



# THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

MICHELE TAFOYA

Countless books, seminars, and gurus promise to teach you the “secrets” to success. Well, here’s my secret: There are no secrets to success.

Actually, it’s pretty simple. Want to excel in whatever you do? Get to work. Keep working. And don’t stop until the job is done. That’s called “work ethic.”

I’m the sideline reporter for NBC’s Sunday Night Football. I won’t lie – it’s a dream job. But it isn’t a dream-come-true. There’s no fantasy involved. Just a lifetime of hard work.

I had my first real job at 13. I was a papergirl. I delivered newspapers to people’s homes and sold subscriptions door-to-door. That job taught me persistence. I learned that to succeed, especially in sales, you have to knock on a lot of doors.

In high school, I worked at Baskin Robbins. The manager didn’t appreciate it when I gave out overly-generous portions to customers. That taught me accountability. Until you run the show, you answer to the person who does.

A few years later, I worked as a telemarketer for an insurance company. A lot of people look down on telemarketers. I don’t. If you think a legitimate job is beneath you, you don’t deserve that job – or any other. Like all telemarketers, I was rejected far more often than not. Usually, I didn’t get past the first sentence. But sometimes I did – enough to make some good money. The path to success is paved with failure.

As a waitress in college, I learned that you need to smile and treat customers well, even when you’re having a bad day. Leave your mood at the door, or expect to be shown the door.

After I graduated, I had seven jobs – count ‘em, seven! One of those was a public relations assistant in Los Angeles. It was fun, but it involved ridiculously long hours. That was okay, though. I got used to it. And when long hours were called for later, I was ready.

I went from PR to producing a morning radio show. The host had talent. We put out a good product. But it wasn’t enough – because timing and luck are also important, and you can’t control those. You can only control what you do. You just have to keep working. What choice do you have?

The radio show gave me the idea that I could be a host – the talent. I put together a demo and sent it out to every station I could find an address for. I finally caught the eye of a sports show in Charlotte, North Carolina. I decided that I would never think of myself as a “female sports

reporter,” but just as a sports reporter. My ambition is to be the best sports journalist, period. What does being a woman have to do with it?

As the newbie, I was at the station all day, and took every assignment that I could, especially the ones no one else wanted. After five months, TV stations noticed I was scooping their stories and started calling. One of those was CBS Sports. I took that job.

It was a huge jump, and it put me under a microscope. I wasn't used to that. I made a lot of mistakes – some honest ones, and some really dumb ones. All of them were public. My bosses didn't hold back their displeasure, and neither did the viewers. This pushed me to screw-up less and taught me how to deal with criticism. Mistakes are life's way of highlighting what you need to improve. So I kept making mistakes, and I kept improving.

After 5 years, I was offered a job at ESPN. After 10 years there, I joined NBC, where I am now. After all of that – a lifetime of work – I think I've learned what it takes to succeed.

Whether it's your first job or your dream job, the formula is always the same: Get to work. Keep working. And don't stop until the job is done.

That's the secret – that's not a secret – to success.

I'm Michele Tafoya for Prager University.