



It's all in the way you say it

RORY RICHARDS

You need an attitude adjustment." Not exactly the words anyone wants to hear – unless, of course, they are uttered by a charismatic, confident, professional motivational speaker with a mesmerizing Aussie accent and a solid track record of corporate success.

Meet Michelle Ray. She is the go-to guru for positivity in the workplace. Ray assists clients with organizational effectiveness, management strategy, internal communications, productivity, leadership coaching and performance review evaluation and delivery. Get your own attitude checked at www.michelleray.com.



Michelle Ray

Name: Michelle Ray.

Hebrew name: Leah.

My mother was born in: Czechoslovakia.

My father was born in: Hungary.

I grew up in: Australia.

Kinder? No.

Marital status? Engaged and about to be married.

Mazel tov! Did you find that nice Jewish boy in the end? I did, actually.

That's great news. Nu? Who is he? What does he do? His name is Brian and he is in commercial leasing.

And how would you describe what you do? I am a motivational speaker. I call myself "the attitude adjuster."

Ouch, that last part sounds painful. I'm an expert on moral and workplace attitudes.

When did you start your business? Twelve years ago. I had an opportunity to go out on my own after a negative performance review.

Is that motivational speaker code for "I got fired and I had to do something"? Not at all. I was just in a bad place and decided to leave the company, start my own business and spread my message.

What is your message? That we are all responsible for our own attitudes and that we have the power to choose our attitude in every

situation. Whether you are a leader or team member, what is important is not what you do, it's who you are and your character as a person. Your integrity as a person is the most important thing. A lot of people are looking for a quick fix. I provide people with info and tools, but it's up to them to do the work.

Pen and paper or Blackberry? Pen and paper.

How many voicemails a day do you get? Hard to say.

How many e-mails a day do you get? An average of 20.

What book are you reading right now? I am re-reading Viktor Frankel's *Man's Search for Meaning*.

Who's your guru? I'm inspired by W. Mitchell. He is a speaker that had two devastating accidents and is in a wheelchair. He reminds me about what adversity really is.

Any famous clients? Not that I can really mention. I work with various provincial government departments, but I can't say which ones.

God knows that enough of them need you. They sure do!

What's the biggest audience you have spoken in front of? Twelve hundred people.

How many speaking gigs do you do in one year? An average of about 80.

How many people work for you? I have a part-time assistant.

How do you market yourself? Predominantly word of mouth. One engagement leads to another.

Are you ever nervous about speaking? Never. Well, I shouldn't say that ... you have to feel some sense of adrenalin without being over-confident.

What's been the most memorable moment or peak in your career so far? Probably being on the stage in front of my peers accepting my certificate as a certified speaking professional. Less than 500 people have it in the world.

Do you think you'll have the business 10 years from now? I

certainly hope so.

Any other profession other than your own you would like to attempt? Honestly, I have no other desire to do anything else. I feel I'm doing exactly the work I was put here to do.

What's the toughest lesson you've had to learn in business? That it's OK to make mistakes and lose money. You become very humble when you make mistakes and it's a necessary part of success.

Do you do any volunteer work? I am on the fund-raising committee at Beth Hamidash. I also do some volunteer work in terms of accepting not-for-profit speaking engagements sometimes.

What do you think of the rabbi at Beth Hamidash? He is great. He is marrying me and Brian!

Do you think that there is a stereotype about women in business? That we are somehow different than our male counterparts? I think, no doubt, that there are those stereotypes, and we are different – physiologically different. We do have to work a lot harder to get ahead.

Ever been to Israel? No, but I'd love to go.

What role does Judaism play in your life? It gives me a spiritual foundation and a sense of community that I think that many people are missing. It's a foundation that I'm grateful to have. I love the culture, mindset, the music, food – the whole experience of being Jewish.

What makes you most proud to be Jewish? Just being affiliated with a religion and a culture that are very proud, and have a history of risk-taking and chutzpah.

My Hebrew is: Lousy – I don't speak it.

As a Jewish woman living in Vancouver, what do you think is the biggest problem facing our Jewish community? Well, let's look at it two ways. The good thing is that we are growing and at a very fast rate. But at the same time, there are a lot of "closet Jews" who don't want to admit their faith and don't want to take part. I think that's a shame. We in B.C. also have one of the highest intermarriage rates in the country and that puts our future at risk. ♣

Rory Richards is a partner in the event planning and PR firm Richards and Chan, www.richardssandchan.com.