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What does Joan Schneider of Schneider Associates consider to be among her most important traits?

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One of my most important assets is my willingness to ask for help and advice. On several occasions during my career, I have relied on colleagues to help me solve problems that were hindering my success.

I founded Schneider Associates in 1980 as a firm specializing in public relations and marketing communications for the real estate industry. I had no idea that in ten short years the real estate companies driving my firm's growth would face dire straights, and in turn threaten the very existence of the business I had worked tirelessly to grow.

I found the solution to this dilemma at Harvard Business School, where the country's most brilliant marketing minds shared with me two invaluable lessons:

- 1) Find a way to differentiate your company from others in your industry.
- 2) Never rely on one line of business, particularly one that is tied to economic cycles.

It was a tall order to differentiate my firm's services - of marketing high-end residential developments - and move away from the real estate industry's cyclical business model. Fortunately, I was also adept at developing positioning, messaging and creative ideas to successfully launch communities, companies, products and services into the marketplace. We were soon on our way to broadening our proven real estate expertise by offering a more robust set of solutions designed to serve developers not only during the marketing stage, but during every phase of the development process. Since then, we have helped dozens of development teams build a groundswell of support for their high-profile projects, and counsel them through the critical phase of permitting and entitlement.

Over time I realized how hard it is to get major mixed-use projects approved in Massachusetts. Securing financing and tenants can be a welcome problem when compared to the task of convincing town leaders and residents to approve new development in communities where the mantra is "Not in My Backyard." To help our clients overcome the hurdles that follow a project's introduction to the market, I worked with Phillip Pennellatore, EVP of our public affairs group, to create community launch - a process that takes a real estate projects from inception through approvals, to grand opening, securing tenants and beyond.

By expanding our services to encompass this comprehensive strategy, we have spent the past two decades helping scores of developers present compelling visions for projects that improve our cities and towns. We have partnered with dozens of greater Boston development teams to build consensus among stakeholders, secure local and state permit approvals and successfully market projects to prospective tenants and buyers. Our development clients rely on us to be a core member of the project team instead of the occasional consultant on crisis communications or marketing

issues.

We have helped clients brand and obtain approval for projects like Westwood Station, Northwest Park, Lexington Technology Park, Wayside Commons, Lenox Farms, Arborpoint at Seven Springs, Meadow Walk at Lynnfield, Charles River Landing and Worcester Crossing, to name just a few.

The Schneider Community Launch process consists of five phases:

- Develop Vision
- Build Support
- Secure Approval
- Launch Community
- Engage Consumers

Our track record proves that an investment in public affairs, public relations, community relations and social media principles can leverage public opinion to embrace change. But it's never easy. Anti-development forces in many communities are organized, sophisticated and are often out of the gate before the public process begins. Their goal is to shutdown new projects by masterminding aggressive campaigns to thwart developers using the latest social media communications techniques.

This is where my most important asset comes full circle. Just as I depended on my Harvard colleagues and Phil to help me through prior challenges in my career, I have worked hard to assemble a Public Affairs team developers can rely on to solve the complex problems facing their projects. My team is knowledgeable, experienced, committed and incredibly tenacious. This tenacity differentiates Schneider Associates in both up and down markets, while enabling our clients to build projects in places where residents instinctively resist change.

The key lesson here: seek out experts whose strengths complement your own. Together you can navigate the most difficult roads, from approval process to the launch of a community and beyond.

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