

## **Beyond the Passion** by Beverly Denver

Several months ago I was invited to give the keynote address at a quarterly meeting of the Federation of Houston Professional Women. The group's program chair told me the focus of my presentation would be up to me; I could talk - for 30 to 45 minutes - about anything I wanted.

"Great," I said, "Let me give it some thought."

But then, a few days later, another member of the Federation said, "Beverly, please tell our members about you, where your passion comes from, what keeps you motivated. That's what our members really want to hear about."

Almost immediately, I began to fret about how I could do that and, at the same time, give my audience information that would be meaningful and useful to them.

So, I started thinking about the passion that sparked the idea for this magazine and how important passion for one's work is to fueling the economic engine of any enterprise. An old cliché came to mind: "Do what you love, and the money will follow."

I know from experience how misleading that statement can be. Over the years, I've learned that finding one's passion is great, because work does become fun, but passion is just the starting point. Relying on it alone to grow one's business is both naive and unrealistic.

To be successful at what we do, we have to go beyond the passion. We have to prepare ourselves and prove to others that we are worthy of their business.

Preparing? I used to think "preparing" that meant getting the education needed to follow one's passion. In my case, it was college and grad school, majoring in journalism, of course. But, I've learned that preparation involves so much more. Staying current is key.

Proving to others? Yes, clients do expect us to stay on top of changes in our own fields, but no longer is that enough. Clients also expect us to do business the way business is being done these days. No one wants to do business with someone who can't be reached by cell phone (when it's necessary), respond to an email instantly or refuses to get a website. In other words, no one wants to do business with an out-of-step old fogey.

Five years ago, when Houston Woman Magazine began, we picked up the phone and made direct contact with prospects to develop new business. Within a couple of years, we saw a dramatic change in the effectiveness of that approach. People out there stopped picking up their phones; they let most calls go to voice mail. Before long it was no longer considered rude not to return a call. Sales professionals learned to assume the person on the receiving end just wasn't interested, and that was that. And, as odd as it seemed back then, even those wanting to know more about what was being offered responded via email.

All that used to drive me crazy!

Then, one day, I got it. I realized I was going to have to change the way I was doing business. I was going to have to improve our website and start a blog. I was going to have to learn about permission marketing and provide e-blasts and e-newsletters for those interested in what we do here. I was going to have to learn more about social media and join Facebook, LinkedIn and Plaxo. Just recently, I've learned that I need to Twitter too.

Needless to say, the demands of having to constantly change the way we attract and serve our customers are challenging. But, the good news is this: Those same demands can provide great opportunities to mix things up, have some fun and creatively grow our businesses. Truly, they can rekindle smothering fires of passion.

So, this summer, let's "be cool," and see how well it heats things up.