

Face to Face

Face to Face with Jane Howze of The Alexander Group

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Jane Howze, Co-founder of The Alexander Group

[Jane Howze](#), co-founder of **The Alexander Group** executive placement firm, loves practical jokes — most often at the expense of her husband, who after 31 years of marriage, is still a good sport about it. Her most over-the-top joke, in concert with business partner [John Lamar](#), was played on a Houston executive who was convinced he had been picked for the reality TV show “Survivor,” and sent an email to 1,000 business associates and friends telling them the good news.

In addition to her sense of humor, Howze also has a keen eye for matchmaking, which partly explains her career choice.

Howze spoke to Houston Business Journal correspondent Bayan Raji about her work, her writing and her golf game.

I noticed you write several blogs. Did you ever consider being a journalist?

I’m a lawyer by background. When I was a lawyer I didn’t think I was a very good writer. When I got into executive recruiting, a lot of what we do after we interview candidates is we send what we call ‘professional appraisals’ to the clients, (pointing out) the person’s strengths, the person’s weaknesses, this is where the person would make a contribution.

For some reason at that point in time I realized that if I couldn’t write really well and communicate well I was not going to be very successful in this business. I took a writing class, and I really work very, very hard at trying to be a good writer. It doesn’t come naturally for me.

What about your golf blog?

I write a column in CultureMap called ‘The Hacker.’ I’ve made every golf etiquette mistake so I kind of write funny stories about that, because I don’t know the rules really well, but I like to play.

Stuff like when I first started learning to play golf, no one told that me after you've hit the ball about 10 times you need to pick it up. I would keep hitting, and I was playing with clients ... and they'd go like, 'Oh Jane, it's OK just pick it up.' and I would go, 'No, I insist on following the rules.' It took forever and I shot like 150.

We laugh about that now.

So you've improved your game?

I think I'm like an 18 handicap. I can sort of play with anybody. My partner said if you play fast and if you help other people find their lost golf balls, you'll be welcome anywhere. I can find any lost golf ball in any woods. I figured out how to make myself valuable to people.

How did you end up in Houston?

This is going to make me sound very ancient, but back when I got out of college there just weren't many management-level positions for women. Houston was much more progressive than Alabama was. My roommate was a life-long Houstonian. She was going to Europe for study and she said, 'Will you drive my car back to Houston?'

So I drove her car back and thought, 'Well, I'll interview.' And then I got a great job here and that was sort of it. It was one of those good cosmic winks I guess.

How did you arrive at executive recruiting as a career?

I have always had a gift for wanting to have my friends meet each other — even back in high school. By the time I got out of college I had fixed up three or four people who had gotten married.

One day I read an article in **Fortune** magazine about large executive search firms who found CEOs for companies and about how most of the people in those search firms weren't recruiters by background but were business people and lawyers.

It was like a light bulb went off and I knew that I would never do anything else.

How important is social media in your work?

I love Twitter and I love Foursquare. I think one of the biggest mistakes that executives who are over 50 make is that they are not conscious of social media. When they're competing in the job market with people who are 35 to 45 years old and they are going 'I don't know what LinkedIn is, I don't know what Facebook is,' they sort of date themselves.

What mistakes do candidates make in interviews?

What bothers us most is candidates who don't have emotional intelligence. Assess your interviewer and assess what he or she is looking for. For example, if you meet your interviewer

at a restaurant and he or she orders water or a coffee, this is not your chance to order the lumberjack special.

Never order an alcoholic drink — this is not a date.

Jane Howze, Co-founder

The Alexander Group

HOMETOWN: Birmingham, Ala.

EDUCATION: Rhodes College, majored in economics; University of Houston Law School

AGE: 61

FAMILY: Husband, John Mann; step-children: John, Chris and Meredith

WHO WOULD PLAY YOU IN A MOVIE? I don't have an answer for the movie star question.

But if I had to pick another professional life, it would be Oprah because she helps so many people or Barbara Walters who paved the way for interviewers, be they TV or otherwise.