



Behind Every Successful Business Owner Stands a Mentor

Unique mentoring program provides benefits to all

By Susan Baka

“A mentor is important for everyone because no one has the luxury of being brilliant at everything.” This wisdom was recently shared with women entrepreneurs who are part of a unique mentoring program called **Step Ahead**. A Toronto-based, one-on-one mentoring program, *Step Ahead* pairs women who want to expand their businesses to the next level with seasoned women entrepreneurs for a year-long mentoring relationship.

The program – supported by sponsors like Scotiabank, PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Export Development Canada – also includes 10 monthly workshops, featuring roundtable discussions, expert panels, networking and dynamic guest speakers. The themed sessions cover the pillars of growing a business, from marketing and human resources through to financial management, work-life balance and even ethics. While the program lasts one year, the benefits for mentors and protégées, both tangible and intangible, extend well beyond. “*Step Ahead* was an amazing journey and life-altering,” says **Maureen Brown**, of Diversity Trainers Plus and a protégée in the 2006 program. “I was a mass of ideas and thoughts before joining the program, and left with a clear business strategy and action plan.”

Since its inception in 1991, *Step Ahead* has provided over 500 women like Maureen the opportunity to learn from one another in an intimate and support environment, to establish valuable contacts for growing their businesses and to hear lessons learned from incredible Canadian entrepreneurs. Guest speakers have included fashion icons **Linda Lundstrom** and **Marilyn Brooks**, media mogul **Pamela Wallin**, Sleep Country Canada sensation **Christine Magee** and a number of Canada’s Top 100 women entrepreneurs.

Camaraderie Inspires

Uniquely focused on business development *for women by women*, *Step Ahead* offers a special camaraderie for sharing ups and downs. Regardless of the range of businesses run by participants, they all share similar challenges from financing to staffing. “*Step Ahead* allows less-experienced entrepreneurs to fast track learning, and it rewards mentors by allowing them to give back to the community and society at large,” says mentor **Linda Wilson**, President of Precision Management Catalysts Ltd. and Last Minute Decorator. “I drive 3-1/2 hours to get here...and it’s more than worth it.”

Donene Lashbrook, President of Lashbrook Marketing Communications in Toronto who has forged and maintained many personal and business relationships through the program over the years, echoes these sentiments: “*Step Ahead* keeps me connected with the energy of ‘go ahead’ entrepreneurs!”

Want to become a protégée and grow your business? To find out how to enroll for the **Step Ahead** program or to become a mentor, visit www.stepaheadonline.com, call 416.410.5802 or e-mail info@stepaheadonline.com

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