

Keep Local Talent

by

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It was late in the afternoon when Kevin enthusiastically came into my office. "I've got it," he began. "I know what we are going to do for the grand opening of the Apollo Trust Company Office in Allegheny Township. We are going to dress you as the mythical god Apollo. In the spirit of the Olympics, you are going to carry a torch from the main office to the new branch. After you run the five miles, you will light a big fire bringing your bank's 125-year tradition of excellence to the area. We will get sponsors for the run and we will donate the proceeds to charity," he exclaimed.

I began to laugh because it was so crazy that I loved it. It was also the kind of original idea that I had grown to expect from our advertisers, CBT, Creative Consultants. My mind flashed back four years ago when I had met Kevin Truffa, Joel Ceraso and Natalie Bozzone at a StrongLand Chamber of Commerce gathering. At the time our bank used a very good advertiser from Johnstown. To be honest, these folks didn't have one shot in a million to get our account. However, since they were all Leechburg natives and had their office in Armstrong County's successful Park's Bend incubator, I felt obliged to listen.

I pride myself on my intuition and I could tell these three young people were very bright. I admired their courage to start a business in such a highly competitive industry. But something else really caught my attention. Like many talented young people in our area, I could tell they were hungry for work. They had the look of a rookie baseball player just wanting to get a chance to bat, along with the underlying confidence to hit a grand slam.

Well I went back to my superiors and casually told them about CBT. Unfortunately, there just wasn't an opportunity for them. Gambling on three young people just out of college when we had a terrific advertiser was far too risky. In my head, I knew it was the only decision. But in my heart, I was rooting for this crew to make it.

A year or so passed and I occasionally saw them at various outings. There was never anything mentioned about getting our business. Then somewhere along the way, an opportunity arose. We needed a local press release immediately. We decided to give CBT a call since local people would have a better feel for the matter we needed addressed. The rookies took a swing. They hit a grand slam.

A little more time passed and I came to the realization in my head that this firm had what it took to make us look better than great. I knew that someone having their pulse right in our community was a tremendous advantage for a bank our size. I also knew it was going to be difficult to tell our advertisers good-bye after so many years of service. However business is business and I wanted the best.

One of my boss's greatest qualities is her openness to change. She has thrived over her 45 years in banking because she has changed with the times. Not many bank presidents pound away at home on the Internet but Helen does. When I told the chief that I wanted her to take a deep breath, she knew something unusual was coming. I told her that I wanted her to look at these rookies. To Helen's credit, she took a look and she eventually gave me the thumb's up sign.

Making the move brought style, intelligence and an intangible local presence to our advertising that began to pay dividends. Press releases about our home-banking products and Internet access won us top honors for a financial institution in the Internet community and an article circulated world-wide by the Associated Press.

Young local people in our area that work hard deserve a chance to come to the plate. Let's find the right opportunities to keep our best talent right here. They just might hit a grand slam. I can't wait to run with that torch.



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