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Carolyn Russell has done more jobs than a day laborer

BY DAN VOORHIS
The Wichita Eagle

Carolyn Russell has done more jobs than a day laborer. She was a nurse, a photographer in the U.S. Army, sold cars, a radio news broadcaster and worked in public affairs for Beechcraft and Boeing. For the past 12 years, she has owned a public relations company.

The Wichita native has two poodles who like to lounge and play.

You joined the Army in 1974. What was it like as a woman in the new all-volunteer Army?

"I was in the signal corps and there were women in the signal corps just starting to do things like Morse code and working in signals. They were going to go over to the Suez Canal (blocked with wrecked ships) to help clear it, but it was still pretty early on, and they decided against letting them go."

Alan Hobbs, the late public relations manager at Boeing Wichita, was your mentor. What did you learn from him?

"I had great training out there. The very first event I managed out there was a KC-135 rollout of some type in one of the giant hangers. There was thousands of people there, and I remember, there was TV, and something went wrong with the audio. I said 'Alan, there's something wrong with the audio.' And he looked at me and said 'Handle it, Russell, just handle it.' And I thought OK, and I figured it out. I think I told them to pull their other mikes up closer or something. But you had to do what you have to do."

"That's what you do in the field.... You learn a lot with somebody who really puts you out there, and you handle it. But he was a great teacher, too."

What types of clients do you work with?

"We are narrowing in on technology clients. I've worked a great deal with online learning, and from that we've worked with defense and homeland security clients."

Why technology?

"Part of it's serendipitous. I worked for Brite Voice Systems, and I was at Boeing, where half the things we did involved technology. And I'm a techno-nerd."

Do you own a lot of gadgets?

"I have an iPhone and before that had all sorts of Palms and iPods and other gadgets and stuff. I'm trying to cut down."

"And I want an Amazon Kindle (electronic reading device) really badly. It's a gadget. And you can make the type bigger or smaller and turn it which ever way you want. You don't have to have it face the light just so."

What about social media?

"I use LinkedIn the most."

How do you use it?

"Building business. Building relationships is key to everything I do. People will say this, and smart people will do this. But what we do is build relationships with clients and with others we might want to reach out to."

How do you keep social media -- blogging, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. --from gobbling up your working day?

"You have to be careful. You can go down that black hole. At first... have fun with it and then get lost in it, just like you did when you got your first Internet account. You can sit there for hours, and then it will be gone. You have to limit yourself, maybe to an hour a day or two hours a day."

How important is social media?

"Twitter can be OK, but at the end of the day, Twitter is not going to make my business. Building relationships is not Twittering everybody. Although Twitter may be part of it."

"It's a tactic. We have all kind of tactics, but they all have to go back to a plan, to a strategy. It may be OK to use Twitter to reach a certain age group to say you've got a product launch in three days, but what are you going to do over the long term to position to them, to protect their reputation?"

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