

Mentorship boosts business success by 70%

BY ISABEL MOSSELER
TRIBUNE

Business success is not always easy, but having a good ear to confide in and sound advice to count on can certainly help pave the way to profit. That's what a new program just launched in West Nipissing is aiming to do: pairing experienced business leaders with newer entrepreneurs to give local businesses an edge through mentorship.

The RéseauM program is based on a massively successful model out of Quebec, which has shown remarkable results in that province and internationally, increasing business success rates to 70% over non-participants.

Those results convinced the RDEE (Economic Development and Employment Network of Ontario) to bring the program to Ontario, and on Wednesday, August 26th, RDEE's Renée Beauparlant held a workshop in West Nipissing to introduce the concept. Réseaus M Chief Mentor and Trainer Michel Auger, from Laval, Quebec engaged a rapt local audience in explaining the program, how it works, and why it works.

"Réseaus M is a real big community network. There are over 1600 mentors in Quebec, and 2300 mentees. Now we have a snowball effect. . . now everyone is on board. We provide support to mentors, from training to liability insurance. . . We help the entrepreneur with the soft skills," Auger said.

The program can be helpful at any stage of an entrepreneur's business life; Auger provided an example of an entrepreneur leaving his business. "For example, an entrepreneur who is maybe 72 and is selling his business. Maybe he's too emotional. He started the company 50 years ago and believes the company is worth \$5 million. But maybe it's worth a million. And sometimes they want to sell, and they do sell, but they don't want to get out. So we help them. Especially when it's a father and son, or a mother and daughter - it's very hard to [transition] when there's a family tie."

In Auger's locale in Montreal, an entrepreneur has to be in business for at least one year to enter the program. In West Nipissing, that qualification has been reduced to 6 months. A mentor has to have a background in entrepreneurial activity or management. Having experienced bankruptcy or business failure is not a disqualifier. "In fact, having faced these issues can be of great benefit to the mentee," Auger pointed out.

While the focus of the program is supporting mentees, Réseaus M also offers a lot to mentors. There are 96 cells in Québec, each with a group of mentors who meet regularly, who undergo their own training, who meet every two months to discuss issues. Every year there is a national event, a 2-day session of speakers and training workshops, a recognition awards ceremony, and 500 mentors who continually work to improve the mentor / mentee ecosystem, as Auger calls it.



Local business leaders came out to learn about the new Réseaus M entrepreneurial mentorship program available in West Nipissing, during an info session held August 26. Shown are (L-R) Jolene Lisk of the WN Chamber of Commerce; Anne Brulé of Innovation Initiatives Ontario North (IION); Lynn Legault-Beauchamp, owner of Seniors' Helping Hand Services; Penny Tremblay of Tremblay Leadership Center; Steve Raymond, owner of Optimum Home Comfort; Renée Beauparlant of RDEE Ontario; Normand St. Amour of Caisse Populaire North Bay; Michel Auger, Chief Mentor and Trainer for Réseaus M in Laval, Québec; Mathieu Shank of Caisse Populaire North Bay; and Rob Deline of IION. Not shown: Denise Deschamps of FedNor.

It's for these reasons, as well as the deep satisfaction of assisting someone in stretching their entrepreneurial capacity, that mentors keep coming back, taking on new mentees, and helping to recruit other mentors. "It's incredibly rewarding for the mentor," said Auger.

He stressed that mentors are more of a sounding board than a coach, and mentees are always free to run their business as they see fit. "You're not providing direction to the mentee, you're helping them to make their own decisions. You want to help the mentee to see that he has done all the steps, ask questions, and this is the difference between being a coach and a mentor. It's not about giving tips, it's about questioning, encouraging and motivating."

In other programs, which are less effective, the mentee sometimes looks at their mentor as "a watchdog", and the relationship becomes less productive, he noted. Réseaus M takes a totally different approach. The mentee is matched with someone they can talk to, in full confidence, without being told what to do. "Sometimes the mentee is going through a hard time, and needs someone to talk to. Maybe he can't take those problems to his wife. Maybe his wife is his bookkeeper . . . we prefer a situation where the mentee takes their time and asks for a mentor. It takes time to build that relationship, about 6 months, to build that confidence. . . . We want the mentee to register on a volunteer basis."

Wednesday's session attracted several area organizations involved in entrepreneurial activities, such as the WN Chamber of Commerce, Innovation Initiatives Ontario North (IION), the Caisses populaires, FedNor and a few local businesses as well. Auger held a brainstorming with the participants, two of which were there as potential mentees, and asked what the obstacles may be to recruit mentors and mentees in West Nipissing and North Bay.

"There's the issue of awareness and understanding - how do we all understand mentoring the same way?" Beauparlant asked.

Auger acknowledged that historically, mentoring was not seen in a good light, with mentees seen as lacking capability. Now, however, it is "trendy". "Now we even have mentoring programs on TV!" Consequently, interest level is high, and when the statistical evidence is presented, and the program explained, participation in the program becomes increasingly desirable.

While the Réseaus M program is offered only in French in Quebec, RDEE acquired the exclusive rights for Ontario in 2013 and adapted the tools for this province, making it a bilingual offering. More information can be found at www.rdee-ont.ca


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Dan Allard



Memory drifts to scenes long past,
Time rolls on, but memories last;
Sunshine passes, shadows fall,
Love's remembrance outlasts all.

You've been gone for ten years,
and you are never forgotten.

Love, Carol
January 14, 1950
- September 12, 2005



Mark Fortin

Passed away at St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, Ontario on August 26th, 2015 at the age of 47. He was the son of Aldine and Richard, brother of Lynn (Aubrey) of Huntsville, uncle to Renée (Kevin), Lauri (Paul) and Jason. He is also remembered by his great nieces and great nephews. The funeral will take place September 19, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. at St. Andrew's United Church, Sturgeon Falls.



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