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Fully Motivated: Joyce Weiss

What inspires a person to become a motivational speaker?

For Joyce Weiss, SEHS '80, it was a fortuitous combination of events -- and an OU master's degree in guidance and counseling -- that put her on the path to becoming a nationally recognized motivational speaker.



Weiss, of West Bloomfield, is a professional speaker and facilitator on employee performance and group dynamics. She is the author of "Full Speed Ahead" and "Take the Bike Ride of Your Life!" and she has been published in more than 100 publications across North America. It's her skill in identifying opportunity where others cannot that has made her a sought-after speaker, she says.

"My strength has always been in working with and helping other people," she explains. "It turned out to be a good segue for me to get into counseling, and then speaking. Now, it's become my business."

Today, Weiss maintains a broad, nationally-based client roster for her counseling and speaking services. She also established a Web site www.joyceweiss.com to promote her business.

It's been quite a transformation for the former stay-at-home mom.

A former junior high school teacher for Detroit Public Schools, Weiss had relinquished that role in the late 1960s to raise her two children. That remained her primary focus until her children reached high school, when Weiss made a decision to return to her professional life.

Enrolling in night school courses at Oakland University, she carpooled to Rochester with others from the West Bloomfield area.

"I was very thankful that OU was oriented to serve commuter students like myself," she says. "It was a flexible enough schedule that I was able to make time for my family and also extend my education."

Driven as she was to re-enter the academic world, Weiss said she still needed to overcome her initial reservations about returning to school after years of being away from it.

"It was a bit intimidating to come back at first," she admits. "But every single OU instructor I had was very supportive of what I was trying to do. It gave me all the confidence I needed to continue in school. I also made a lot of friends at OU that I'm still in touch with. It was such a positive experience for me."

In fact, Weiss points to the completion of her OU education as the turning point of her professional career.

"Once I got my master's degree at OU, my confidence just went 'pow!' and I really found my way along this path," she says. After graduating, Weiss used OU's Career Services to land her first job in the counseling field, helping laid-off auto workers in Pontiac prepare for job searches and interviews. Following that, Weiss opened a private practice, working one-on-one to assist job seekers.

But it was a one-off chance to speak before a local banking group that made her realize her knack for public speaking. Taking a cue from the group's positive response, Weiss made speaking her focus. She went on to pass the rigorous training to become a Certified Speaking Professional, a designation that only 10 percent of professional speakers can claim.

"I call myself a motivational speaker, but it's really deeper than that. My focus is showing people how they are stopping themselves from discovering opportunities that are already there for them."

Such a message should resonate in Michigan's current tough economic climate, she adds.

"We in Michigan are in difficult times, and many of the issues affecting us are beyond our control, as individuals," she says. "I turn that around and say, look at what you do control. Find where you can make a difference in yourself and in your work. Find ways to network -- it's extremely important -- and attach yourself to people who are looking for opportunity."

Weiss says an excellent way to network to stay active is the OU Alumni Association, which is something she does and encourages others to do. "You meet a lot of people this way, people who can teach you a lot and people who appreciate what you do. All of us have something to offer in life, and there are many ways for people to get involved. You'd be surprised at how life gives back to you sometimes, if you make the effort."

SUMMARY

What inspires a person to become a motivational speaker? For Joyce Weiss, SEHS '80, it was a combination of events and an OU degree that put her on the path to become nationally recognized.

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