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King Says Strong Female Mentors Helped Shape Meaningful Career

EAST LANSING, MI: When King Media president and founder Coleen King was just 11 years old, she knew two things for certain: she would escape the life that she saw before her, and education would be her route to freedom. Raised by her grandmother until age five, King learned that she could be and do anything—a belief that helped her sustain resilience throughout her lifetime.

Despite the traumatic childhood that followed, King shares “I believed my grandmother, and I knew whatever I did, it would be meaningful.” So, when Judy Labanowski (now Perschbacher), a first-year typing and stenography teacher at Forest Hills Central High School, asked why the 16-year-old “had such a bad attitude” in her class, King was ready with her response.

“I’m not going to *be* a secretary,” she recalls saying, “I am going to *have* a secretary, and my grade in your class is bringing down my GPA, so what are we going to do to fix this?”

Perschbacher quickly saw that the self-assured sophomore wanted something much different for her life than most. She also recognized that her student did not have a supportive home environment. “For extra credit, Judy had me take stories from the Grand Rapids Press and convert them to stenography. She helped me navigate the college application and selection process. But most of all, she and the Perschbacher family made me feel important and showed me what was possible,” shares King.

Similarly, high school English teacher Ann Layton also noticed and encouraged King. “She believed in me, and suggested I look into a communications career,” explains King. During a time when women’s options were much more limited, King pursued her education and career with focus and passion. “Her support empowered me to dream big,” she explains.

King’s relationships with Perschbacher and Layton endured, and she credits the women for helping her achieve the career and life she loves. “My grandmother planted a seed. These women helped nurture that. They took an interest, and in doing so helped shape my path in life. Having a strong female support system was supremely important. It fuels my love and commitment to education and being a mentor to others,” King says.

King worked to support herself through college and earned her Bachelor of Arts in communications from Michigan State University. She is now a frequent guest speaker at her alma mater, opening the minds of students to dream big. In 2020, King was named Outstanding Alumni of the Year by the MSU College of Communications Arts and Sciences for “obtaining the highest level of professional or academic accomplishment.”

King’s career in the male-dominated world of broadcast media began at Avery Knodel, a prestigious national rep firm in Chicago. She went on to become the first female sales representative at Lansing’s CBS affiliate, where she later delivered the station’s first-ever live remote broadcast. King continued to break barriers as the top-performing regional sales manager for two Lansing television affiliates. But according to King, it wasn’t until she “retired” in 1999 that her career came to have the meaningful impact that she’d envisioned as a child.

“My former clients continued to call, and I enjoyed helping them. King Media was born, and with it the opportunity to create real, meaningful change,” says King. This January, the full-service marketing agency celebrates its 25th anniversary.

King is filled with gratitude for a career she’s never taken for granted. “I get to wake up each morning and work hard, doing what I love with some of the industry’s top talent. It feels amazing.” King and her team’s work has earned more than 140 national and international [awards](#) since 2015 with [campaigns](#) addressing issues like problem gambling, mental health, marijuana education, mobility, veterans services, talent recruitment, and many more.

King has kept the agency thriving and growing through challenging economic times—but she hasn’t done it alone. “It has been the adventure of a lifetime. Thank you, Judy, Ann, and the other remarkable women who have been inspirational educators, mentors and lifelong friends.”

Founded in 1999 by Coleen King, King Media is a full-service marketing and advertising agency providing research-based solutions in response to client needs. Our core competencies include market and community research and analysis, brand development, creative and message development, strategic planning, graphic design, media planning and buying, and web design and development. King Media’s corporate office is centrally located in East Lansing, MI, with additional offices in Ada and St. Joseph, MI. For additional information and to view recent work, visit KingMediaNow.com.

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