

# The Charlotte Observer

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LEADERS MOVING FORWARD

## Selling success

*Being aggressive pays off in job recruiting, says CEO of CEO*



**Deborah Millhouse**

Job recruiting is no different than home building, says Deborah Millhouse. She has experience with both.

"Instead of building with brick and mortar, I am building with people," said Millhouse, chief executive of CEO Inc., a job placement company in Charlotte.

"If you don't have the right people in place, you will have a foundation that doesn't work the way you want it to."

Before her husband's job brought her to Charlotte in 1992, Millhouse, 44, worked for a California home builder in various departments, including customer service and human resources. She started at CEO Inc. in 1994, after first working for another area placement firm.

In 1998, Millhouse bought a majority stake in CEO, which she says had yet to ever turn a profit. She added that she got CEO in the black within three months. How'd she do it?

"I actually sold," Millhouse said. "Recruiting is a sales process. You have to secure companies that are willing to pay you a fee to find the people they need. If you are just sitting on your behind expecting them to come in your direction, that doesn't happen. You have to

aggressively find companies that are looking for people and then aggressively find the talent."

CEO, which Millhouse says has annual sales of \$3 million, is in the midst of launching a Web site, [www.ceouniversity.net](http://www.ceouniversity.net) -- that will provide, for a fee, career coaching materials. The site, not yet fully active, currently advertises CEO's Lifetime Leadership Executive Coaching program, which runs three years and costs \$3,000.

MoneyWise recently caught up with Millhouse to ask about her secrets to success.

Questions and comments edited for style, clarity and brevity.

*Q. What's your best advice for ensuring business success?*

You must create value for your clients, hire the best people, understand their motivation and unique abilities, pursue excellence, and watch cash flow and return on investment.

*Q. What's the biggest business mistake you've made?*

I have had two partners. One was great, the other was not. It is important to have like-minded partners with the same values, integrity and belief system. The financial gain of working with an incompatible partner was not worth it, so we chose to exit that relationship.

Unfortunately, it cost us all the way around, but we learned from that mistake.

*Q. What's the biggest mistake you see others making?*

I see other companies using an absolutely horrifying process for hiring people. The people who make up your team are the key to your success. The day you choose to settle is the day you accept second best. If you cannot find the best, check your process. It is likely broken or not designed for success.

*Q. What are you going to be doing with ceouniversity.net?*

We are taking our intellectual property and packaging it as intellectual capital to the marketplace -- books, products, assessment

tools for team building. Our idea journal is full of new ways to strategically meet our client's needs.

*Q. If you weren't head of CEO Inc., what would you be doing?*

Tough question - I love what I do. I would probably be using my unique abilities to provide direction through leadership, build confidence through relationships, and expand capabilities through creativity, to create value and grow companies and people.

This article appeared in the July 8, 2007 issue of *The Charlotte Observer*. Copyrighted 2007 by The Charlotte Observer, 600 S. Tryon St., Charlotte NC, (704) 358-5000.

