

stepping ahead

mentoring news & reviews for entrepreneurial women

Step Ahead Mentor Honoured

In 2006, *Step Ahead* paid tribute to **Jean Price** (jeanprice@rogers.com), a long-time mentor in the *Step Ahead* program, who moved after closing the manufacturing and retail branch of her 23-year business, Clews Clothing, and is now operating a subsidiary – “Clews for Self Discovery” – a consulting business assisting women to dress to their best advantage.

“I am so honoured to have been part of the *Step Ahead* organization,” says Jean. “It has been an enriching experience for me over the 10 plus years that I was a mentor. I often felt that I learned more from my protégées than they learned from me!! They were always questioning ‘why’ which made me delve deeper and analyze my business more than I probably would have. It was such a joy to watch all the protégées grow and become more confident in their businesses. I will always cherish my time spent with *Step Ahead*. I made many, many long time friends and contacts.”



Step Ahead board member Wendy Banting (left), and Jean Price.

THE VALUE OF A MENTOR: PROTÉGÉES SPEAK!

“Like a third eye, my mentor saw things I did not. She questioned me, pointed out alternatives, and pushed me to try things that turned out to be good for me.”

Lynn Shulman, Elixir Organics Spa (www.elixirspa.ca)

“*Step Ahead* was an amazing journey and life-altering. I was a mass of ideas and thoughts before joining the program and left with a clear business strategy and action plan.”

Maureen Brown, Diversity Trainers Plus (www.diversitytrainersplus.com)

“I always left the monthly meetings so inspired. The participants gave me so much advice and the protégées had so much to offer. This mentoring program elevates all of us.”

Lisa Scale (left), Bella Photography (www.bellaphotography.ca)

“I came to *Step Ahead* because I did not know how to do mass production, retail sales and marketing. I’ve met some fabulous women who are showing me the way. Everything has blossomed like crazy. *Step Ahead* opened so many doors.”

Kris Kischer, Habitat Haven (left) (www.thecatsden.net) – shown here at *Step Ahead* graduation with her mentor, **Marianne Bertrand**, Muttluks Inc. (www.muttluks.com).



“It’s been a wonderful opportunity and I’ve made some great connections. As an entrepreneur, you often feel alone. This program taught me that I’m not on my own planet and that I can reach out. *Step Ahead* has an energy that I haven’t found in other groups. Every participant has given me a little of themselves.”

Catherine Jordan, Language Advantage Inc. (www.language-advantage.com)

NEED A BRUSH-UP?

If you are part of *Step Ahead’s* alumni, you can register for a single workshop anytime to hone your skills and re-acquaint with other participants. Contact Jennifer at 416.410.5802 or info@stepaheadonline.com.

Step Ahead Reunion!

See page 4 for details

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step ahead

Women Business Owners Mentoring for Success

LOOKING FOR A MENTOR? JOIN US!

Potential protégées can apply for acceptance into the 12-month *Step Ahead* program at any time during the course of the year. The program includes a year-long one-on-one mentoring relationship with an assigned mentor and 10 educational workshops. Here are workshop details for the remainder of 2007:

- **June 6: Human Resource Strategies**
- **September 12: Creative Financial Management**
- **October 3: Strategies for Growth**
- **November 7: Ethics for Entrepreneurs**
- **December 5: Work-Life Balance**

Please contact Jennifer Frank at 416.410.5802 for details on becoming a protégée. If you are interested in volunteering your time to be a mentor, please contact Wendy Banting at 905.763.7428. For more on *Step Ahead*, visit www.stepaheadonline.com

Profiles

KHADIJA SUNDERJI

President/Owner

W/S Group Inc.

905.888.5260

info@clearviewpartitions.com

www.clearviewpartitions.com



Business Snapshot: W/S Group Inc. essentially serves the automotive aftermarket sector, providing two product lines: Clearview Partitions (designed to prevent shifting cargo from hitting and injuring vehicle drivers from sudden stops) and Workvan Storage Systems (a full range of shelving, roof rack, partition and other vehicle accessories). W/S Group Inc. has a North America-wide dealer distribution and installation network.

Background: Born and raised in Mombasa, Kenya, Khadija received her undergraduate degree in Business Administration at Brock University and her post-graduate degree in Software Systems Technology at the University of Sheffield. While in Canada, she met the inventor of the Clearview Partition and convinced her family to invest in it. Her uncle even came to Canada to run this business with his new partners. Returning to Canada in 1993, Khadija learned that the company was in trouble and took over the helm in 1996.

Why Entrepreneurship: Khadija credits her father and the community at large for inspiring her. “My family has been in business ever since I was born. From a very young age, I learned that the only way to have a good life and freedom was by running my own business. To me, entrepreneurship represents independence, and dare I say it, fun. You get to see the results of your efforts right away.”

“There’s nothing better than a protégée like Khadija who takes your ideas, runs with them and says wow, it’s great that there are women like those at Step Ahead who understand the challenges of running a business and who are so supportive!”

Donene Lashbrook (Khadija Sunderji’s Mentor), Lashbrook Marketing

Why Joined Step Ahead: “To learn how business was done in Canada because I felt that I still ran things like I was in Kenya.”

Biggest Benefits: “I now have access to a huge pool of resources in terms of breadth and depth of knowledge and experience. The mentors are very generous with their information.” Khadija is also learning more about marketing from her mentor, who has a great deal of knowledge in this area. “I have never really had a marketing plan and have generally run things by the seat of my pants. No more!”

Goals: “To formalize the procedures of the company so that nothing is left to interpretation and to double the sales volume by year end.”



LISA SCALE

Bella Photography

905.857.1967

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lisa@bellaphotography.ca

www.bellaphotography.ca

Business Snapshot: Named Central Ontario’s professional portrait photographer of the year in February 2006 and Canadian Forces photographer of the year in October 2006, Lisa bring 20 years experience to her work. She has a passion for and specializes in capturing people’s personality in portraits.

Why Joined Step Ahead: “To take control of my business direction and improve profitability.”

Biggest Benefits: “My sales have actually increased 44.6% and my profit margin 59%... and I did this all in less than a year. When I joined, I thought you couldn’t be successful as a mom and a business person and that you had to make a choice. My mentor is a role model – and she has shown me that you can indeed succeed as a business owner who has children. I have found this program so inspiring that I have recently found myself mentoring women new to photography, helping them create a lifestyle and not just a career.”

“I enjoy seeing my protégée benefit and move ahead. Lisa really worked hard at implementing the ideas we discussed.”

Judy Paradi (Lisa Scale’s Mentor), Paradi Marketing (www.paradimarketing.com)

Goals: “To build a new, dream studio on part of a 23-acre property I recently bought, to change my business model, to enhance the portrait experience for clients with a very relaxing, inspired environment and to spend more time with my family... all the while increasing my company profits. And I have set a goal to begin building a speaking career. I really have a passion for that and want to share.”

HOW TO PROJECT A PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

Photographic tips from Lisa:

- There is a lot of bad photography in business – as a small business, you need to portray yourself professionally because you *are* the product.
- A well-done business portrait:
 - reflects your professionalism
 - adds prestige to all business encounters
 - increases recognition
 - reflects your personality
- The ability to connect a face with a product or service helps the buyer feel more comfortable making a purchasing decision.
- When planning the image you want to project, think about who your target market is, what form of advertising the image will be used in, and what the image should say about you (eg. formal or casual?).



Meeting

Highlights

Our meetings continue to be an excellent forum to hear about business trends and to network with dynamic entrepreneurs and speakers. Here are some highlights from our speakers and panelists over the past year. For more tips, visit www.stepaheadonline.com.

2007

April 2007 – Projecting a Professional Image

Sally Potter, Partner, The Public Relations Post (www.prpost.ca), and Anita Wright, President, Wright Alternative (www.wrightalternative.com):

- Where to start when developing a PR program: define what image you want to project (eg. highly creative or conservative; determine key attributes that best describe your product/service); develop key messages; and define your main targets.
- In terms of your personal image, choose clothing that suits your body type and give people a focal point (eg. a belt with a great buckle).

March 2007 – Marketing Power Boost

Judy Paradi, Paradi Marketing (www.paradimarketing.com):

- Be a smart and strategic marketer: have a set marketing budget, create a brand and deploy it consistently in every touchpoint with your customer, communicate your value proposition clearly, pick marketing vehicles that will give you the best bang

for your buck, and track your results so you know what is working best.

February 2007 – Aligning Your Business to a Changing Marketplace

Sonja Perovic, President, Loopmedia inc. (www.loopmedia.com):

- Be determined, watch trends and be willing to shift, but first: do your research, look at different ways to change your business model, test before you leap when you make changes and then watch the growth pattern.



Anita Wright



Sonja Perovic



Donna Kutter and Norine Bevan

January 2007 – New Beginnings

Norine Bevan, President, Summerlee Group of Companies (www.summerlee.com):

- “It’s wonderful that you all have a mentor because if I’d had one when I started, I could have done in 10 years what it took me 20 to do.”

2006

December 2006 – Work-Life Balance

Elizabeth Verwey, Founder, HomeOffice Mentors (www.officementors.com):

- Keep a time log of your whole life for three days and assess where you can dovetail tasks and outsource what you don’t like to do.

November 2006 – Ethics for Entrepreneurs

Richard Powers, Assistant Dean and Executive Director, MBA Programs, Rotman School of Management (powers@rotman.utoronto.ca):

- Five questions to ask for ethical decision-making: Is it profitable? Legal? Fair? Right? Going to further sustainable development?



Richard Powers

October 2006 – Strategies for Growth

Jen Evans, President, Sequentia Communications (www.sequentia.net):

- When it comes to technology support, think about outsourcing. Companies like Hired Guns (www.hiredguns.ca) that provide everything from trouble shooting to network expansion advice can be very helpful for small businesses.

September 2006 – Creative Financial Management

Cathleen Colehour, President, Clarigo Consulting, and Chairman, Smart Business Boards (colehour@clarigo.ca):

- Create a relationship with your banker before you need help or are in a crisis – then the banker can work with you to get you through any rough periods.

May 2006 – Accessing Capital

Presenters Sharole McNiven, Manager of Small Business, Scotiabank (sharole.mcniven@scotiabank.com), and Jasmin Ganie-Hobbs, Account Manager, Business Development Bank (BDC) (jasmin.ganie-hobbs@bdc.ca):

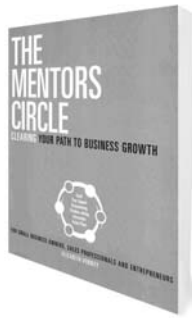
- Sources of financing include banks and financial institutions, personal resources, business partners or angel investors, and venture capital. In order to manage your borrowing, protect your credit rating, select the right borrowing solution, plan for emergencies, expansion or retirement, and improve cash flow.
- For start-ups, bankers typically want to see: 1) your business plan, including financial projections and assumptions; 2) you personally (including your personal net income; and 3) what *you* are investing in the business.



Jasmin Ganie-Hobbs and Sharole McNiven



Resources



The Mentors Circle – Your Path to Business Growth: Over the years, business speaker and consultant **Elizabeth Verwey** recognized how much her clients taught her while she guided them through exceptional business challenges. This informative guide explains how to run effective business support groups – or Mentors Circles – providing ways to solve problems, brainstorm, gain new perspectives and take the action steps necessary to grow any business. (*Small Business Mentors*, 2006) **Cost: \$29.99.**
To order, visit www.mentorscircle.com.



Step Ahead mentor **Debbie Gracie-Smith [L]** with **Elizabeth Verwey**

Quotable

Quotes

"I think Step Ahead is fabulous. We get all kinds of strength from our peers. Whether it's inspiration from our mentor or the many people we meet, it's an incredible organization that puts you in excellent company."

Nora Camps, DUO Strategy and Design Inc.
(www.duo.ca)

ATTEND OUR SUMMER REUNION!

Be sure to mark off the evening of August 15, 2007 for *Step Ahead's Summer Reunion*, to be held at Sunnybrook Estates in Toronto. All current program participants – as well as past mentors, proteges and sponsors – are welcome. It's a terrific opportunity to renew old acquaintances and to meet both our dynamic new participants and alumni. For details, watch www.stepaheadonline.com or contact Jennifer Frank at info@stepaheadonline.com or 416.410.5802. There will also be a Marketplace – contact Jennifer if you are interested in exhibiting.

Step Ahead gratefully acknowledges our 2007 sponsors
Scotiabank and PricewaterhouseCoopers

2006 MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

April 2006 – Projecting a Professional Image

Nora Camps, DUO Strategy and Design Inc. (www.duo.ca). "The most important person to know is you. Integrate who you are into your brand."
• Everything you *do and choose not to do* communicates the value and character of your brand, including phone conversations, e-mail messages, signature line, and all outbound materials.



Nora Camps



Elaine Frost

March 2006 – Marketing Power Boost

Elaine Frost, STRATEGIES by DESIGN (www.strategiesbydesign.ca):
• Select a market segment that will value your greatest capabilities and strengths by listing three problems they have that you could solve – look for ways to increase their profit, not just decrease their costs, and focus on their needs or problems, not your costs or price.

February 2006 – Aligning Your Business to a Changing Marketplace

Marg Hachey, Duocom Canada (www.duocom.ca):
• Use robust technology – not necessarily leading edge or expensive (e.g. Web conferencing – you can be seen and heard and it's very cost effective).

January 2006 – New Beginnings

Marianne Bertrand, Muttluks Inc. (www.muttluks.com). "Success is contagious. A little bit leads to more."
• When you think you're in a jam, remember there's nothing to lose – forget fear (which makes you look one way) and reverse your thinking instead. "If you are worried about making payroll, think about hiring new people, and that thinking will lead to a solution to your payroll problem."



Marianne Bertrand

For more tips and advice from our speakers, visit www.stepaheadonline.com.

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Women Business Owners Mentoring for Success

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