

Business, better than usual

Cherry Hill woman finds her calling helping business leaders make a great impression

By **KIM MULFORD** • Courier-Post Staff • August 1, 2010

Above Barbara Pachter's desk in her dove gray home office hangs a framed black-and-white portrait from her days as the first female photographer at the now-shuttered Philadelphia Bulletin.

It's a tightly focused shot of a grizzled man wearing a pair of mirrored sunglasses, the lenses of which reflect a double image of his xylophone.

"I was a good photographer," says Pachter. "But I'm a better trainer."

Today, the Cherry Hill resident uses her eye for detail to help people present themselves more professionally.

She is an internationally renowned business etiquette and communications expert who is frequently quoted in the news media in dozens of articles and on television programs such as ABC's "20/20" and CNN's "Anderson Cooper Show."

Her eight books have been translated into nine languages. The volumes are lined along her office bookshelves, including "New Rules at Work: 79 Etiquette Tips, Tools and Techniques to Get Ahead and Stay Ahead," and "The Power of Positive Confrontation."

Hired by Fortune 100 companies to teach business professionals how to dress, speak in public and mind their manners, Pachter leads seminars and workshops around the country. As the owner of Pachter & Associates, which she launched in 1987, Pachter was recently named one of New Jersey's best 50 women in business by NJ Biz.

Her instructions go beyond what to wear and how to be polite. She also teaches people how to assert themselves.

"They can be competent technically, but -- men or women -- if you don't speak up at a meeting, if you don't offer your suggestions, if you speak too softly, if you use nonverbal behavior that negates what you're saying, it's easy to become invisible," Pachter says.

"Your promotion doesn't come and the company doesn't get the benefit of it."

Before she could teach others how to climb the corporate ladder, however, Pachter had to learn how to do it herself.

The daughter of a former Cherry Hill councilman and a real estate agent, Pachter grew up as one of three sisters. After Pachter's grandfather died, her mother took over the family's metal die stamping business and ran it for 15 years. She was Pachter's first role model, as were her sisters.

There were others along the way.

After the Bulletin folded in 1982, Pachter went to work for Merck as an industrial photographer.

"It was a great job," says Pachter. "They sent me overseas. I worked on the annual report. And I got to meet a lot of people in the company because I would travel with them to conferences."

When Merck needed a corporate trainer, she applied and got the job. She already had a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in communications. Earlier, she had taught English as a second language in Camden, using her students' photography to illustrate simple stories.

Teaching suited her.

"Merck trained me to be a trainer," says Pachter. "They would have never hired me from the outside to be the trainer, but since I had worked there and knew them, I was able to make the transition."

While working at a major aerospace company in California, Pachter met her mentor, Ann Davis, a corporate executive who taught Pachter how to navigate a male-dominated business world.

"She took an interest in me, she mentored me and we're still friends," says Pachter. "I learned a lot from her. She was one of the highest women in the aerospace company. There weren't that many high-level women in those days. She was an incredible teacher."

In her book, "The Power of Positive Confrontation," Pachter describes an uncomfortable interaction between herself and a male company director who said to her: "Why don't you stay home and have babies like a good gal?"

She went fuming to Davis.

Take him to lunch, she was told. So she did, and they became good co-workers, if not friends.

"He was significantly older than me," says Pachter. "I was really young . . . He wasn't used to working with women."

Things have changed for women, says Pachter, but then, the business world is constantly changing. That's where Pachter steps in.

Is it OK to e-mail a thank-you note? (Yes, but it doesn't replace the personal touch of a hand-written note. Most people e-mail these days, she says.)

Is it OK to wear open-toed shoes to the office? (It's not an easy answer, Pachter says, and depends on the organization you work for. "Look at the higher-ups and see what they're wearing," she says.)

Is it OK to text under the table during a meeting? (Definitely not. She knows of one vice president who lost a contract for his company that way.)

Pachter fine-tunes her rules using the real-world stories she collects during the roughly 100 seminars she leads each year.

She changed her stance on thank-you notes, for example, after a human resources director approached her following a seminar.

The director interviewed four people for a position, and only considered the three who e-mailed their thank-you's the next day. The fourth candidate's hand-written note arrived in the mail after the hiring decision already had been made.

When writing a personal blog or posting on social networking site, consider your public profile, Pachter advises. She cites the example of a private school teacher in Pennsylvania who was fired for writing negatively about a student's essay on her personal blog.

Dressing well is still important, Pachter says. At one company, she encountered a promotion committee which had just turned down an engineer for a job.

"They were talking about how this man still didn't know how to dress for work," says Pachter. "They didn't want him presenting the company the way he presented himself."

Her advice has worked well for Joyce Hoff, Pachter's training director for the past 15 years. The two share Pachter's spacious home office.

When she was hired, Hoff was a stay-at-home mom of three young children. She didn't know how to use a computer mouse when she took the job. But Pachter saw her potential.

"I've grown tremendously," says Hoff, a Marlton resident who is the immediate past president of her synagogue. "I've learned an incredible amount from listening to her.

"She made sure I looked professional," Hoff adds. You gain so much knowledge when you're around someone whose so poised and articulate for so long."

A professional image is still important, even in today's more casual business environment, says Teresa Moore Griffin, an organizational consultant and expert in self-awareness based in Voorhees. Organizations want to know if a job candidate will be a good fit for their company, Griffin says, and they base their judgment on a person's appearance, behavior and speech.

"We shouldn't, but we do make an incredible range of generalizations," says Griffin. "The accuracy doesn't matter. It's the impression we leave others with."

Griffin works with many of the same corporations that hire Pachter, and the two women sometimes speak at the same venues. Pachter is highly regarded and tops in her field, Griffin says.

"She's just a consummate professional," says Griffin. "She's the real article. She lives her message. To me, nothing more can be asked of a professional."

Pachter also volunteers for a local organization which helps domestic violence victims. Her first client needed to find a job, so Pachter counseled her over six meetings in public places, like restaurants (a frequent venue for Pachter's coaching sessions.) The woman eventually landed a job.

Pachter has used her powers of persuasion to good effect in her own personal life, too. She and her husband, Martin Heiligman, have been married for 10 years. ("He says I tricked him into a happy life," jokes Pachter.)

And though he didn't want a dog, they have a curly-haired female Labradoodle. Heiligman dubbed the dog "Donovan" after the former Eagles quarterback.

Pachter is also mother of 20-year-old Jacob Oxford, an interior design student at George Washington University. He's spending the summer working as an intern for his mom.

("He's just incredibly creative," brags Pachter.)

"She loves her son to death," says Hoff. "And her husband, of course, and her puppy dog . . . She's very close to her sisters. Family means so much to her. They're a very tight-knit group of people."

She's also quick to help others. When a reporter shakes her hand at the end of an interview, Pachter gently corrects a wayward thumb. It should be bent, not on top, she says.

Little things count, she says. Put them together, and they create an impression of who you are.

You never know when it may count, she says, so "why not practice professionalism, good communication, good etiquette all the time?"

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ON THE WEB

Barbara Pachter is a business etiquette expert and the author of eight books on the subject. To learn more about her coaching, seminars and advice, visit www.pachter.com

PACHTER'S POINTERS

Seven ways to avoid saying or doing the wrong thing with e-mail:

1. Double-check that you have selected the right recipient. Pay attention when typing a name from your address book in the "TO" line. It's easy to select the wrong person.
2. Add the e-mail address last. You don't want to send an e-mail before you have finished writing and proofing it. Even when you are replying to a message, it's a good precaution to delete the address and insert it once you are sure the message is ready to be sent.
3. Use a professional e-mail address. "Hotmamaat . . ." "Divaat . . ." or "thesexyoneat . . ."

." are not appropriate addresses.

4. Do not come across as abrupt. Read your message out loud. If it sounds harsh to you, it will sound harsh to the reader. You'll seem friendlier if you use a salutation.

5. Make your message easy to read. Looks count. Vary the length of your sentences and paragraphs. Long sentences or paragraphs are more difficult to read.

6. Be cautious with humor. You can bomb badly. Something perceived as funny when spoken may come across very differently when written.

7. Proofread every message. Mistakes will be noticed and, depending upon the recipient, you will be judged for making them.

Source: Barbara Pachter's Blog: Pachter's Pointers