

As seen in  
**Long Island Business News**  
June 22, 2001

# Growth Strategies

AN INFORMATION ARSENAL FOR BUILDING BUSINESS

## Tales of life after politics

By ADINA GENN

**W**hen Mario Cuomo lost the 1994 gubernatorial election, Mark Grossman – Cuomo's then-Long Island regional director – found himself at a crossroad in his career. Or, as Grossman puts it, he was “politically displaced.” He'd spent six years as a top gubernatorial aide and had great respect for Cuomo. And the regular paychecks were something he'd grown accustomed to.

But with George Pataki's victory, Grossman had to move on. So, he combined his political know-how with an impressive Rolodex and decided to become a public relations consultant with a government bent.

Grossman spent November and December of '94 attending every Long Island meeting on the business calendar, letting people know he was opening shop.

In January, when the Pataki administration asked him to leave, equipped with several commitments from new clients, his wife Lisa's support, and brand new office gear, Grossman launched Holtsville-based Grossman Strategies.

“In politics, you know going in that the employment won't last forever,” Grossman says. “But the experience is invaluable. I couldn't do what I do now without that previous experience.”

At some point virtually everyone in public service faces Grossman's predicament – as will those staffers in Nassau County Executive Tom Gulotta's office come November. Political staffers aren't granted civil service protection. But most staffers feel an acute sense of loyalty to the politicians they serve and wouldn't feel comfortable working under a new administration anyway, especially if a new party steps in. Some leave while the official's term is in full swing, ending their careers on a high note with friends in high places. Others stay in public service until the very end. Regardless, experts agree that public service is excellent training for careers outside politics.

Take Gary Lewi, executive vice president of the Manhattan-based Rubenstein Associates, which claims to be the largest public relations agency in terms of Long Island clients and billings. Lewi, who's been with the firm since 1986, was Senator Alfonse D'Amato's press secretary from 1981 to 1986. Prior to that, he served in the Town of Hempstead's public affairs office. Although Rubenstein Associates doesn't handle political candidates or public agencies, Lewi finds enormous value in understanding how public policy decisions are made – and how they're not made.

“There are very few public relations clients – in retail, energy, transportation, education, law, health – who aren't impacted by the public policy environment,” Lewi points out. “I don't envy the person who doesn't understand Long Island government when working in public affairs. It would be like parachuting in the Balkans without a map.”

Lewi warns that assuming a prior friendship will carry weight in expediting a client's



Bob Giglione

**SURVIVAL SKILLS:** Armed with a powerful Rolodex and invaluable experience, Mark Grossman, like many former political appointees, has leveraged his time in politics to further his career.

position is a big mistake. Understanding the thought process and dynamics of government, however, will help anyone in PR make strides.

Lewi left public service during D'Amato's term. With a new family, he shifted to the higher-paying private sector.

Vanessa J. Herman chose to stay with D'Amato until the very end. She'd worked her way from administrative assistant in the Mineola campaign office in 1991, eventually serving as D'Amato's press secretary up until 1999. She was shocked when he didn't win reelection. After the loss, she took a step back.

“I'd been working for someone I believed in. It wasn't just a job,” she says. “I didn't have the heart to get involved in politics anymore.” She even turned down a job offer to work for Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Then she heard from a business acquaintance, a former counsel to D'Amato, who knew of a position at SUNY Stony Brook. There she met Shirley Strum Kenney, the university's president, and accepted a position as special projects coordinator in the office of the president.

She also runs her own public relations firm, Smithtown-based Millennium Strategies, which does work for the 1in9 Breast Cancer Action Coalition, a cause she was involved with while working for D'Amato.

“I learned great communication skills in public service,” she says. “I learned to be cool and calm under intense pressure. And knowing I have a great Rolodex gives me great confidence. But it's mutual – these people may need something from me.”

Dianne Baumert-Moyik, president of Holbrook-based Baumert PR & Design, put her firm in the hands of her staff for six

months last year when Tom Gulotta asked her to become his press secretary.

“I knew I could do a good job and that it would help me keep my contacts strong,” Baumert-Moyik says. “With the tremendous magnitude of the budget crisis and West Nile Virus, my six months there felt more like 18 months.”

Baumert-Moyik returned to the private sector because she says her firm needed her. It wasn't the first time she'd stepped in and out of public service. She previously worked for Babylon Supervisor Arthur Pitts and then Rich Schaffer before Lewi recruited her for a stint at Rubenstein.

Kevin Law, managing partner of the Long Island office of the law firm Nixon Peabody in Garden City, looks back at his public service with fondness. He once served under Pat Halpin, the former Suffolk County Executive, as assistant county executive for environmental affairs and affordable housing, and as director of real estate for the Suffolk County Department of Law. Law left shortly after Robert Gaffney took office, even though he was asked to stay.

“Bob deserved to put his own person in office,” Law says. “Plus, I was ready to go into the private sector.”

Today, Law concentrates on environmental and real estate law. “My clients appreciate that I know the inner workings of government to help them solve their problems,” Law says. “And my experience has helped me gain clients.”

That kind of experience also helps attract clients for Grossman, who has photos in his office of him with Cuomo. Even so, some of his clients are prominent Republicans.

“I wear my political affiliation on my sleeve,” he says. “But I don't use it in my business. I have a loyalty to my clients.”