



David Johndrow, left, owner of Johndrow Vineyards, is pictured with his winemaker, Rob Lawson. Johndrow and his wife, Maryann, left the technology world to start their own wine label, but transferred their skills to get it off the ground. *COURTESY PHOTO*

Recycling skills

Job experience can serve as transition to new frontiers

BY APRIL WILKERSON
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OKLAHOMA CITY – Old career advice: Don't burn bridges and network like crazy.

New career advice: Continue with old advice, but use existing career skills to leverage and market your new venture.

As today's work force changes and people strike out as entrepreneurs or shift from one type of work to another, many are finding that skills from their previous jobs are coming in quite handy.

David and Maryann Johndrow of Oklahoma City spent four-and-a-half years as owners of HRLogix, a technology company that sold a human resources application tracking system. Anyone who applied online for a casino job in Las Vegas did so using the technology the Johndrows built from a scratch. About two years ago, the couple sold HRLogix to a Florida company in order to start their own wine label, Johndrow Vineyards. That's when their technology and marketing skills gave a boost to their wine.

"With HRLogix, we had 90 percent of all jobs in Las Vegas, and we were the first to go after the casinos; we had 280 when we left," David Johndrow said. "People knew we were a safe choice because we made a lot of friends and understood the market. With our wines, we're also building relationships in a condensed market and want to be the wine of choice."

Their technological savvy isn't hurting them, either. Johndrow said they rely heavily on Facebook, online photo galleries from celebrity events (including the

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- Brian Blake, owner of B2 Design

Sundance Film Festival in Utah, where they're at now serving their wines), YouTube videos that spoof wine snobs, and branded product downloads.

"We do have some printed stuff, but it is very minor," he said. "This keeps our prices low and gives us the flexibility to make changes on the fly. So we're keeping things fresh and to the market at the pace they want it."

Johndrow said they only sell their wines in the markets they want to, such as Hawaii, California and Utah, and everything else is done via their Web site. They're also making inroads in their home state: In 2010 in Oklahoma, they expect to sell 1,000 cases of wine, he said.

Jessica Miller-Merrell, co-owner of Xceptional HR, based in Moore, has transitioned from corporate world to entrepreneur with a blending of her skills and passions. In October, she left her post as human resources manager at Office Max in Norman to start a consulting business that helps companies use social media to devel-

op strategies for human resources and recruiting.

Knowing the HR language and corporate ways has opened doors as she's worked with companies to adopt a social media strategy, she said.

"I've been able to talk the talk and do that in front of company leaders and executives," she said. "In the world of social media, once you get to the decision makers, you have to provide it to them in words they understand, besides the social media talk. They don't necessarily care how to use it – they want to know what kind of investment they are going to get."

Miller-Merrell said job-hunters also are looking to prospective employers to tell them how they can use a variety of skills in a new position, as well as types of additional training they will receive.

"They want to be able to use their skills in a new job, but they're also asking companies what kind of professional tools they

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will provide them," she said. "They want to be able to take that with them. That's what the new Generation X and millenials want.

Oklahoma City, started his company after the dot-com bust left him without work. What he did – leveraging existing skills for a new way to earn a living – has become popular in today's down economy, he said. People have not only been finding success,

he said, but have filled a niche.

"Other businesses like to work with smaller, more individual companies because they're going to get better service," he said. "They're not just a number. They're the big fish in a little pond now."