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Influencer Series: Filomena Fanelli

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Impact PR & Communications CEO and Founder **Filomena Fanelli** is a 16-year industry veteran with an affinity for helping tell her clients' stories – and every single one of them has one. Often called a publicity hound – a title she happily embraces – Fanelli serves as the firm's chief strategist, working with a diverse array of large and small businesses to deliver crucial media placements, develop individually tailored messages and produce consistent, thoughtfully-crafted content that adds up to just the right kind of exposure. Fanelli got her start at one of New York City's most prominent public relations firms, Rubenstein Associates, where her can-do attitude helped her quickly rise through the ranks to become a vice president, before freelancing and – most recently – taking the entrepreneurial plunge.

The Distracted Executive: As an entrepreneur, what is the greatest challenge in your business today, and what are you doing to address it?



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Filomena Fanelli: When I launched my own firm back in April, I created a list of goals I wanted to achieve in a year's time, thinking that some were definitely attainable and others would be a stretch. Luckily for me, it was manifest destiny. I managed, with the support of some very talented colleagues and incredible clients, to meet and exceed every single item on that list. The next challenge is to reach higher and set new benchmarks for success. I already have a date on the calendar to do so and will spend an entire day envisioning the year ahead and creating a next-level plan. Here's to continued growth!

TDE: What are the biggest distractions that you deal with every day? What is your go-to solution?

FF: Competing deadlines are a constant challenge. At any given moment, a reporter may reach out for a last-minute interview, a client may have a brilliant idea to run by me, or a press release may need to be sent out to the media. Add emails and a ringing phone or two to the mix and the distractions are many. My job is to quickly assess the priority level – not everything is “roof-on-fire urgent” – and to coordinate accordingly. My way of keeping it all in check is old-fashioned, but it absolutely works. I rely on a simple spiral notebook and a handwritten to-do list. I keep tabs on all tasks and write them out in order of priority. The key is to stay flexible and know when it's time to assign new numbers to each of the items on the list or to delegate. One event or phone call can change the entire plan! Since my job also involves feedback and materials from others, I keep a separate log with notes on owed items or answers I'm expecting back from others. This second list helps tremendously.

TDE: Give my readers one tip on how to keep it all together these days.

FF: I have a saying that sums up my philosophy: Work like there's no tomorrow. Since I, like all of you, don't what the next day holds – we could get ill, a child could have an emergency, a client could have a last-minute need or an unforeseen IT issue might derail the day (this last one happened to me recently) – making the most of the present keeps me one step ahead. I even optimize my off-hours or down time, reading newspapers before the day begins and checking easier items off my list before things get really busy. It helps me feel accomplished and as in control as possible.

TDE: How do you deal with interruptions/distractions all day long?

FF: Technology is a blessing, but it can also be an enormous distraction. I set aside specific times to manage social media accounts and to deal with routine emails and phone calls. One tip that has worked well for me is keeping my personal email in a separate account, that way I'm not tempted to view it until I'm good and ready to.

TDE: You manage people and work with some people who are all over the place. How do you deal with someone who is very distracted and not giving you what you need?

FF: I start by setting clear expectations – what I need, when I need it by, etc. – so that the proper parameters are in place. Then I leave the lines of communication open. I ask everyone I work with to let me know if they have questions; I truly don't mind if they do. I also request that they let me know if they run into an issue or a delay, understanding that things do happen sometimes. If all of that fails, I try to meet them where they are. Not everyone has the same work style, so I note who likes to work when and how. Some clients prefer to talk a project through by phone, others favor email or text. Some are most responsive first thing in the morning, while others are night owls. I keep that in mind when there are deadlines to be met.

TDE: Priorities. Everything seems important or urgent these days. How do you efficiently navigate your to-do list and calendar?

FF: Simply put, I have learned to say “no” when I need to. Being realistic about how much time is

needed for each meeting or project is essential. So is resisting the urge to fit one more thing in. It's important for me to keep my promises, whether it's to my clients, the media I work with or my family members. Being honest about my time makes me a better businessperson and a happier individual. It also shows respect for those around me.

You can contact Fanelli by email at filomena@prwithimpact.com or by phone at 845.462.4979. Visit [Impact PR & Communications](http://ImpactPR.com) online at prwithimpact.com.