

Living by the Three R's:

Reputation, Relationships, and Resources | *By Mia McLeod*

When I started McLeod Butler Communications just five years ago, I had spent the preceding six years in state government. Working for a Republican attorney general after law school, then as a gubernatorial appointee for a Democratic governor, gave me a unique perspective. In 2002, several opportunities arose almost simultaneously.

I was just emerging from a series of personal triumphs and tragedies. It certainly was not an ideal time to leave the stability of full-time employment and start a new business.

Lobbying always had been an area of interest, but as I began to reconnect with legislators and other mentors with whom I had worked during my undergraduate years as a page, I soon realized that lobbying independently would be difficult.

I remember researching and seeking mentors who were actively engaged in governmental relations and lobbying at the state level. But there were very few who looked like me. Surprisingly, as I perused the lobby of the State House looking for independent contract lobbyists who were African-American and female, I could not find any.

So I asked other lobbyists about their own experiences and perspectives. Some offered helpful advice. Others advised me to consider doing something different.

"Why would you want to do this?" they asked. "You're too nice," they added. "You're a good lookin' gal," others would say, "that'll open a lot of doors for you," as if I had nothing else to offer or no more was required. Even more telling was that their comments were not mean-spirited or intended to be offensive.



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As I focused on the direction of my firm, it was obvious that there were three key areas on which we needed to build:

1. Reputation. Building a solid reputation in any industry is critical. The lack of diversity in this field made it especially difficult to be taken seriously. After Operation Lost Trust and other infractions at state and federal levels, I knew that trust and integrity had to be an integral part of everything we do.

2. Relationships. They can make or break your business. This is probably the most underestimated area of any business, although it is impacted by things we do and say in other aspects of our daily activities. We are always representing our companies, even when we are not "officially" at work. And

this process never ends. Networking is vital, but businesses need a foundation or infrastructure on which to build and grow.

3. Resources. These are equally important because they help broaden our reach and impact by providing clients with access to essentials that may not be available otherwise.

Five years later, McLeod Butler Communications is still learning, growing, and, yes, impacting the way South Carolina does business by influencing the laws that govern our state. We are building a solid reputation and earning the trust and respect of business and government leaders alike by keeping our word, offering straightforward, strategically sound advice, and giving our clients an active voice concerning issues critical to South Carolina.

As I look around the State House lobby now, I see several other African-American women helping to blaze the trail. Some are independent; some are not. There still are not nearly enough. What a phenomenal opportunity we have, if only we choose to seize it. I cannot wait to see what the next five years brings. ★

McLeod is president of the Columbia-based McLeod Butler Communications LLC.

The South Carolina Technical College System is one of the state's premier engines of economic and workforce development.

South Carolina has embarked on a monumental shift toward a high-skill "New Economy." The future that the development of this new economy portends is promising, but the commercialization of ideas that emerge from research and development will occur only where there is a highly skilled, adaptable and technologically proficient workforce.

And we know how to develop that workforce.

Through the high-quality education and training provided by each of our 16 Technical Colleges and the internationally recognized workforce training offered by our Center for Accelerated Technology Training (CATT), the South Carolina Technical College System is key to developing and maintaining the workforce South Carolina needs to succeed in the new economy.

