

Women Entrepreneurs: The Role Has Ready Models

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L'auteure nous dit qu'Elizabeth Arden, de Woodbridge, en Ontario, est là pour nous indiquer le rôle des femmes dans le monde des affaires. Elle suggère que la participation mérite de supporter l'isolement physique et psychologique. Il semble que les femmes dans les petites entreprises soient pour la simplicité en tout. Par contre, les hommes se créent souvent des ennuis car ils ne peuvent résister à l'envie d'offrir un déjeuner de luxe à un client ou à celle d'acheter une voiture de fonction plus spacieuse que nécessaire. D'autre part, même si les femmes d'affaires décident de s'offrir une aide ménagère, ce n'est que pour avoir le temps de suivre un cours du soir sur les affaires. L'auteure encourage les femmes à se joindre à "Canadian Association of Women Executives". Là, il n'est pas mal vu qu'une femme cherche à monter dans la hiérarchie et elle trouvera un soutien que même sa famille ne pourrait lui donner.

SINCE Florence Nightingale Graham marched out of Woodbridge, Ontario, in the early 1900s to found her international business empire as Miss Elizabeth Arden of New York, Canadian women cannot claim to be neophytes in the private-enterprise system. With Arden's genius for inspiration, perhaps more of us ought to be examining the possibilities for women entrepreneurs in today's marketplace.

To see women successfully expanding the horizons of their enterprise, we do not have to look to the Olympians, to the Ardens, Coco Chanel, Estée Lauder and Mary Quant of the world, nor only to the female orientation of the fashion industry. In the Toronto area alone, there are numerous small businesses owned and operated by women, many of whom are functioning in areas otherwise dominated by men.

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FIVE such enterprising women are:

- Carol Cruikshank, president, Cruikshank Services, a mailing house with graphics and printing services;
- Dierdre Gibson, partner, Gibson/Bahrynowski & Associates Limited, Housing and Planning Consultants;
- Carole Howlett, partner, Sterling Howlett Limited, Interior Design Consultants;
- Lily A. Knight, president, Knight Computer Cables Inc.;
- Gail Patterson, president, Gail Patterson Insurance Agencies Ltd.

All five would probably shy away from being cast as role models. Yet each is willing to admit the need for them and to share her very positive attitude to self-employment, growing out of a varied background of business experience.

The most experienced entrepreneur, Carol Cruikshank, worked as a secretary for twenty years before starting her mailing house in 1974. Carole Howlett, the design consultant, had left the profession at one stage; then, following a marital breakup, she put in two years of consulting on contract before forming her partnership with another woman professional. Also in partnership with a woman, Dierdre Gibson had planning experience in both corporate and government work which left her dissatisfied until she struck out on her own two years ago. Lily Knight devel-

oped her taste for independence in her first job running an office. Her dream of her own company came true only four years ago; but she is already contemplating the time when she can establish her second business. The newest entrepreneur, Gail Patterson, began her career in nursing, followed by six years in a major insurance corporation and then the creation of her own insurance agency last spring.

None of these businesses are cottage-industry operations. All have been active from seven years to as little as six months. All have their own staff and office premises. In Carol Cruikshank's case, that means four women and '2,300 square feet stacked to the ceiling,' she says. As Howlett sums up the business owner's attitude: 'It's not a commitment if you don't pay the rent. That's where the guts come into it.' Newcomer Patterson agrees.

LEAPING from her corporate niche and the recent achievement of the insurance industry's Million Dollar Roundtable into her own agency, Gail Patterson states that she 'still can't believe how much \$9.50 a square foot changed

me.' Patterson and the other women now scrutinize the price of envelopes and wince when the postal rates climb. They also have powerful new drives along with their new responsibilities as entrepreneurs. Patterson will be earning the commission on \$4-to-\$5 million in insurance policies that she expects to write in her first year in business for herself.

At the start, even with the earnings incentive, there is little glamour in their world. Interestingly enough, the women see the 'no-frills' approach as almost distinctively female. Many men in small operations, they say, tend to get into trouble because they cannot resist the temptations of lavish lunches for clients or a bigger company car than earnings justify. But if women can, in fact, adapt more easily to the low-profile situation of the small-business owner, what about the isolation and the risks involved?

These women deny that heroism is part of their self-image. Carol Cruikshank insists that she 'does not understand why everyone thinks we're so brave. If I went belly-up in two years time, I could always go out and get a job.' Not that she, or any of them, would want to do so; nor do they seem to contemplate failure as a serious possibility. Strictures on their personal expenditures and lifestyle and the precarious nature of small business seem regarded by all as a natural part of being independent and starting out.

FOR THIS among many reasons, one cannot help seeing these women as extraordinary individuals, as well as rugged individualists. The soft-spoken and modest Lily Knight raised four children while helping to run her husband's eight-year-old company and simultaneously started her own firm four years ago. 'I've always worked with whatever comes along,' Knight says simply. Now, with her own company, at least that means she has finally hired a housekeeper. However, it turns out that help at home merely frees her to take managerial, public-relations, marketing and public-speaking courses at night school, 'all those things I think will be an asset to grow on,' she says.

When I managed to pry the record of her accomplishments out of Knight, including the harmony of her 23-year marriage (she still meets her business-associate husband regularly for lunch), the other women in our meeting expressed the awe and admiration that I certainly felt. Lily Knight may well be something of an exception, even among her peers. However, she and two of the others, Gibson and Patterson, are quick to acknowledge that they have also had the benefit of strong marital support for their personal goals.

Although their work does not overlap the way the Knights' companies do, Gibson's husband, a self-employed architect, is in a field related to her housing and planning consultancy. Patterson's spouse is actively involved in her new insurance agency. A schoolteacher, he has taken leave of absence to help get her operation running so efficiently that she will have time to have the children they both want.

Howlett and Cruikshank, each divorced some years prior to forming her own company, seem to epitomize the physical and psychological isolation of the entrepreneur, an isolation which must intimidate many women — and many men. Yet there is vigorous agreement among all five women that the strains are so considerable that even a supportive family cannot be expected to relieve them. The self-employed must look for outlets and

reinforcement elsewhere; in this the women entrepreneur is at some disadvantage.

AS OPPORTUNITIES for therapeutic discussion and problem-solving sessions, professional development meetings have to be ruled out for anyone, male or female, since business competitors are bound to be present. However, normal business contacts and association memberships prove to be little better as far as women are concerned. As Carol Cruikshank says of her experience with associations tied to her business: 'I had to be very low-key — which isn't me at all. You almost end up with a split personality.' Operating in what is still very much a man's world, these businesswomen discovered that they could find the common ground for relaxation and professional reinforcement at their level only among women like themselves.

The Canadian Association of Women Executives (CAWE) is the organization which meets their needs by providing a peer group. For Cruikshank, 'It's a really good support system,' and, as a founding member, she wishes that the Association had been in existence when she started out in business.

Established in 1976, CAWE now has some 300 members in the Toronto area, drawn from corporate and government spheres, as well as from independent businesses. The Association is geared to offering mutual support, professional-development opportunities and a promotional network only to

women in management. By being so selective, its long-term strategy is to provide a pool of talent and contacts for the most senior levels of business and government.

CAWE offers women managers the opportunity to test and develop their skills in a 'low-risk' way, both internally on the Association's many committees and externally as spokeswomen representing the Association to other business organizations and to the media. Indicative of its rapidly increasing stature in the business community was an invitation from American Express for CAWE to co-sponsor a conference last fall. At the Association's dinner meetings, moreover, the Program Committee has already provided an impressive list of guest speakers this year, ranging from the Federal Minister of Employment and Immigration Lloyd Axworthy to the Vice-President and Co-ordinator of Natural Resources at Imperial Oil Limited.

Dierdre Gibson, the housing and planning consultant, says that the 'key' to benefitting from CAWE is to become a committee member as she has done on the Resources Committee. Except for Carol Cruikshank, who worked on the Program Committee in her first year as a CAWE member, all of the women entrepreneurs currently find it worthwhile to devote a great deal of time to Association committees. Carole Howlett and Lily Knight are also member of CAWE's Board of Directors.

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**At the Canadian
Association of
Women Executives
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For Howlett, putting in between ten and twenty hours a month on CAWE work, the Association is worth such effort because of the resources and reinforcement it yields in return. Among these, she includes professional assistance from CAWE members working for corporations (their advice has been vital to the success of her own business). She also emphasizes the importance of the CAWE dinner meetings — the flurry of business cards exchanged there and the follow-up phone calls giving her leads for business development. These contacts with what Howlett

calls 'very interesting and, I feel, outstanding people' have taught her an invaluable lesson as well. She has learned not to be shy about her achievements, because, in the environment of the Association, 'It is not bad manners to promote yourself.'

Chairman of the Business Owners Committee for CAWE while serving on the Board this year, Lily Knight sees her committee as dedicating itself to the encouragement and education of would-be entrepreneurs and of women already in business for themselves. Knight sums up an attitude to her involve-

ment with the Association in terms that all its members would support: 'People who join an association like this have to be go-getters. . . I like the stimulation and input. . . the companionship. After all, we are all out there doing the same thing in the world — trying to get along and do our best.'

Courtesy CAWE Newsletter, Winter 1981. Canadian Association of Women Executives, One First Canadian Place, Suite 4800, P.O. Box 192, Toronto, Ontario M5X 1A6, Tel: (416) 366-2520.

Statistics on Quebec women **Des statistiques sur les Québécoises**

On January 26, 1982, the Quebec Status of Women Committee published its first booklet regarding the living conditions of Quebec women. This book entitled *Numbers in hand*, by Suzanne Messier, contains information about work, education, demography, single-parent families, fertility and cultural communities.

Numbers in hand is easy to consult and understand. One-hundred-and-fifty charts provide data on Quebec women under headings such as age, sex, region, schooling, marital status and whether there are children. More than 100 pages of text describe various traits of women living in Quebec.

Numbers in hand compares the situation of men and women, thereby helping us better understand the position of women.

The simplified presentation of data makes the book an indispensable tool in understanding the life of Quebec women.

This book is available through Quebec Government bookstores at a cost of \$10.

Québec, le 26 janvier 1982. Une première au Québec: le Conseil du statut de femme vient de publier un recueil de statistiques sur les conditions de vie des Québécoises. Cet ouvrage intitulé *Chiffres en main* et préparé par Suzanne Messier se veut un répertoire des informations les plus récentes et les plus complètes sur des thèmes aussi variés que le travail, l'éducation, la démographie, les familles monoparentales, la fécondité et les communautés culturelles.

Chiffres en main est simple à comprendre et facile à consulter. Près de 150 tableaux rendent accessibles des données sur les Québécoises, présentées principalement selon l'âge, le sexe, la région, la scolarité, l'état civil et la présence d'enfants. Plus de 100 pages de texte font également ressortir les traits les plus caractéristiques de la vie des femmes d'ici.

En privilégiant les thèmes les plus populaires, en comparant la situation des femmes à celle des hommes et en fournissant des commentaires sur la réalité des femmes, *Chiffres en main* répond enfin aux besoins des personnes intéressées à la condition féminine et à la statistique.

En regroupant dans un document unique des données jusqu'ici éparpillées et en simplifiant la présentation de ces données, le Conseil du statut de la femme propose *Chiffres en main* comme un outil de référence indispensable à la connaissance de la réalité des Québécoises. Le Conseil souhaite de plus 'qu'à long terme, la publication de cet ouvrage permette aux utilisatrices et utilisateurs d'obtenir facilement de la part des producteurs de statistiques, la mise à jour de ces données.'

Chiffres en main est en vente au prix de dix dollars (10\$) dans les librairies du gouvernement du Québec à Hull, Montréal, Québec, Trois-Rivières.