

This is a monthly series the Boston Business Journal will be featuring on diversity in business. If you have a column or story idea you'd like to submit, please forward your suggestion to BBJ Executive Editor George Donnelly at gdonnelly@bizjournals.com.

SPOTLIGHT

Joni Lee C. Rossi

PRESIDENT AND CEO OF CQ PERSONNEL AND MACPHERSON GROUP.



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About the author: Joni Lee C. Rossi once dreamed of becoming a lawyer, but while she was an administrator in a prestigious law firm inspiration struck. She realized there was a niche for a service-oriented placement firm that could handle the demands of large companies. Instead of pursuing law, she decided to devote her advocacy skills to a different profession — one that would help people become productive members of the workforce through training, coaching, and placing them in fulfilling jobs.

In 1987, Rossi founded CQ Personnel. CQ is the Navy radio signal that indicates an urgent need for help. CQ Personnel is a temporary placement firm that began by providing Boston area companies with the finest talent. The core mission of CQ Personnel is to open doors and support all talented, ambitious employees and companies striving to create and take advantage of new opportunities.

In 1992, MacPherson Legal Staffing was created to respond to an overwhelming amount of inquiries from clients to place quality legal professionals including attorneys, paralegals and legal support personnel. Since their inception, both of Rossi's companies have displayed the depth and breadth to complete administration of Federal and local contracts accurately and in accordance with necessary guidelines creating new opportunities at law firms, colleges, banks, companies and government agencies and municipalities.

Today, the MacPherson Group has offices in Boston, New York, and Providence. MacPherson Group's annual revenues have grown an average of 35 percent over the last few years. Many of Rossi's original clients are with her today, including the Bank of America, MetLife and Cambridge College as well as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and city of Boston.

Rossi holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard University as well as a paralegal certificate from Northeastern University's Paralegal Program.

“TOO OFTEN COMPANIES TRY TO PRESERVE PROFITS AND STOP INVESTING TIME OR ENERGY IN BOLD ENDEAVORS. I URGE YOU TO TAKE CALCULATED RISKS. “SOMETIMES YOU MUST TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH,” AND “KEEP MOVING, AND STAY POSITIVE.”

Keep moving and stay positive

Recognize your passion — you need to find what you are passionate about. Then, as Warren Buffett says, the “money will come.” Early in my career, I developed a strong interest in helping people while working as a job developer for programs enacted by the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), now known as the Job Training Partnership Act. Instead of pursuing law, I decided to devote my advocacy skills to a different profession — one that would help people become productive members of the workforce through training, coaching, and placing them in fulfilling jobs. What experience have you had the resonates?

A solid mission statement — The core mission at CQ Personnel is to open doors and support talented, ambitious individuals seeking new or higher positions, as well as companies striving to create new opportunities for them. Your mission statement will move your company organically to the next step. Strive to provide value and promote diversity. Diversity is a key component. You need to breathe new ideas into your business on an ongoing basis. Embracing diversity will help promote new ways of thinking about what you do. Part of our mission is to maintain a strong record of client satisfaction, built on a solid foundation of customer service. CQ's mission serves as a guidepost as the company moves boldly into the future.

Develop your business skills — Ask yourself, what goods or service do you offer that will be accepted by the buying public? You can do that by conducting market research. Become familiar with all the language associated with your industry. Always ask questions. And know all the forms, documents, licenses, etc., you need to sustain your business. Accurate execution of business processes will help guarantee your success.

Publicity — Seek and receive publicity in both print and broadcast media. Establish a social media campaign that will position you as a thought leader amongst your colleagues. The platforms for social media are many, and it would be helpful to seek assistance. Go to the SDO-certified business web site www.somwba.state.ma.us/businessdirectory/businessdirectory.aspx to find MBE/WBE'S in social media. Helpful hint: Use Tweetdeck or Hootsuite to eliminate multiple entries that you need to make across these platforms to assure your messaging is consistent.

Partner — Although risky, partnerships with other companies can be a good way to identify and develop new niches. Partnerships may also make it possible to provide solutions for a wider variety of clients. Of equal importance is networking, as well as utilizing every marketing tool available to gain the greatest possible advantage in the marketplace. Look to partner with other MBE/WBE's. CQ Personnel has grown exponentially through its SDO partnerships.

Take risks — Too often companies try to preserve profits and stop investing time or energy in bold endeavors. Take calculated risks. “Sometimes you must take a leap of faith,” and “keep moving, and stay positive.”

Mentor — I have mentored countless companies by helping them attain their Supplier Diversity Office certification. The Supplier Diversity Office assists minority and women-owned businesses identify their unique value proposition and the best way to represent themselves to their clients. SDO also offers

free training. I take pride in working with individuals to shape them and their businesses into profitable concerns.

Join in — I urge you to seek ways to support organizations that help and support entrepreneurial businesses like yours. An ardent supporter of the Supplier Diversity Office which provides Minorities and Women business assistance with free trainings, and others like the Greater Boston Chamber Of Commerce, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce, Greater Boston Convention Bureau, Home for Little Wanderers, WriteBoston and the Asian Civic Association, have allowed us to gain innumerable business leads from these relationships.

Financial stability — Like many businesses, CQ struggled in its early years. We put processes in place early on demanding accountability. Read your financials every week and you and your company will benefit down the road. Also, by developing strong relationships with banks and honing your cash management skills, you will manage your company's revenues each year. CQ Personnel reached profitability its first year in business by keeping abreast of all financial events.

Competition — With over two decades of experience, one of CQ Personnel's major challenges is competing with international conglomerates that have been in business for more than twice that and have strong brand equity. We overcame the competition by working with countless businesses, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. We serve on several boards, including the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and Outward Bound/Thompson Island. I believe these relationships have helped our company gain more market share, create greater brand awareness and discover innovative solutions.

Joni Lee C. Rossi is president and CEO of CQ Personnel and MacPherson Group.

Embracing Diversity, Empowering Individuals

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