

## 2016 Woman Business Owner of the Year: Eileen Wixted

BY PERRY BEEMAN, Senior Staff Writer

Friday, July 29, 2016 6:00 AM

### About Eileen

Position: Principal, Wixted & Co.

Education: Bachelor's in communication, Michigan State

University

Hometown: Brooklyn, N.Y.

Family: Husband William Havekost, four children

Community activities: Serves on boards of Syverson Strege & Co., Central Iowa Endorsement Council and Iowa Women's Leadership Conference; communication adviser to Dowling Catholic High School

Age: 56



Eileen Wixted tells her staff to make friends wherever they go, whether they are at the McDonald's drive-thru or navigating the security check at an airport. "It will enrich your life because a rich, rewarding life is one in which you build strong relationships," Wixted said. "It is not a transactional world. People are interested in you."

Just be careful what you say and do. "Everything communicates a message, and you are in control of the message," Wixted said. "The way you treat people is so important and will begin building a path for future success. Kindness is a strength."

Business representatives need to feel empathy for their clients, Wixted said, and she considers that one of her strengths. "You have to have empathy for people. Communication today is about building that conversation."

Her clients know she is invested in their ability to succeed. "Eileen is a strong-willed, passionate, effective communicator," Iowa Board of Regents President and businessman Bruce Rastetter wrote in a nomination letter. "... When I use the word passionate to describe Eileen, it is a deliberate description."

Wrote Michelle Book, CEO of Food Bank of Iowa and another nominator: "Eileen doesn't coddle and she doesn't sugarcoat. When I hear 'no pain, no gain' I think of two people: my high school long-distance track coach and Eileen Wixted."

Wixted has had to help clients communicate during massive layoffs and even a plant closing around the holidays. “This work is about your reputation, even after a bad event,” Wixted said. Instead of people associating her with tough times, they thank her for sage advice.

It’s about that empathy. Maybe some of that comes from her days at WHO-TV, which ended when she got fired by a guy who later was shown the door himself.

When Wixted lost her job, she “had a 24-hour cry, and then it was time to make calls.” She freelanced for Meredith Corp., KIOA radio and an ad agency. “I thought, ‘Nothing is beneath me. I have to get a paycheck.’”

She returned to WHO-TV, but her heart wasn’t in it. She then decided to co-found a marketing agency with a friend and colleague. She eventually went out on her own, and has assembled a staff that includes several former TV station employees from around town.

It’s quite an accomplishment for someone who considers herself “the only kid at grade school who read the newspaper” and recalls “coming into the business when women were just the weather girls.”

“This is a noble profession,” Wixted said. “You can change the world around you.”

**Three areas of influence:**

Believes in community service, from coaching mock trials and attending school events to serving on the boards of nonprofit organizations.

Understands the importance of relationships in one’s professional and personal life.

Has dedicated her career to fostering clear communications that meet the goals of her clients.

**Words to live by:**

“Make friends wherever you go.”