets from helping people present their successes in a better way.

"Helping people with the job search process — it's really rewarding, and I feel happy doing it," she says.

Lewis has clients all over the country — New Hampshire, Illinois, Massachusetts, California, Texas, New York and Washington, D.C. — and many have found her through the Internet. She even accepts PayPal (an Internet payment service).

The Resume Boutique also aids women who are returning to the workforce after raising children. She helps with their resumes, offers career guidance and direction, assists with letters to potential employers, but most of all provides emotional support.

"Those people really need help, direction and emotional support," she explains. "They need to have someone to call about their job search."

For these women, their children have been their world. How do they talk about them to



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their prospective employers? Do they?

She also directs them on their wardrobes. Lewis insists on a dark skirt and jacket, light shirt and closed-toe shoes.

“Looking professional shows respect and interest no matter what other people are wearing,” Lewis says.

In guiding them for interviews, she helps them research the prospective employer and interviewer so they can find commonalities to discuss. Asking questions about a project and expressing interest shows the applicant has done her homework.

Lewis also recommends that women refrain from discussing the kids.

“Your qualifications and interest in the job are what are important,” she says. “They want to know why you want to go back to work and why you are interested in their company.”

Lawyer Debra Solomon took 10 years off to care for her three children. After moving to Baltimore two years ago and working as a paralegal for a small firm for under a year, she took leave to study for the Maryland bar. She took the exam in February.

Her children were 11- to 15-years-old, able to stay after school, and she was ready to go back to work fulltime. But she needed to reframe her resume to re-enter the workforce.

Lewis worked with Solomon in the spring, creatively helping to account for the unaccounted chunk of time. She also refreshed her interviewing skills while Lewis provided support when the search grew increasingly frustrating as Solomon was competing with younger applicants.

“It was important that she helped me think out-of-the-box and look at non-standard jobs,” says Solomon, 45. “And she helped me have the confidence to go back to work fulltime when I was home with the kids.”

The Maryland Zoo was looking for in-house counsel, and after a long interview process, Solomon landed the position in early June.

Competition is mounting in more than just the professional world. Lewis also works with college-bound students, who find it increasingly difficult to gain admission to their

choice schools.

Both of David Greenberg’s children had Duke University at the top of their lists. For Brett, now 21, Lewis researched the school’s requirements, goals and academic standards and talked with him about his academic and career goals. She prepared him for interviewing, covering such topics as offering a firm handshake and looking the interviewer in the eye. She also prepared an activities’ list that helped to set him apart.

Greenberg’s daughter, Jennifer, 18, also solicited Lewis’ help as she competed for one of 1,620 slots against 20,000 others. With Lewis’ touch, her application stood out and she was accepted to Duke.

“Maybe the little bit that Randi does, putting the resume and activities list in perfect form gives them the ‘yes’ instead of the ‘no’ or gets them in first semester instead of second semester,” says Greenberg. “It’s dotting the ‘i’s’ and crossing the ‘T’s’ and making your application look the best it can be.” **i**