

Jessica Koch

People Matter Most

About five years ago, Jessica Koch decided to take a hiatus. She felt disillusioned about how she'd been treated by her last few employers, and she had a young daughter at home with whom she wanted to spend more time. Her husband had been the girl's primary caregiver up until then, but Jessica came to him with a proposal for a new arrangement—she would market and expand his small business and take over childcare at home, while he worked on a more full-time schedule.

Jessica's husband, Christopher, was willing to go for the change, but his home renovations business was only pulling in about \$10k annually at the time. However, Jessica isn't nationally known in sales and marketing for nothing. Within a few weeks, Christopher had a six-month waiting list. By the end of the year, he was more than able to support the family on his income alone.

During her hiatus, Jessica enjoyed her time with her daughter and didn't think much about her career. "I wasn't on social media and wasn't checking email," laughs Jessica. "I wouldn't even go into my home office!" Then, she got a phone call from the Calvert County Chamber of Commerce. They wanted her to teach a class about LinkedIn and the art of marketing yourself to employers. As Jessica was not currently employed at the time she politely declined several times. But she finally agreed because she has a strong belief that "people matter most," she affirms. "I finally had to push myself, so I taught the class with the understanding I had every intention of going back to hiding after it was done."

But a funny thing happened when she took on the role. Her first class was in a local mega church, and she found the massive room packed with people as she walked in. The energy in the room was electric, the experience was exhilarating, and afterward, people began approaching her to ask for help—Help with marketing their

businesses and themselves, and help with projects. She even received job offers. Jessica turned down the offers, but began helping others for free when she remembered her faith and commitment to serving others.

For six months she continued speaking, teaching, and advising without charging anything. She was counseling businesses about their sales process, helping companies land government contracts, and teaching people about LinkedIn and how to leverage their networks. But finally, enough was enough. "My husband said, 'Yes, I know you love people, and yes, people do matter most, but you should get paid for the value you provide!'" Jessica laughs. "He advised me to 'go register a business, get business cards, and suck it up buttercup because like it or not a business has found you! And apparently there's a calling here for you, and you love it.' He told me I just lit up when I was talking about all the people I was helping. I did love it, and I still love it."

Thus, Jessica L. Koch Consulting was born, and Jessica hasn't looked back since. She and her team of contractors provide sales and marketing for their clients, teaching them how to build out their sales plan, how to onboard and train sales teams, how to prospect for business, and how to utilize social media. "We integrate the tried and true methods like wearing out the soles of your shoes with the more modern electronic methods," explains Jessica. "We do sales and business development, as well as social media and marketing plans, along with helping some clients win government contracts." The most profound profit growth for a business comes in two main ways, increase sales, decrease operating costs and Jessica L. Koch Consulting is truly a National Expert helping businesses achieve both.

In the two years that Jessica L. Koch Consulting has been in business, all of the business



has been by referral. Jessica has a broad network, and by the time she hung up her shingle, she already had a list of people waiting to make use of her services. She doesn't limit herself geographically since much of the training can be done virtually. However, from time to time she will be flown out on location.

She also has a full docket of speaking engagements. Public speaking was something she fell into during her decade plus with the auditing firm Optimum Expense Recovery & Consulting, where she quickly displayed a knack for it. Nowadays, she does monthly webinars for several Chambers of Commerce, and she's spoken at conferences in front of women business owners, a national group of superintendents of public schools, CFOs of universities, CEOs of companies, and government executives. She finds the speaking engagements to be a thrilling and productive way to push forward conversations around best practices. Jessica had something of an "aha" moment while speaking at a conference in Kalamazoo, remembering that on that trip she reflected on the true power of marketing. "I was scheduled to speak to the region's superintendents of public schools, and I found out about this program where all of these kids go to college for free," recalls Jessica. "So I'm thinking to myself, there are so many good things happening in different parts of the country that should be shared since they can easily be duplicated. We're too far along in these technologies to not be able to create a ripple effect of all of these great impacts that are working. If one community has figured something out, how do we duplicate that somewhere else? That's a big part of why I do what I do; it's helping people see the things that are good and helping them duplicate them."

Jessica also carries this attitude of putting people first into her personal life by remaining active with charities and non-profits and trying to instill those values in her seven children. Six of them are grown-up now and in their 20s, but her youngest daughter is only eight years old, and Jessica and Christopher did split their time homeschooling her. However, the demands of both Jessica's success and her husbands has led them to place their daughter in a wonderful private Montessori school where she loves it and is thriving! Jessica had the privilege of sharing a unique experience with the homeschool co-op she was recently a part of with about 20 other children.

"I found a pattern online for a no-sew fleece scarf," Jessica says. "All the kids made them, and then they made a second scarf to send to a kid in another country. When you're young, people tell you that you can make a difference, but as you get older, you start to wonder if that is true. Politics seem so big, corporations are so big, the things I do don't feel that powerful. But for some reason, those scarves really did. I thought about how one person had bothered to make a YouTube video about these no-sew scarves that influenced me to teach it to these kids. And these kids sent the second scarf to some kids abroad who they will never meet. I took the scarf to a talk and shared the story with a roomful full of executive women. So that one video impacted all these people."

Although she works hard to teach her children the right values, she also has a mature and wise attitude toward parenting. "It was a defining moment when I realized, as blessed as I am to have my children in my life, they don't belong to me," Jessica nods. "You really just get to care for them, do the very best you can, and then you have to let them go. I have a son who's active-duty in Afghanistan right now. He's been on many dangerous missions, many where the whole team did not come back, and he's only 24. He's amazing, and he loves what he does. I had to encourage him and tell him he's doing a great job, even when I want to say, 'No, you can't do that! It's dangerous and it scares me!' But this isn't about me."

Jessica knows a thing or two about the military as her father was in the Navy. She grew up bouncing around military bases. Before she could walk, she'd driven across the country several times. The family bounced from Maine, to Massachusetts, to California before ending up in Maryland. She doesn't remember too much from those early years; things like the leaves changing in Maine, the earthquake drills in California, and always hanging around in airplane hangars where her father worked on P3s.

Jessica was about nine years old when her father was transferred to Andrews Air Force Base in Prince George's County, where she and her two younger siblings finally began to settle in for a longer stay. The kids were sent to a private Catholic school--St. Philip the Apostle--where Jessica found it hard to fit in with the other kids. "It was a tight-knit community, and a lot of the kids there were sitting in the same desk their parent or even grandparent had sat in," observes

Jessica. "The military kids popping in weren't as embraced or well received." Still, she did well academically, and began to focus her energy on volunteering and playing music.

During recess, she and a friend would stay behind and practice music for school services, and soon Jessica began to volunteer at a camp for kids with special abilities. "One thing about those kids is that they were so transparently true to their emotions," smiles Jessica. "If you hurt their feelings, you knew right away, and if you made them feel joyful, you knew right away. Being a part of that was pretty amazing." She also became a candy striper at the hospital, befriending senior citizens in hospice and learning about their pasts. Overall, she says volunteering taught her that her problems—being picked on sometimes at school—weren't so bad. She had a lot to be grateful for.

As she entered high school, her parents could no longer afford private school, and she transitioned to a public school which was, if anything, even worse than the Catholic school. Fortunately, after a year there, Jessica's father bought the family their first family home in Calvert County, Maryland, and she again switched schools; this time, to a public school she enjoyed.

In the meantime, her father had helped her get her first job—putting paper records onto microfiche in an industrial park warehouse. The experience was definitely a motivating one. She was still underage to be working but within a few weeks she was promoted to begin operating the cameras and pushing documents through the machines. The other women there who were in their 30s and 40s resented the promotion, and Jessica took their attitude as something of a warning sign. "I don't want it to come across as judging anyone's position because I've done everything," acknowledges Jessica. "I've cleaned toilets to help my family and I've worked at Wal-Mart. But I remember thinking while doing those jobs that I won't be happy doing this job at age 30 or 40. I should have higher aspirations. I was motivated by a desire not to be sitting there doing that type of work in my 30s and 40s."

At her high school in Calvert County, Jessica certainly looked to have a bright future. She was a straight-A student, was in the top 10% of her class, took summer school courses voluntarily because she was bored, and was elected to be Student Council Secretary. However, neither of her parents had gone to college, and no one, not her

teachers, nor her friends, nor any sort of counselor encouraged her to apply. Instead, she wrapped up school and almost immediately married her high school sweetheart at the tender age of 18.

After graduation, Jessica took a job at the front desk of the local Holiday Inn, and a couple of years after that, she and her new husband moved to Germany where he was being stationed. For three years, Jessica explored Europe and found odd jobs working at the daycare center on the base as well as the video store right outside it. "I had a couple of girlfriends that worked there, too, and we'd just play movies all day, sing and act silly," reminisces Jessica. "My husband got sent to Operation Provide Comfort, so I was mostly on my own, and I took all the trips I could take. I went to Prague, Paris, Bavaria. It was cheap, it was safe, and it was a blast!"

Toward the end of their three years in Germany, Jessica had their first child, and then the little family came back home to the DC area. In quick succession, Jessica had 3 more children before the troubled, unhealthy marriage blew up. Then, she moved back in with her parents and returned to work at the Holiday Inn.

A year later, the Holiday Inn announced that it was looking to hire for a sales role. Jessica had heard about commissions, and, with four mouths to feed, she knew she needed to up her bottom line. She applied for the role and didn't get it; but she was competitive and determined to find another sales role. She looked in the paper and found a radio station that was hiring folks to sell advertising space. She walked in and told them she had no experience but that she would work hard and succeed. They hired her, and within a couple of weeks she had her first contract signed.

That said, her first year in sales wasn't easy. She jokes that "my customers taught me how to do the job!" and notes that she only pulled in around \$30,000 during her first year. Then, she had lunch with a friend that changed her life. As a person of faith, Jessica had been holding back from making money, feeling it was somehow wrong. Her friend encouraged her and reminded her that making more money would mean she could help more people. Jessica took the lesson to heart, and in her second year made \$130,000.

By this time, she was dating Christopher, who she'd met at the playground where he was entertaining his two daughters. When the two married, their family expanded to six kids; years

later, when they had their daughter, they reached seven. Fortunately, Christopher was a fantastic partner. "He's brilliant, he's inventive, he has this high-level thinking," Jessica says admiringly. "He has a degree in astronomy from the University of Maryland, where he worked to pay for college with his home remodeling business—the same one he has now! Once I was eating a grapefruit, and I happened to say it was the best grapefruit I'd ever tasted. Christopher planted the seeds out front and now we have 2 giant grapefruit trees. It's a good thing we have cathedral ceilings, because we have to bring them inside every winter!"

After the radio station, she worked at a marketing firm, where she greatly honed her sales skills going door-to-door and training other salespeople. After that, she had a brief stint at a mortgage company, but she found that the business asked its salespeople to do unethical things, and quickly moved on. It was then that she landed at Optimum, where she was an instant hit.

At the time, the auditing company was working with clients like the local car dealer and the plumber down the street. Within three months of starting, Jessica booked appointments with the CFO of New Balance and Staples in Massachusetts. "I told my boss I need airline tickets," laughs Jessica. "He said, 'You barely know enough about the company. How did you do this?' I said, 'Well, I called them!'" Over the next 15 years, Jessica built the business, began public speaking, attended conferences, and built an impressive career for herself. At one conference, a stranger approached her, and, pointing to her nametag, said that he knew her by reputation, and that the rumor was that if Jessica Koch asks you for a meeting, you'd either have to retire, die, or say yes.

Eventually, the owners of the business decided to sell, and Jessica moved on to a series of small marketing businesses and helped grow them efficiently. But after being disillusioned with their operations, she decided to take a hiatus and pray over her next steps, until she got the fateful call from the Calvert County Chamber of Commerce.

As a leader, Jessica never stops learning and reading. She never got a college degree, but when asked, she says she has a Master's in Sales and Marketing from the school of life. And along the way, she read just about every sales book in existence, from Tony Robbins, to Dale Carnegie, to Zig Ziglar. Ken Blanchard, author of *The One*

Minute Manager, is her favorite, and has inspired her to always work at bringing out what shines in other people.

Jessica reminds young people entering the working world today that their relationships are their greatest assets. She's even launched a campaign to start a scholarship program that will train teenagers how to set up LinkedIn profiles and make sure they understand networking and leveraging their connections. The program had a wildly successful debut in December 2019 at the Career and Technology Academy which is a part of the Calvert County High School Board of Education. This program is growing, and she hopes to do something similar for non-profits.

Always, Jessica emphasizes the human aspect of business. "One of the things that makes a business great is when they can anchor to something that's greater than just making money," she points out. "That's why I believe in cause marketing. It does something for the employees, as well as for the community. For my own programs and everything I do, I try to have an affiliate or an association that I'm working with. People matter most, and I also like to say, 'See a need, fill a need, plant the seed,' thus, sprouting the company motto, 'Increase Sales, Decrease Operating Costs! Helping your company's profits grow from seed to orchard!' I believe if you help people get what they want, then everything you need and more shows up at your doorstep."

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