

By Michelle Archer / NWJobs

Tricia Belcastro is itching to get back to doing the marketing work she loves full time.

In the two years since she was laid off from her senior marketing position at fitness-equipment manufacturer Precor, Belcastro has rekindled a consulting business from her Woodinville home, as well as a side business on Etsy, but a full-time job has been elusive.



Tricia Belcastro is searching for a senior-level marketing role. (Michelle Archer / NWJobs)

"Searching for a new role has been frustrating," Belcastro wrote in a form to be considered for a career-search makeover from NWJobs. "I am good at what I do, but I am not a dynamic interviewee."

More than a few times, Belcastro has sailed through phone screens and phone interviews to land in-person interviews for senior marketing or marketing director roles. "But my in-person interview does not get me the job," Belcastro says. "I practice. I study. But to no avail."

During a recent behavioral interview, Belcastro says she was asked to respond with a positioning statement for the company's product.

"I've been developing brand and product-positioning statements for 20 years, but I completely blanked out," she says. "Needless to say, I did not make it to the second round of interviews."

Helping Belcastro figure out how to match her interview performance with her on-the-job performance are three local experts: career coaches Lisa Quast of [Career Woman, Inc.](#), and [Kathryn Crawford Saxer](#), and human resources professional Seia Milin.

After meeting with her, Quast says Belcastro is doing an excellent job preparing for job interviews. "Her situation is difficult, because there aren't any glaring errors in her preparation," Quast says. However, she did find three potential solutions for Belcastro's concerns.

To counter the problem of going blank when trying to communicate achievements, Quast recommended that Belcastro assemble a portfolio of work examples, such as a three-ring binder with samples of marketing and strategic plans she has created, to bring to interviews.

"When a hiring manager asks Tricia to 'tell me about a time when you ...,' she can easily flip to one of her examples and use it as a prompt to explain the situation, what she did, and the results she achieved," says Quast.

Style choices

Belcastro told Quast that she often feels overdressed when interviewing in some of Seattle's casual offices. Quast counsels her clients who are interviewing in super-casual environments to avoid wearing either end of the extremes: jeans or a suit.

"Opt instead for a pair of slacks, and a blazer that can be quickly removed for a less-formal appearance," Quast says. She adds that the key is to choose an outfit that is a step above the company's typical workday attire, without looking like you are trying too hard.

Since Belcastro has received feedback that her communication style is more formal, Quast says that she needs to be able to convey her excitement and passion for the position during interviews.

"It's important for Tricia to relax, be herself and not be afraid to let the interviewer see her personality and sense of humor," Quast says. "For example, she could make a hiring manager laugh with a story about what went wrong on a project she led, then explain how she was able to fix it and what she learned from the situation."

Would you like free career advice?

Is your job search stuck? Do you need help switching careers or networking effectively?

If so, you may be selected to get free job-hunting, networking and interviewing advice from a trio of experts in exchange for having your story and photo featured in NWJobs. To be considered, submit [this form](#).



Translating resume to the interview

Milin, the HR professional, reviewed Belcastro's resume and says that it's what recruiters want to see in marketing candidates. It's to the point; she brands and positions herself well; she includes her experience with a Fortune 100 company (Coca-Cola); she uses industry-specific keywords; and she quantifies the increased sales and types of teams that she has managed.

"Stating achievements on the résumé is attractive to employers, as they know that past performance is a very good indicator of future performance," Milin says.

As good as her résumé is, Belcastro should speak in person about her work experience and skills as if the interviewee has never seen it. "She should use her skill of persuasion to demonstrate that her achievements are transferable to the job for which she is interviewing," Milin says.

Milin "really delved deep into how I have been answering behavioral interview questions," says Belcastro. "What came to light was that I was not providing the details needed to showcase my experience. It was definitely an 'aha' moment."

Reconnecting with co-workers

Saxer, the third expert, helped Belcastro with her networking efforts. They went over a spreadsheet that Belcastro had compiled to document whom she has talked to during her job search.

"It went on for pages," Saxer says – a testament to the fact that Belcastro has exhausted her current network. Saxer says that since Belcastro has had such an illustrious career, she was surprised to see just 220 connections on Belcastro's LinkedIn profile.

Belcastro told Saxer that her connections were mostly people she has worked with recently, and that she felt a little uncomfortable reaching out to people she hadn't worked with in years.

Saxer recommended that Belcastro build a new network //comprised// composed of old and new connections, giving her current network a rest.

"I tasked her with reaching out to people she worked with early on in her career, particularly at her first big job at Coca-Cola," Saxer says. "She had mentors and co-workers she loved and respected there; I expect they will be delighted to hear from her again, and happy to connect her to people who might be helpful in terms of her job search."

Saxer shared a LinkedIn rule of thumb: Send someone an invitation to connect if he or she is likely to know your name and has a positive association with it. She also gave Belcastro conversation pointers for in-person networking events, which she encouraged Belcastro to attend to build those new connections.

For her part, Belcastro is excited to implement the experts' suggestions. She says it was invaluable to hear people she doesn't know evaluate her.

"I'm working on expanding my LinkedIn network by linking across my career, not just my recent peers and contacts," she says. "I'm now in touch with my first mentor from my first job; it was wonderful to catch up."

Belcastro has already attended two networking events, and made contact with a recruiter who places contractors at Microsoft and Amazon.com. Now she's eager to have a chance to shine in an in-person interview.

"I do feel a new energy and a new optimism," Belcastro says.

