



chapter 5

BEVERLY KAYE **on** **Discovering Your Niche**

As competition increases in our knowledge-based global economy, retaining talented people has never before been so critical to American business. Beverly Kaye is a leading authority on talent retention, career development and mentoring. She has authored and co-authored several best-selling books in the realm of engagement and retention, including Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay, Up is Not the Only Way, and Love it, Don't Leave It: 26 Ways to Get What You Want at Work. She is a popular resource for national media, such as The New York Times, Time, Fortune, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, USA Today, and a variety of professional magazines. She has written more than 40 articles in various trade publications, including Training & Development, Workforce and HR Magazine.

What did Beverly Kaye do to earn a seat at the table of leading business experts? How did she build her business and name? In the following story, Beverly talks about her brand and how she became recognized as an expert.

Collaboration is sweet

Beverly decided to study the field of career development and employee retention while pursuing her doctorate degree. As a former college dean, she had always been interested in the field of leadership and organizational development. Much of that interest stemmed from her experiences with students. She realized that many of these students were brilliant academically, but they often found out the hard way that academic brilliance wasn't enough to help them make it in the corporate world. She became very interested in how companies develop people.

When it came time to write her doctoral thesis, Beverly chose the topic of career development. One incident at the University of California, Los Angeles changed her view of herself and her perspective on career development. She had completed her coursework and had to defend her dissertation on organizational career development. She had selected a committee that she thought knew her, liked her, and would be gentle. She also chose a dissertation approach that was relatively straightforward, clean and easy, as she wanted to move quickly and get it done.

She was shocked when the committee rejected her dissertation and told her to start again. They said that she operated from her intuition, not from a theory base. They asked her to do “phenomenological research” which requires that you develop your own theory. You investigate a phenomenon and collect data. When your theory holds all your data, you've got it. Beverly tried three times, and failed three times. Working with data was not for her, and she considered quitting. Her mom asked, “Why not quit?” After hearing that, Beverly knew she couldn't quit. And then one of her professor on the committee encouraged her by saying, “Bev, if you hang in there, this will be your career development.” She didn't know what that meant, but she knew she had to continue.

“I wish I had known then what I know now!”

Finally, she got smart. Out of desperation, she asked a friend to sit and listen to her talk about the data she had collected. As she talked, the theory began to bubble up. When she presented her findings, the committee finally approved her thesis and said, “Bev, you got it.” The theory she developed became her first book *Up is Not the Only Way*, and it launched her new career in the consulting field.

The experience taught Beverly that her best thinking is done in concert with others and that there is nothing wrong with asking for help. She has used that lesson to grow her business, her practice and her approach to living.¹ The more she talks about a subject and the more she shares with others, the more it grows. She has wonderful colleagues that she can contact anytime when she’s getting stuck. She calls them and says, “Think with me on this.”

Understand business challenges

Finding and keeping great people is one of the biggest challenges of modern business. Recruiting, selecting, motivating and retaining top talent will continue to be critical for businesses to succeed, and employers have to find ways to help their talented people thrive in the workplace and lead satisfying careers. Beverly identified this need and used it to carve her own niche among today’s leading business thinkers.

If you want to build an inspiring company, you need to inspire the talent on your team.

“I think inspired talent builds inspiring companies,” she said. “If you want to build an inspiring company, you need to inspire the talent on your team. It’s that simple. That’s what I’m about. That’s what our company is about. We’ll keep thinking of new ways to offer up our brand of medicine – our prescription. That’s part of the challenge and the excitement.”

Develop unique tools and products

Beverly considers creativity to be her greatest asset and one that she has developed over time. She is constantly asking, “How can we look at this differently? How can we think outside the box? Let’s think of a new way of coming at it.” Beverly believes that she has developed an ability to hang on to a lot of little threads and pull them together in order to make something unique happen.

How can we look at things differently? How can we think outside the box?

Her company, Career Systems International, takes a unique approach – it is “tools-minded” as well as “change-minded.” When working with

a client, they invent a tool or take a tool that they already have and reinvent it to deliver the required solution. For example, while there are a lot of mentoring tools and courses out there, Beverly’s team designs “shortcuts” ... something that makes it easy for the mentor and the mentored ... something fun, engaging and very easy for the client to administer. This takes the consultant out of the equation and enables the mentor and student to engage in the process together. The tool becomes a helpful structure. It facilitates the dialogue.

Build brand awareness

While the human resources world may consider Beverly’s name a brand, Beverly was not initially aware of that. She remembers one client who planned to put on a program by Beverly’s company and insisted it be called the “Beverly Kaye Program” rather than “CareerPower,” which is what her company called it. It made her smile and she said to herself, “See, there it is. I’m a brand.”

Brand recognition builds up as people begin to use your ideas and products, and tell others. It now happens to Beverly all the time. She meets people for the first time and they tell her that they have read one of her books or used some of

her materials. Recently she was talking with someone in a large aerospace company and this person said, “We have a book club formed around your book. We read a chapter a week. We are all excited about it.”

Brand recognition is building when people who have never met you know who you are.

When she was younger, she knew everyone who used her materials. The fact that she has a larger team to represent her work helps her tremendously. It’s an amazing sign that 300,000 people bought *Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em*. Beverly’s company used to be called Beverly Kaye and Associates. In order to broaden her brand, the company changed the name to Career Systems International. At first, her sales team was against the idea because it was her name that people recognized, but Beverly wanted her company’s name to reflect the other talent her company had to offer. “The company truly is more than me. Many others also contribute their expertise. Many of the consultants and trainers that I work with deliver our materials even better than I do. My job is to deliver big keynotes or kick off events,” she says.

Come to terms with “Who I Am”

The biggest challenge in building her brand was accepting who she is and what she does well. She considers herself a very, very practical thinker, but for a long time, she fought her own gift. She wanted to be more conceptual or academic. However, she found that her gift is in keeping it simple. It took her a long time to say, “Beverly, you just know how to boil it down and help people remember. And that is a gift.”

Now she has gotten to the point where she meets people that have followed her work for 20 years or she runs into people that met her 12 years ago during an event where she was a speaker. She’s been in the same niche since 1975 or so. Although she never left her specialty, she’s been steadfastly changing it ... morphing it ... improving it ... adding new pieces to it. Her work has changed, but it’s definitely been

more evolutionary than revolutionary. The key is, she has stuck with her original niche, career development and talent management.

With over 30 years of consulting experience, she joyfully declares, “Today I’m working with a team of people that I enjoy and growing an organization that makes me comfortable. I’m happier at this age with what I do than I have ever been before. I think I’ve come clear about who I am.”

Get your name out there: speak and write

Beverly has always believed that you have to be out in the public talking about what you do and giving your ideas away. Since the 1970s, she has been active with the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) and other organizations. She makes a point of attending conferences not just as a speaker but also as a learner. She can go back in her files and find material from speeches she gave 25 years ago. Every year, she speaks at many different conferences, which keeps her name and brand visible. Whenever she speaks, she always attends someone else’s session. She never goes to a conference, gives her talk and leaves. She’s always looking to learn something new, and in her field, there’s always something to learn.

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She has also been a successful writer of books and articles. *Up is Not the Only Way* became a classic in the human relations field and has been published repeatedly over the past 20 years. To have a book still alive after all that time is quite remarkable. *Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em*, co-authored with Sharon Jordan-Evans and specifically written for managers, sold 300,000 copies. She never dreamed that would happen. Her new book, *Love It, Don’t Leave It: 26 Ways to Get What You Want at Work*, targets employees and may sell even more than her previous books.

Keep going

Beverly is always thinking about her work. There is always some new idea that captures her attention. She has a gigantic library of books all over her office, but she probably skims a lot more than she reads. She doesn't make herself read every page, but she'll absorb the main ideas. She never goes anywhere without a book, a magazine like *Fast Company* or *Fortune*, or her "to do" file.

She is convinced that the most important ingredient in a thriving brand is passion. It is to find your niche and create your work around it. It pays to find your passion and go deep within it. You need to develop your expertise around something that truly holds your passion because there's never a true vacation from it. Her passion and craving for learning and developing new ideas keeps her energized. She admits, "I'd like to slow down, to shut down at 6 p.m., to relax and sit in front of the television, but I never do. I'm always drawn toward one more project."

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Five Insights from Beverly Kaye on Discovering Your Niche

1. Recognize who you are and who you are not. This takes a lot of self-reflection and self-acceptance.
2. Constantly ask yourself, how can I look at this differently? Make a habit of looking at things from a different angle.
3. Develop creativity. Diverge before you converge.
4. Listen to and learn from many different people.
5. Find the things in life that really excite you, that make you feel passionate. Your passion will give you energy and fuel your life.

Beverly Kaye's Viewpoints

If it's to be, it's up to me

Some people are tempted to hold others accountable for their work satisfaction. Most find over time that those others can't – or won't – deliver what's wanted and needed. Ultimately, you choose your career, your boss, your team and your organization. You decide how long to stay and you have the power and influence to improve your work. Accept that responsibility, complete with its challenges, and you'll get more of what you want from your work and your workplace.

Ask and you may receive

If you don't ask, you're less likely to get what you want. It seems so simple. Yet some people hold back. They expect their bosses to read their minds. Don't expect others to take the first step. Don't make them guess, because most often, they'll guess wrong. Be clear. Be prepared. Be collaborative, and then ask for what you want.

Chart your career course

Your career is your creation. So when was the last time you really gave serious thought and time to planning it?

Give it to get it

First and foremost, make sure you're a solid performer (meeting your goals consistently). Solid performers almost always get more respect.

Job Judo – Go with the energy

In the martial art of judo, you use the momentum of the other person to increase your own energy and effectiveness. You build on the energy coming your way. Similarly, in job judo, the key is to build on the energy that comes from doing what

you love. Think about what energizes you. Then find a place to invest that energy.

Up is not the only way

Most folks seem to think they need to move out of their current position to develop. This has never been less true. You can enrich your current work by expanding the job, refining your expertise, or finding depth in areas you really enjoy.

Link and build the connection

When Beverly says link, she means teamwork, collaboration, interaction, sharing, information, coordination and networking. All these activities are vital in this high-speed, high-tech, ever-changing world of work.

Opportunities? They're still knocking.

To uncover opportunities in your organization, tell someone you are looking for them! Oh – and make sure that when the opportunity knocks, you not only hear it but are prepared to open the door.²

Simon Says:



Read *Love It, Don't Leave It – 26 Ways to Get What You Want at Work*, by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans.

How long has it been since you've said you love your work? What are you waiting for? For your organization to care? Your boss to go? Someone to hand you an exciting new assignment? More money? *Love It, Don't Leave It* is the antidote to waiting. It will teach you how to find satisfaction in your work ... right where you are ... now. The book is simple and helpful for those who want to increase their sensitivity to others and their power to communicate.

