



Focus on the Future

Guest Predictions: Karen Russell

Guest Predictions is a regular feature in which we ask leaders in a number of professions questions that affect us all.

Karen Russell is the Marketing Director at ECHOworks, Inc., a non-profit organization in Leesburg, Virginia. Established in 1974, ECHO provides comprehensive, individualized employment, vocational training and community integration opportunities for persons with disabilities. Karen has dedicated her career to ECHO's mission for the last thirty-two years.

Q: What changes in your professional environment in the past 3-5 years have you found to be the most beneficial?

A: Our Association with TRG has been a great help in the development and implementation of a successful Marketing Plan. Winning a grant last year has allowed more flexibility and increased our funding. I would highly recommend to any business owner to find a consultant who can help you put your ideas on paper. TRG has also helped me with simple organizational tips and our continuing relationship is beneficial when new projects are needed.

Q: What changes have been the most troubling to you?

A: The most troubling change has been the same change that has affected everyone - the declining economy. The normal way of doing business is no longer normal. The traditional ways and methods used before no longer work and there is a lot more outside the box thinking required to stay afloat. We are surviving based on strong business partnerships and our reputation for providing quality services to people with disabilities.

Q: How will globalization (e.g. the emergence of new global powers, such as China and India) affect your professional area in the near term?

A: Globalization does not affect us too much. We mostly network with other similar entities on a local and national level where we share ideas, successes and effective methods. On occasion we have an opportunity to meet a person from another country who also is involved and it is amazing how similar we function.

Q: What significant challenges might be anticipated in your professional area in the next few years?

A: Our biggest challenge right now is finding work. The economy is affecting foundations and that in turn, affects the way they grant money to non-profits. Simultaneously, businesses are more hesitant than ever to open their doors to us due to budget cuts and the effects of the

economy. There are also stereotypes regarding people with disabilities that we must overcome in our efforts to find new work sites. Breaking down barriers is a significant challenge for us and my biggest goal is to educate the community about the capabilities of the people we serve.

Q: What are the greatest challenges confronting young professionals in Western culture today?

A: Learning to balance their professional and personal lives. I think all the new technology will affect personal relations. Businesses grow based on relationships with others. An inability to relate due to greater reliance on technology as opposed to the personal touch will make it difficult for young professionals to contribute to that growth.