

HR Anew Spans the Service Spectrum

By *Debbi Mack*,
STAFF WRITER

Deborah Stallings, president and CEO of HR Anew in Columbia, said when she started her business, she was like the train in the children's book *The Little Engine That Could*.

"The greatest challenge was just believing that I could," Stallings said. Today, HR Anew is essentially a full-service human resources consulting firm, offering a variety of services for every stage of employment, from recruitment and hiring to exit interviews.

"We bring a level of expertise to small and medium-sized businesses that they could never afford if they try to hire all the experts internally," she said. And for large employers, HR Anew provides specialized services and services they lack time or resources to handle in-house.

This involves spending time with the client's key stakeholders, reviewing their mission, vision, goals and values, discussing what the client is trying to achieve, then reviewing what's in place and developing a strategy for getting desired results.

Not Afraid to Try

Before Stallings started the business, she was "fearful of what leaving the world of full-time employment might mean for me." Although she had years of experience in re-

cruiting and human resources, she was somewhat concerned over having been unable to finish college when she was younger.

However, these concerns have turned out to be unfounded. "I find there are a lot of business owners who will take a risk with you - if you show them how well you can perform," she said. "If I can get in the door, we usually can keep the business."

Stallings, who divided her childhood between her native Chicago and her grandparents' farm in Liberty, Miss., moved to Maryland at the urging of a former boss, who wanted to hire her as manager of nursing administration for Greater Baltimore Medical Center in Towson. Although her family was skeptical of the move, she visited the area to explore the idea, quit her job and moved to Maryland within three weeks.

Stallings says she's "never really been afraid of trying to do something better" after asking herself "What's the worst that could happen?"

"I figured the worst thing that could happen was if it didn't work out, I could move back to Chicago," Stallings said.

Extensive Experience

After moving to Maryland, Stallings worked in a series of human resources and recruiting positions, primarily with hospitals, learning more about

her profession with each job. During six years working at Doctors Community Hospital in Lanham, Stallings went from being a nursing and allied health recruiter to doing hospital-wide "full cycle" recruiting.

Next, she worked for three years with Prince George's Hospital Center as a human resources consultant, doing "everything except employee benefit administration. It's where I gained more generalist skills."

After a brief stint of consulting, Stallings started her company, HR Anew, in February 1999. She ran the business part-time at first, but went full-time with it four months later.

"I always had an interest in having my own company, but was a little bit afraid of it," Stallings said. "As a single parent, I never felt safe enough to branch out on my own." However after her daughter got a sports scholarship to attend Furman University in Greenville, S.C., she decided it was time to focus on herself.

Since starting HR Anew, the business has grown to 25 employees and about 30 consultants of various expertise. "We have a really broad and deep bench of team members," she said.

Although Stallings started HR Anew as a recruiting firm, she diversified into other areas as clients requested additional services.

HR Anew's clients include

private companies, government agencies and nonprofit organizations. In the past several years, it has landed and gotten repeat business from clients such as NASA, the Maryland Department of Transportation, the National Library of Medicine and Arbitron.

Expanding Horizons

Stallings has an office in Columbia, but plans to open more locations in the next year. Furthermore, she plans to seek international clients during a five-day trade mission to the United Kingdom and Italy this spring.

Stallings is also finishing her undergraduate studies at the College of Notre Dame in Baltimore. She initially aimed for a degree in communications and information technology, but is considering changing to business administration and going for an MBA after that.

The biggest challenge for Stallings in starting the business "was really just getting through that fear of not being successful." To overcome it, she just asked herself the same question she did before moving to Maryland: "What's the worst that could happen?"

"It's a blind faith walk sometimes," she said. "But with prayer, hard work, commitment, mentoring and a little bit of someone believing in you, you can make it happen."