



Tamara Jacobs graduated with Summa Cum Laude honors from the University and received her degree in Theatre through the School of Education. She is the founder and president of Tamara Jacobs Communications, Inc., which coaches companies, celebrities and other individuals on how to brand themselves. She is the author of the best-selling book “Be the Brand” and is currently writing “Success is A Planned Event,” which is scheduled to be published in 2014.

Can you tell me a little bit more about your company?

My company I think is an interesting outcome of what I did at Michigan. We do strategic communications and performance coaching. It is a company that was formed 20-plus years ago. I was an executive with Johnson & Johnson, I had just had a baby, and I thought, “Well, at this point, I might —and it was risky— have enough relationships and reputation that I could separate myself, become a consultant, and still keep these relationships, only now on a retainer basis and for projects.” That was a bold move, back in 1992.

How can some of the tips you provide in your book help students at the University who are trying to make a name for themselves?

It can make them memorable because I think, now more than ever, it’s about personal responsibility and accountability. There’s an awful lot of talk about “finding a mentor, if you can just find a mentor and attach yourself to a mentor.” I think that’s the wrong impression and it’s outdated. It is not safe right now for people to hope that somebody else is going to promote them into a job. You have to advocate for yourself, and in order to advocate for yourself, you have to differentiate yourself and that’s where the whole notion of branding comes in: what is unique about you? Why would someone want to hire you?

I coach a lot of people, quite frankly, students who are graduating from a plethora of universities, particularly in the tri-state area, for their interviews. There are certain things that the book helps them do and my in-person coaching tips will help them master as well.

For instance, you want to look your best, but you don’t want to buy a suit for the interview. Why? Why do you not want to buy a new suit for the interview? Frankly, you don’t know how you look in that suit; you’ve never actually had an experience in that suit. I tell people to wear something you’ve already worn before and had a good experience with it, because basically, you’re bringing your friend into the interview with you. However, if you buy a new suit and wear it to the interview, you’ve just brought a stranger into the room and are not sure if you’re feeling comfortable with that stranger so you spend time adjusting whatever the heck it is that you’re wearing and wondering if you made the right choice. People pick up on the fact that you’re not comfortable. We’re very shallow, sorry for that, but we see you before we hear you. So it’s critical that you have a presence, this whole notion of executive presence, of how you’re going to be received when you walk through those doors in that room. And that’s what this book will help you do: it will help you strategize.

How did your experience at the University help you prepare for your career?

The University provided me with a real myriad of experiences. I was in a show at the Power Center, one of the early shows. I was in West Side Story. So that was a wonderful opportunity to be in this huge, gorgeous venue, performing live for so many people in the audience. I did an honors project that I performed as a one-woman show. I was Susan B. Anthony; they gave me the opportunity to write it, produce it and star in it. I did radio and television, writing scripts, performing and being critiqued. It was such an interesting mix of learning opportunities.

Teachers were very invested in their students, they always made time. I found that surprising for such a large university, that it was so intimate. Whether I took a big class or small class, quite honestly, it had to do with projecting an outgoing personality and shopping my brand at quite an early age. I always made sure to sit in the front of the room, always. I never took a seat in the back because if you are sitting in front, you are committed, the professors know that you are committed, you are there to interact and be visible and it means you’ve taken a stand even though you’re “sitting down.” I got very close to my professors, and that’s what I liked so much about Michigan. I liked the vibrancy and the intimacy even in a big school, which was unusual.

What are some of your most memorable moments at the University?

I think some of my most memorable moments were in coffee shop conversations with other students. I’m from Michigan, so I wasn’t expecting that I would be constantly interacting with kids from New York and California. I think what I enjoyed the most was diversity of thought because even though it’s a Midwestern school it has a very national and international feel. So I felt like I was in a global microcosm even though I was still in Michigan.

What are some of the awards you received at the University?

I was an Angell scholar. I had a 4.0 GPA. I also graduated Summa Cum Laude, so I think those were the most prestigious milestones where I was able to distinguish myself for academic excellence.

You are currently working on another book that is scheduled to be published next year. Can you provide a little more insight on what that book will be about?

This book is a follow-up to “Be the Brand,” called “Success Is A Planned Event.” It’s all the things we do that get in our own way; we tell ourselves, “no,” before people can or will state a negative. It’s getting past our own self-doubt so that we can go for it and ask for “Yes!” And once you give yourself permission to go for “Yes,” then how do you prepare for it and how do you deal with “No.” I detail experiences I’ve had where instead of going for it all I dialed it back and “shared,” minimizing my needs – lacking conviction and commitment. “Success is A Planned Event” is about permission and strategy.

What advice would you give to students at the University?

Be original! One of the quotes I use in my upcoming book is from Dr. Seuss. “Today, you are you. It is truer than true. There is no one alive who is you-er than you.” That’s what I would tell students. They have to be authentic and focused on the needs of the interviewer; it’s not about what they want. If they are in an interview or trying to promote themselves, first they would have to put themselves in what I call “the Role of Receivership™.” They have to ask themselves, why would the other person want to give up their most precious commodity, their time, to either read your resume or be with you? It’s about being connected to the other person’s needs. So when students are looking to promote their brand, especially when they’re trying to take this wonderful degree and successfully use it to get a job, it’s not what they’re looking for; it’s what the employers are seeking. There’s an expression in business America that “features tell, benefits sell.” So if all someone does is list all your accolades and features, then employers are going to go, “So what? How does this benefit me?” You have to help them. You have to attach all of the accomplishments to why it would benefit them. You have to do it in an original way. You can’t just send out some type of generic letter or resume. You have to create a tell me more headline that provokes and engages -- as a gatekeeper, if the first two lines don’t get me, I don’t read on. It’s about coming up with something that’s original and arousing; it has to engage and employ the “Quick Connect™.”