



Cathy Alfandre's E-Letter

Create greater joy and fulfillment in your working life.

May 2007

Greetings!

"Look at your fingers. Each one is crowned by an abstract design that is completely different than that of anyone in this crowd, in this country, in this world. They are a metaphor for everything. Each of you is as different as your fingertips."

--Anna Quindlen

Distinguishing Yourself

As I work with people pursuing new career opportunities, I've noticed that one of the sticking points can be getting comfortable with talking about *what makes you special*. Sometimes there's some difficulty with finding the right words or being (reasonably) succinct. More often, the challenge is not really recognizing how special you are. Some symptoms of this syndrome: under-appreciating your talents ("everybody can do that"), under-recognizing your experience ("I was just a volunteer when I did that" or "other people have done this kind of thing for more years than I have"), and not fully seeing the impact/contributions you have made.

I can joyfully say that each person I've ever worked with (and truly, each person I've ever known) has a wonderful, beautiful collection of characteristics that distinguishes him or her from anyone else. So I urge you: Take some time to get clear on--and fully appreciate--what makes you unique. This is especially important if you're in the job search process, but is useful for everyone. Draw from both your work and personal life experience. If you think in marketing lingo, you can call this your "brand" or your "marketing message." But whatever you call it, find those words.

Answering questions like these (and asking others for their input) may help:

- What makes you different from others who do work that you do (or that you want to do)?
- What's important to know about your background?
- What accomplishments are you proud of?
- What do people compliment you on?
- What do people turn to you for? What have you developed a reputation for?
- What do you really enjoy?
- What are you passionate about?

Once you start to answer these kinds of questions, there is usually a process of sifting through and distilling what you say about yourself to a few key points. These points will probably change as you change and ponder the questions further. But over time, you will become more comfortable with distinguishing yourself and these words will start to show up in places like your resume, cover letters, networking conversations, interviews, and just in your day-to-day life.

Go ahead. Write the words down and practice saying them, with confidence. You are special, and others should know!

All the best,

Cathy

"Getting Unstuck"...

...is the title of an excellent new book by Timothy Butler, Ph.D. The underlying premise is that finding yourself in a "stuck" place (which he calls "psychological impasse") is not only normal from time to time, but an essential pre-requisite to making meaningful change. With some life challenges, you can "tough it out" and plow through the problem until it's resolved. But when you're at impasse, the old methods and the old models no longer work. Butler suggests that the cycle of impasse and getting unstuck has six phases, and outlines how the process of going through them can allow you to find a new vision and get onto a new path. In each phase of the cycle, he also offers specific exercises to help you move forward. (Interestingly, many of the exercises are best done in discussion with one or more others to get the fullest set of insights.) If you or someone you know is "stuck," I encourage you to read and use this book. I find it to be both deeply thoughtful and remarkably practical.

This bi-monthly e-letter is intended to offer ideas, tips, resources, and questions to ponder on careers, fulfilling work, and career-life decisions. I welcome your reactions and your suggestions for future topics.

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