

Recognize This!

By Stephanie MacKendrick

While passing a pleasant and semi-tropical Christmas holiday this year in Toronto, my mind occasionally drifted to thoughts of work, despite my best efforts to remain relentlessly cocooned and unoccupied. Amid torn bits of wrapping paper, empty bottles and other detritus of happy holidays, a menace loomed on the horizon: February. That nasty, brutish and short month when you're fed up with winter, but spring is still too far away to be of much comfort. Dark stormy days, grimy melting snow banks, and slush.

However, despite such seasonal woes, it's a remarkably gloom-free time at CWC. We're busier than an RRSP sales rep on February 28, working on the many projects that culminate for us in the highlight of our year - the CWC Annual Awards Gala (February 23 in Ottawa).

Not only is it a kick to be able to give the winners a brief moment in the spotlight, but it's also incredibly rewarding to have a chance to read all the nominations and find out who are the unsung mentors and trailblazers in our industry. As we read the letters of support from colleagues and bosses, we know that someone has given thought to the nominees' achievements and has asked others to think about and quantify them, providing recognition before any judging ever takes place.

And this is not just wishful thinking on our part, imagining the impact of the awards process. We hear about it year after year.

One woman told me that her boss called her in shortly after she asked for a letter of reference for an application to one of our programs and then handed her a plum assignment. He said that he hadn't realized that she was interested in the area being covered by the program and now that he did, was already giving her more interesting and higher profile assignments.

Another example. A CWC board member emailed me recently, saying how surprised, moved and gratified she was by letters of support that were offered on her behalf as she applied for a program. When I read the email, I just smiled and felt the familiar warm glow. It confirmed my suspicions that no matter how much you understand the process intellectually, it's not until you actually experience it – as a nominator, nominee or even supporter – that you realize its power. The person in question shouldn't have been surprised about the letters. She is quite a remarkable woman whose strengths and abilities are patently obvious to anyone who has known her for more than five minutes. But, the nominee is always the last to know and she was truly taken aback at the esteem in which she was held.

It also reinforces the old adage to “never assume, because it makes an ass out of you and me.” A tedious, but valuable, little expression. We assume that people know what other think of them and how much others value their work. We assume, especially with people in senior positions, that they've already made it and so it doesn't matter any more whether they are recognized. And that's the biggest canard of all because let's face it; it doesn't matter where you are on the food chain, from plankton to polar bear, everyone needs recognition. It's what keeps us motivated, it's what inspires us and reminds us of the potential in each of us to be extraordinary.

Yet when we're busy, recognition can be one of the first things to go. Who has time to cheerlead, to pay attention to what others accomplish, to send a note or make a phone call? (And that's not finger pointing, really, because it ain't easy out there when everyone is under the gun).

That's why we were doubly astonished and delighted to receive a record number of nominations for the CWC Annual Awards this year. So now an unabashed plug: Come to our gala, especially

this year in the presence of new government leaders, as we showcase of the achievements of women in the industry, and the companies and individuals who support them. But even if you can't be there, take a moment to acknowledge and support the award winners as they've supported others. Maybe even make it one of your new year's resolutions to recognize those around you.... and to begin thinking about who'd you'd like to see nominated for next year's annual awards.