

MY SERENDIPITOUS "VOLUNTEERS FOR CAREERS" EXPERIENCE

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As a volunteer career expert for the Volunteers for Careers initiative, I registered to provide pro bono resume and cover letter writing services for one individual, but I indicated my preference to work with a *Canadian* impacted by the tragedy, in recognition of the fact that citizens of other countries were also affected by the attack on America. However, I knew that the majority of eligible registrants would be Americans, and that my chances were slim that my desire to donate my services to help a displaced Canadian worker would be fulfilled.

As fate would have it, my Volunteers for Careers client did not find me through normal channels (an automatic database matching process had been established through www.VolunteersforCareers.org), but totally unaware of the Volunteers for Careers initiative, he somehow came to email me for a price quote for professional resume and cover letter writing services. I quoted him my regular fees for senior management level clients, which he agreed to, and we set up an appointment for the following week. He had stated in his email that he was hoping for a quick turnaround time, and having many commitments already scheduled, I gave him an honest estimate of when I could complete his project, but also offered to refer him to a firm that could provide a quicker turnaround. He responded that he would like to work with me, and that he had every confidence in the quality of the finished product. Since this was not a referral, and not having spoken to him by phone, I found it curious that he would be so confident in my abilities.

He had emailed me his existing resume, cover letter, and reference sheet in the initial email, so I was able to determine that he had spent his entire career in the logistics/supply chain management field, one that I was very unfamiliar with. The meeting was set for a Monday, and by Sunday I was feeling very ill. Monday dawned, and not only did I feel even worse, I had developed a fever as well! But I didn't want to cancel on my client on such short notice, so I made it into the office on time to find that he had been more than 15 minutes early! It seemed that everything was going wrong for me that day – the conference room I had booked in advance had been double-booked, and I had to ask my client to wait until I found another meeting room. Then there were numerous interruptions to keep me feeling off-balance. I was beginning to wish that I had stayed home!

But my client was very forgiving, and as we started talking we built a very solid rapport, and I found him to be extremely interesting to talk to. He told me that he appreciated me coming in to meet with him, despite not feeling well. He then revealed that he had actually endured having a cavity filled that morning without having his mouth frozen, just so that he could talk coherently during our meeting.

After discussing all the potential obstacles that could have prevented us from getting together, I learned that he had lost his job as a direct result of the events of September 11th, and was the only Canadian in the multi-national firm to have been displaced. Imagine my surprise in realizing that my Volunteers for Careers client had found me! As I explained the initiative to him and that I would be performing the services for him pro bono, we were amazed at the circumstances that had brought us together. I told him that it must be his lucky day!

At the end of the first session, he expressed that he was feeling so much better about himself and his situation, and that he would be willing to pay the fee I had originally quoted to him, because he was

convinced that the quality of service and the end product he would receive would be worth it. I re-affirmed my commitment to Volunteers for Careers, and my sincere desire to help and receive nothing in return. He commented that he was glad that he had decided not to be referred elsewhere for a quicker turnaround. It was then that I asked him how he had found me. This is the truly amazing part: he said he found me on the Internet, which surprised me, because I don't even have a website. He said he went to a search engine and typed in a few keywords, and I was one of seven hits generated. I told him I was puzzled because I don't have an Internet presence yet, except for my AdviceZone.com profile, which he apparently found. Even more amazing, the reason he chose me over the others was because of the Henry David Thoreau quote I had added to my email signature block just the week before:

"If one advances confidently in the direction of their dreams, and endeavors to lead a life which they have imagined, they will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

This has been one of my long-time favorite quotes since I first came upon it. To my surprise, my client pointed out that this quote at the end of my emails had convinced him that we would work well together. In between sessions, I received the following email from him:

"I cannot for the life of me figure out how my browser found your name, but it looks like from the Rogers-Excite home page I entered "help resume" – this returned seven hits. Now [there's] 13,340. Looks like the fickle finger of fate has pointed me in the right direction again!"

He also stated, "You gave me a lift before I realized that I needed one. Bravo!"

Needless to say, I was glad that I had kept my appointment that day, despite how physically awful I felt. The emotional reward was priceless.

After completing his project (I produced two new versions of his resume targeting different objectives within his existing field of logistics/supply chain management, a cover letter written for a specific job posting, a reference sheet, and networking cards), he had this to say:

"I've reviewed both [versions] and am very pleased. I would hire me! It, as every thing else is, is wonderful! Thank you again so much. It's amazing how something as simple as this can really lift one's spirits. Optimism and hope are needed during this process and you are really making a difference to fuel both. All in all I'm very pleased with the results. You are very good at what you do and I'm very lucky to have had crossed your path.... in more than one fashion. Thanks, again."

Although I had only signed up to provide pro bono resume and cover letter writing services, as we talked, I saw the opportunity to extend my services even further. Although my client was already sure of his career direction, we discussed the potential application of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® to help him identify elements of organizational/job fit. He had mentioned several times that he did not want to jump at the first offer extended without being sure that it was the right job for him. I then decided to offer him a pro bono MBTI® session. He completed the inventory and faxed me the answer sheet the next day. He expressed that he was really looking forward to the interpretation session after completing the inventory.

I conducted the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator feedback/interpretation session, incorporating various exercises such as a Values Card Sort exercise. Having never heard of the MBTI®, he was astounded by the accuracy of the assessment. I also provided him with specific tools to help him evaluate potential jobs, post-interview, for congruence with the values he determined to be highly important to him, and that would allow him to express his natural preferences.

Later, I read his comments on the evaluation form, which said "I am amazed [at] the findings and am impressed with Sandra's feel for conducting and leading the sessions, which I thoroughly enjoyed."

My client said that he had learned a tremendous amount from our work together, and was really appreciative of my commitment to Volunteers for Careers. I responded truthfully that even though I wasn't getting paid, this was the most rewarding client experience I had ever had, and boy, was I glad that I hadn't stayed home in bed that day! There had to be more than coincidence that matched us up to share the Volunteers for Careers experience together – I am convinced that it was serendipity.

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