



LOEWEN & PARTNERS

Innovation, Integrity, Results

Sourcing Capital for Growing Companies

WOMEN'S POST

The Ivey Business Plan Competition – no longer a man's world

Published: May 18th 2007
by Jacoline Loewen

Every year, the Ivey Business School runs a start-up business competition where MBA students from across the country are invited to pitch their ideas in front of real Bay Street investors. This is a serious opportunity because the winner takes home \$35,000 in seed capital to take an idea from the pages of a business plan to the real world. The students go through the experience of being hammered by venture capitalists and, hopefully, once they have licked their wounds, they will learn from the feedback.

This year, I participated as a judge in Ivey's annual MBA business plan competition. Late in the evening, relaxing in my hotel room, flipping through business plans, I watched a program with talking heads discussing the business world and was vaguely irritated by a woman who said, "It's a man's world, still, and men need to help women get ahead." While I agree that it is good to understand women and how they fit into the business world, I don't think men exclude or keep the business goodies all to themselves. The number of female names on the business plans from MBA students across Canada scattered around me, shouted that women's confidence levels are changing at break-neck speed. Yet, did these female students need an extra hand-up, or a special category for female-run companies, as this TV interview suggested? More so, would the male venture capitalists shun the plans presented by women?

When I was in MBA school (decades ago – yikes!) I liked to be one of the guys and if a guest lecturer commented in surprise, "I see there are women here in the MBA program," I would sting with embarrassment. Call me old fashioned but I still prefer to think of myself and the other judges as one group – not male or female.

The next morning, humming James Brown's catchy tune, It's a Man's World, I headed over to the Juniper Hall (no dead, white, male names used by Ivey) to join the other judges and sit through a long morning of start-up business venture presentations.

Investing is about placing money with the sapling of a business that is most likely to grow into a huge, strapping oak of a global enterprise. With venture capital, there is no room for bias or favoritism. It comes down to the black crucible of business – it's about who has the best plan to make the most money over the next five to seven years. Finito.

My group of venture capitalists ranked two teams at the top; both had male and female presenters. Coincidence? I think not. Yin and Yang does seem to work better in business.

Later at lunch, I caught up to a couple of the women contestants who were judged by my group of fund managers, and I posed the question about what it is like being female in business and doing the MBA.

Faye Xuan, from Simon Fraser University, looked struck: "I'm part of my team, I don't really think about the fact that I'm female. I prefer to focus on my team and how we have something unique and special that will keep us going".

Reagan Davidson, from the Dalhousie team that ended up winning the competition and \$35,000, said, "I've noticed that males and females seem to have complementary traits which, when used cooperatively together can maximize the strengths of both." These women are my kind of gals!

Heading home, I had a swing in my step. The strident tones of that woman on TV with her underlying subtext that men were holding women back, had been drowned out by the positive spirit of these young women coming into the business world. They are not denying the fact that they are women (unlike me, years ago). Instead, they recognize clearly the value of their own very female traits in the business world.

Jacoline Loewen is the author of [The Power of Strategy and e-Volution](#). She is with [Loewen & Partners](#), which finds capital for companies that want to grow. www.loewenpartners.com