

Kelly Blazek returns her 2013 Communicator of the Year Award after social media backlash

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Controversial Cleveland Job Bank creator Kelly Blazek has agreed to give back her 2013 Communicator of the Year Award, after a week of social media backlash to the brutal emails she sent some job seekers trying to connect with her for job leads.

The Cleveland Chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators confirmed earlier this week that it was reaching out to Blazek to talk about "how her actions have negatively reflected on IABC and IABC Cleveland."

Last week, after a job seeker named Diana Mekota shared the harsh rejection letter Blazek sent in response to Mekota's invitation to connect on LinkedIn, several people called for IABC to strip Blazek of its award and posted negative comments on its website about her.

The chapter's website has now replaced its story about Blazek winning the award with a statement saying:

"The IABC Cleveland Chapter board of directors and Kelly Blazek have mutually agreed that she will return the chapter's 2013 Communicator of the Year award. The decision was made in the best interest of IABC, its members, and its mission."

"Ms. Blazek, who is not an IABC member, agrees she will not use the Communicator of the Year designation in any way going forward, and apologizes to the members of the Cleveland chapter." It continues, "IABC remains committed to providing professional communicators with the very best in content, community and professional-development opportunities."

Blazek, who has pulled down her Twitter and LinkedIn accounts and erased her blog, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Blazek had a long-standing policy of not accepting invitations from those she does not personally know. But when Mekota and others went public with Blazek's emails denying their requests to connect, Cleveland's close-knit marketing communications committee expressed outrage and concern that Blazek's email would reflect badly on Cleveland and discourage Millennials from moving here.

They also shared the story via social media, prompting others to share similarly discouraging rejection letters from Blazek and attracting the attention of news sites including CNN, Adweek and the BBC.

IABC Cleveland named Blazek its Communicator of the Year for her hobby of compiling job openings in the marketing, public relations, digital communications, media, journalism, graphics, and nonprofit management positions throughout Northeast Ohio. She distributed her Cleveland Job Bank listserv to more than 7,300 subscribers.

"Blazek is not just a headhunter or a recruiter, but a senior communications executive who enjoys helping others in the profession," the IABC said in a statement announcing the award. It noted that "her listserv is one of the largest individually produced employment compilations in the country within the marketing and communications field."

"I've always been a passionate advocate for keeping talent in NE Ohio, and we have so much of it in the region," Blazek was quoted as telling attendees at the IABC recognition event. "I want my subscribers to feel like everyone is my little sister or brother, and I'm looking out for them."

But even though the sentiment on social media widely favored Mekota, others pointed out that the vicious reaction to Blazek overshadowed what she had done.

"I stand four square in support of Kelly Blazek," said Terry Novak, a local consultant in marketing and sales. "She has been selfless in her efforts to help people in the sales/marketing, PR, and media fields find leads for jobs in Northeast Ohio for a long time. She tells the truth and gets excoriated ... go figure.

"If anything, Kelly should get an award from the PR Association and the Sales and Marketing Association for assisting and giving a boost to job seekers," he added.

"I spent almost 30 years working in the media industry, some time with advertising agencies, but mostly in the magazine publishing industries. I also worked in the Human Resources field, both public and private, so I kind of know how important it is to have a source like Kelly Blazek when looking for a new position," Novak said. "Kelly may have taken a wrong step in her answer to one or two of her plaintiffs, but her overall assistance to many folks can't be denied."

Nevertheless, parody Twitter accounts sprouted up, including "Krabby Blazek" (@KrabbyB) and "The Other NEO Job Bank" (@OtherNEOJobBank), with the tagline: "Oh wait, there is one. And it's run by a couple of millennials."

Another Kelly Blazek in Wisconsin has added the following line under her LinkedIn profile: "Please note that I am not the same Kelly Blazek in the news who ran the Cleveland Job Bank."

We have never met. We have never worked together. You are quite young and green on how business connections work with senior professionals. Apparently you have heard that I produce a Job Bank, and decided it would be stunningly helpful for your career prospects if I shared my 960+ LinkedIn connections with you - a total stranger who has nothing to offer me.

Your invite to connect is inappropriate, beneficial only to you, and tacky," the email continued. "Wow, I cannot wait to let every 25-year-old jobseeker mine my top-tier marketing connections to help them land a job. Love the sense of entitlement in your generation. And therefore I enjoy denying your invite, and giving you the dreaded 'I Don't Know Diana Mekota' because it's the truth.

Oh, and about your request to actually receive my Job Bank along with the 7,300 other subscribers to my service? That's denied, too. I suggest you join the other Job Bank in town. Oh wait - there isn't one.

Don't ever write me again.

Kelly Blazek | Principal
Gemba Communications, LLC
2013 IABC Communicator of the Year