A close-up of a logo

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Being Yourself Can Land You the Most Unexpected Opportunity…

by [Susan Jacobs](https://www.identitymagazine.net/author/susanjacobs/)

A person wearing sunglasses and a scarf

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Sometimes it just takes one opportunity, one person’s trust and vision, to open a whole new world of possibilities.

Over 29 million results appear when you Google my name. With no middle name or initial as a differentiator, over the years there’s been a lot of, ‘Sorry, I thought you were a different Susan Jacobs.’

When an email arrived from a company that does clinical trials for medical devices in search of a writer and strategist to help them rebrand, I assumed it would be one of those ‘Oops, you’re not the one we were looking for,’ situations because this is not my industry.

Upon responding, they asked if I had any medical or scientific experience. Nope. I looked at their website and barely understood a word.

Surprisingly, the email exchange turned into a phone conversation, which turned into a request for a proposal. Sure, but I figured there was no way it would go any further.

### **Being Yourself Can Land You the Most Unexpected Opportunity…**

Pulling from more than two decades of experience in marketing, branding, and communications I did the best I could and sent it.

Even more to my surprise, a couple of days later, I was hired. Shock, joy, intimidation, and terror all mushed together when the email came landing me the project.

The scope of work… conduct a website audit, reposition the brand, make the copy and content accessible even though they’re a B2B business, conduct team members interviews, and revise, edit, rewrite all the website copy.

Waiting for the signed agreement and first payment to arrive, I tried to pump up my confidence with positive affirmations, reading former client testimonials, and thinking about whom I could call for a ‘lifeline.’ The truth? I was clueless about how to pull off doing a good job, let alone a great one.

**With the contract signed and money in the bank, it was the moment of reckoning.**

For the website audit, I had to go through the website and share my understanding of their key message points before moving on.

I read the website repeatedly but was clueless as to what anything meant. How could I do this? Would I have to resign and give the money back? Find a ghostwriter?

**Never in my career was I in this position; I was petrified.**

Sink or swim has been a theme throughout my career, often jumping headfirst into projects and jobs with no prior experience, but there was always at least a basic understanding. This was not the case here; I felt like I was in a tidal wave about to drown.

### **Bird by Bird**

After a lot of pacing, dark chocolate, deep breathes, Google and dictionary searches, and some ‘come to Jesus’ moments with myself, I remembered a quote (modified slightly) by Anne Lamott, author of “Bird by Bird,” a bible for many writers:

“Thirty years ago, my older brother was trying to get a report on birds written that he’d had three months to write, which was due the next day. He was immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. My father sat down beside him and said, ‘Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.’”

Sometimes it’s the oddest reminders that can completely transform a mindset. This was all I needed to re-read.

Going bird by bird, one sentence at a time, I realized the sentences were just a series of intimidating words strung together that didn’t actually say anything of substance. It was like those people that speak so poetically, so eloquently, that you’re almost hypnotized, but then realize you have no idea what they said.

My understanding of the key message points was accurate. The client was happy, and with restored confidence, I could proceed creatively and strategically.

### **When An Outfit Can Potentially Derail You**

But then they wanted to meet…

While that shouldn’t have been a big deal, it was. They are a very corporate Inc. magazine-ranked company, and I didn’t own a suit, an LBD (little black dress), or a pair of slacks. More Bohemian chic, I was concerned my sartorial style wasn’t appropriate for this audience.

I stalled the meeting until more deliverables were complete and so they could get more comfortable with me. This also bought time to put together the right outfit.

[Tweet “I was conflicted; be myself or try to be someone that I’m not?”]

Yes, I could have gone shopping, but was conflicted; be myself or try to be someone that I’m not?

This reminded me of the pivotal interview twenty+ years ago that launched my career in the entertainment industry. It was for a secretarial job to the VP of International Finance at Columbia Pictures. While I had secretarial skills, I didn’t have the right clothes, so borrowed from family and friends to patch something together.

The human resources woman looked me up and down, at my resume that was a mix of secretarial and film/theater jobs, and said I’d be miserable in that job even though I had the skillset. She sized me up instantly and saved me from a job that probably would have lasted just a few hours!

Instead, she hooked me up to be the assistant to the director of publicity for the foreign film division. My career was jumpstarted.

### **Back to this story…**

The meeting with my new client was scheduled. I wore a vintage black dress, funky designer sneakers, and a colorful scarf. I was nervous.

Albeit very corporate, this company is run by a family team, so they have an entrepreneurial sensibility that I was banking on, and which is probably why they were willing to take a chance.

I met the wife and her daughter first. The wife looked me up and down; in my mind, I was doomed.

Everything went great until the wife took me aside.

“I have to be honest; I was very nervous to meet you.”

What the f\*\*k? She was nervous to meet me. How’s that possible?

“We took a risk hiring someone with no experience in our industry, but when you got off the elevator, I knew we made the right choice because you had creatively written all over you. We wanted to do something completely different to stand out and didn’t want the same old same old that would have likely come from a writer and strategist in our industry.”

### **Un-friggen-believable. We had a good laugh after I shared my outfit stress.**

They ultimately became my top reference, and the website was nominated for several awards.

### **From Insecurity to Empowered**

From my initial insecurity and self-doubt taking on this project, I was ultimately infused with a newfound confidence, realizing that having no prior experience can be an asset. This company wanted a ‘fresh outsider perspective.’ Even though they’re B2B – they wanted to stand out from their competition, which their website absolutely does.

Turns out distilling complicated subject matter in an unknown industry and turning it into a compelling and understandable message, story, and content is right up my alley and now a regular part of what I do.

Sometimes it just takes one opportunity, one person’s trust and vision, to open a whole new world of possibilities. This happened with the Columbia Pictures HR person and years later with this company that does clinical trials for medical devices.

### **Lessons learned:  Being Yourself Can Land You the Most Unexpected Opportunity**

***Be True. Be you. As they say, ‘Everyone else is taken.’***

***You never know what’s really going on in someone else’s mind unless you talk.***

***Being different and the outsider is an asset. My advice? Own it.***

### **About the Author**

#### **Susan Jacobs**

Writing has been part of my DNA, career, and creative outlet for as long as I can remember. My joy is bringing to life stories of the world, its people, and its cultures.

I'm filled with an insatiable curiosity for life off-the-beaten-path and love to share stories of the unheard voices I find along the way.

Giving voice to things that matter, raising awareness, and expanding perspectives is what lights my fire and is the heart and soul of who I am and what I do.

I have contributed a chapter to two books: “Step Forward and Shine,” published by RHG Media Productions, and “Pain, Purpose, Passion,” published by The Round House Press. I'm a contributing blogger to Huffington Post, Identity Magazine, Thrive Global, Yogic Living, and Medium.com. My personal essays and writing have appeared in Pink Pangea, FourTwoNine Magazine, Extreme Sailing Series 2018 Official Magazine, Aquarian Times, Spirituality & Health, PR Week, and IndieWire. I'm working on my first memoir.

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