

## **Succeeding in a Complicated World**

by Stephanie MacKendrick

We have lots of choices today. We've come a long way from the days when if your father was the goldsmith, you became a goldsmith. If you were a girl, you knew that you should aspire to marriage and motherhood. Whether you liked your prescribed fate or not, the path was pretty clearly mapped out. Predictability and certainty were the upsides, boredom and mismatched vocations were the downside.

Personally, I'm quite glad that the direction of my life was not predetermined, as it would have been a few short generations ago, to be part of a generation whose women have had more choice than any generation preceding it.

But with choice comes increased uncertainty and responsibility. As you strive to master your own destiny, you must also take greater responsibility for the choices you make. We've moved as a society of narrow role definitions requiring little choice to "anything goes". This can be daunting. Try buying a simple writing pen - ballpoint, fountain pen, gel roller, ink roller, padded grip, regular grip, fine point, medium point, chisel point, 24 different colours of ink, cheap ones, expensive ones. It's the same with life – stay in the hometown or move to Australia, become an accountant or a shiatsu therapist, get married, stay single, become a parent, travel or put down roots – the choices are endless and almost paralyzing.

It's the same in trying to map out a career. If we're lucky, we make choices because we want to, but often, it's because we have to. Downsizing, weak sectors, obsolete functions can all trigger the need to create new career maps. Sometimes it's not a question of changing an established path, but of finding a direction to commit to at the outset of the journey.

There is no shortage of questions that we should, and do, ask ourselves. Should I continue to work independently, or am I more suited to the corporate world? Do I have the experience and business skills to strike out on my own? How can I find work that I feel passionate about? What are my most marketable skills? Why am I not advancing at the pace I think I should be?

Sorting through the answers can be difficult. Few of us have an accurate picture of how others see us. Few of us can read our own resumes and assess how well it reflects the combination of skills, personal attributes and experience that we offer potential employers. Even fewer of us can figure out how to make our own organizations more aware of our potential and achievements once we've been tucked cosily into a particular role or area of the corporation.

We are hearing from our CWC members about the challenges they face in trying to develop career strategies in this environment of constant change, of endless possibilities, but few certainties. It's hard to evaluate whether your dream is a high risk strategy or not, let alone figure out what you might do to get there. And anyway, as quickly as you figure it out, things will change.

We have responded by creating a number of new programs. In addition to our mentorship program, we recently launched Career Energizer, an on-line, do-it-yourself

career planning workshop that helps members to define their strengths and weaknesses and to develop goals and next steps independently. With CBC/SRC, we created the Transformer program, offering a personalized program on managing change and transitions for two members a year.

We have just created "One-To-One", a program to address, directly and individually, questions of advancement and transition with career coach Rodger Harding of Harding International Associates. Each participant will complete a career self-evaluation, receive a two-hour private career coaching session (audio taped for future reference) and a follow-up with the career coach. The program offers a limited number of scholarships each month under the joint auspices of the Alliance Atlantis Professional Development Fund, the CTV Participation Fund and the Global Mentoring program. Application forms will be available to CWC members in May.

At time of writing, the pilot program was underway. If we find, as I believe we will, that it is successful in meeting member needs, we'll renew the program on a yearly basis. But I wonder - how could it not succeed? After all, women have long known that if you're not sure where you are, you'll get ahead faster by asking for directions.