

NEW

December 17, 2009

Directions

Conference for Administrative Professionals

empowers participants



During a dynamic and engaging day, participants at the second Annual Administrative Professionals Conference, held simultaneously in Toronto and Kingston, attended a number of informative workshops. The Toronto sessions included keys to successful networking, how to be a more confident and effective presenter, and learning how to improve time management skills. See page 3 for highlights of the Kingston sessions.



"This day was about believing in yourself and dreaming big because you never know where you will land," said Patricia Furtado, an administrative assistant in Corporate and Direct Services (CDS). Furtado made her exuberant comments after attending the second Annual MOHLTC Conference for Administrative Professionals held on Oct. 28. For the first time, the conference was held simultaneously in Toronto and Kingston, as well some conference sessions were also made available online to staff at their computer desktop anywhere in the province.

Furtado, who was a Toronto participant, said the conference left her feeling motivated and inspired. "The day was so enriching," said Furtado, who works for the Appropriation and Expenditure Management Unit.

Earlier in the day, Dawn Ogram, Assistant Deputy Minister, CDS, kicked off the conference by telling participants it was an extraordinary day for administrative staff from across the ministry to network, learn and acknowledge their unique and essential roles in the organization. Ogram noted that the administrative model, which has been in place for nearly a year, provides administrative professionals with wider exposure to the ministry's operations, expanding their skill sets and opportunities.

"Future learning and development opportunities for administrative professionals will continue to help build the competencies you require in the cross-functional stewardship organization of the ministry," said Ogram, whose address was seen by participants in Kingston, via videoconferencing.

The conference's keynote speaker, Linda Lane, told participants that her current role co-ordinating the Women of Influence and Inspiration Seminars — which bring together role models to share their experiences with women in the OPS — came about because she took a risk. In 2001, as an administrative assistant in the Ministry of Government Services (MGS), she volunteered to organize the initial seminar, which evolved into a permanent fixture and a dream

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Presenter Julie Biddle, below right, got attendees to participate in exercises on writing more effective e-mail messages and managing overflowing inboxes during her Taming the E-mail Monster workshop. While, facilitator Kathryn MacKenzie, left, led an interactive session on how to make presentations come alive. She shared tips on how to plan an effective presentation and lessen the terror of public speaking.



Below: Throughout the day there were opportunities for participants to mingle and learn at Knowledge Cafés set up at both the Toronto and Kingston locations. Display booths provided information on a range of subjects including learning and development opportunities, public speaking, workplace health and safety, and wellness.



TORONTO

Administrative Professionals Conference

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job for her. “Putting your goals and ideas into action can come in tiny steps. But the most important part of the formula is to believe in yourself,” said Lane, who is currently a project officer for the OPS Ideas and Innovation Unit of the Transformation, Innovation and Excellence Branch, MGS.

This year’s administrative conference was entitled: “Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver — Stepping Forward”. Lyn Lynch, transition learning consultant, CDS, who organized the conference, said the aim of the day was to inform and empower participants, as well as to provide useful resources to take back to the office. “There are sessions to support personal development and teach skills such as time management, networking and goal setting,” Lynch noted.

The Toronto workshop sessions included titles such as: Make Your Next Presentation Come Alive, The Art of Networking, and The Career Challenge: Bold Moves to Propel Your Career Forward. About 120 participants attended the Toronto conference, while about 30 administrative staff in Kingston participated in workshops such as Building Bridges — Collaboration @ Work.

A number of ministry staff also attended two of the workshop sessions virtually through the use of the Exchange — a ministry web portal offering tools which help staff connect and share a wide range of documents, data and research online. Using the Application for Live Interactions (ALI) tool, individuals accessed and participated in workshops from their desktop.

Sharon Crawford, a scheduler/administrative assistant for the Supply Chain and Facilities Branch, CDS, participated in the Taming the E-mail Monster workshop from her office. “There was no problem getting into the session,” Crawford said. “The material the facilitator sent to me after the session was very useful and I have forwarded it on to my colleagues.”

Ann Cotman, a scheduler/administrative assistant for the LHIN Support Team based in Kingston, said she particularly enjoyed the Taking Advantage of Your Learning Style workshop, which she attended. “I didn’t know about the different learning styles. The session made me recognize qualities that are my strengths and I learned about other qualities that I might want to work towards,”

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Clockwise, from top: Knowledge Café exhibitors await the arrival of conference participants seeking out information from a variety of local resources. Staffers Brian Evoy, Faye Thompson (left) and Julie Ryan, three of the local conference organizers, check in on the day's progress. Workshop leader Kathleen McDonald makes a point during the Take Advantage of Your Learning Style workshop. Participants learned to recognize the strengths and challenges of a variety of learning styles in the workplace.

KINGSTON

Administrative Professionals Conference

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Cotman said. "It is really nice to have this day. It shows the ministry appreciates us and what we do."

A Knowledge Café was set up at both the Toronto and Kingston locations, offering a forum for participants to network and access information on a range of interesting subjects. The display booths included information on the Centre for Employee Health, Safety and Wellness, learning and development opportunities in the OPS, and Toastmasters — an organization focused on enhancing public speaking skills.

"The Knowledge Café was an excellent opportunity to meet colleagues who work in other branches and to learn from each other," said Julie Ryan with Registration and Claims Branch, CDS, based in Kingston. Ryan was also a member of the committee which helped organize Kingston's Knowledge Café.

Unice Burke and Nina Cas, both from Legal Services Branch (LSB) in Toronto, said they learned a lot from the workshop on improving one's presentation style. "The techniques to involve your audience will be useful in getting everyone's attention and getting your point across in a presentation or a meeting," said Burke, a clerk in LSB.

"I thought an important message of the workshop was to not give up," said Cas, a legal secretary. "Even if a presentation doesn't go well the first time, the next time will likely be better. It's about taking a risk and learning from it. What's great about this conference is that it gets us out of our own little box and meeting other people and listening to new ideas." ■



Richard Wiskin, above, facilitated a unique session in Kingston called 5 Bold Moves to Transform Your Career. He inspired participants on how to achieve their dream job.

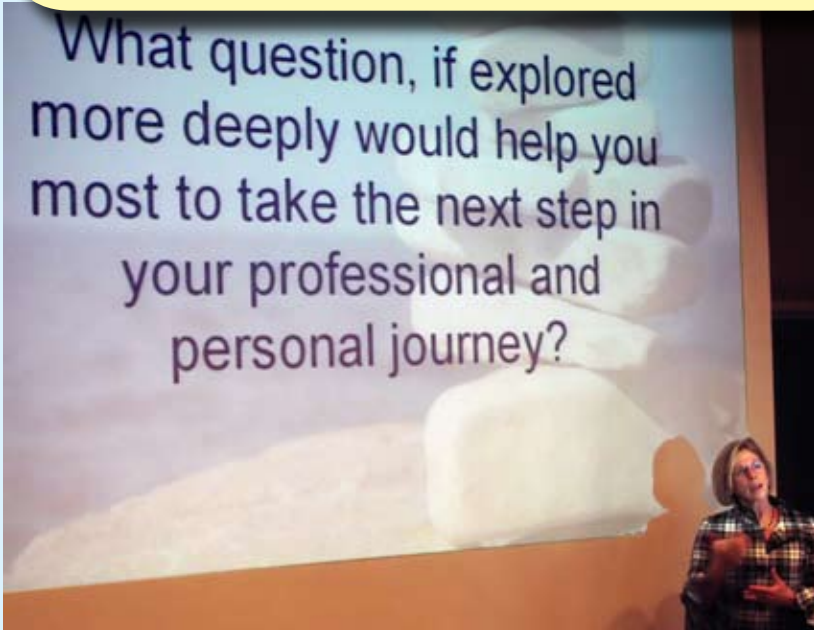
>> Words of wisdom <<

A number of dynamic speakers offered participants attending the second Annual Conference for Administrative Professionals, a wide range of advice on personal development, networking and career building. Here is a sampling of the nuggets of wisdom shared by presenters.

"When someone asks you what you do, always put your benefit out there first. Say: 'I'm the first point of contact for my branch.' Administrative assistant is a title. It's not what you do,"
Linda Lane, keynote speaker and presenter of the Art of Networking workshop.

"The most important part of an e-mail message is the subject line. Always be informative and to the point,"
Julie Biddle, presenter of Taming the E-mail Monster.

"If you want to emphasize something in a staff meeting, your message must be clear,"
Kathryn MacKenzie, presenter of the Make Your Next Presentation Come Alive session.



The day wrapped up with an informative keynote speech from Lauri Prest, director of Training and Organizational Development with Providence Care. She explained to the audience how your individual behavior contributes to and influences those around you. Prest took attendees through an exercise that guided them into developing a reflective action plan for behavioral change and goal setting.

Administrative model celebrates one year of building skills and opportunities

The ministry's administrative model launched nearly one year ago has opened up many new opportunities for staff members like Laura Conrad. In early September, Conrad stepped into a position as a scheduler/administrative assistant to executive lead Ruth Hawkins in the Direct and Corporate Services' Office, Corporate and Direct Services (CDS).

Conrad said she was equipped to take on her new position because of the learning and development opportunities that have become open to her in the last year, while she was working in Health System Strategy (HSS). "I was able to work in different areas of the division and was given the opportunity to work on external consultations and with different stakeholders," Conrad said. "I temporarily filled in as a scheduler and worked for a director."

With the support of her manager, administration, Conrad attended courses at the OPS Centre for Leadership and Learning, which focused on an introduction to government accounting, as well as governance and accountability issues. She also completed a conflict management course and had an opportunity to job shadow an administrative co-ordinator. "All these opportunities and experiences, helped prepare me to take on my new role," Conrad said.

Josie Addesi, executive assistant to Dawn Ogram, Assistant Deputy Minister, CDS, said Conrad's move is one of the early examples of cross-divisional sharing of administrative staff where CDS and HSS were participants. "We're very excited," Addesi said, "we are

hoping to work cross-divisionally more as time goes on."

A significant change has also been how the executive assistants and the managers of administration have been working together to support administrative staff. "Whether it's through job shadowing, developing interviewing skills, or career planning, we are sharing and becoming mentors to each other. That's where the real magic happens,"

said Addesi.

Susanne Lyle, transition change management lead, CDS, said that providing learning and development targeted to every level of administrative professionals has been key to embedding the new model within the ministry. "We asked them what training they would need to be successful in their new roles," Lyle said. The new managers of administration attended a number of learning sessions organized specifically for them, in areas such as recruitment and labour relations.

While, the ADM executive assistant group, who now have the managers of administration reporting to them, received coaching related to their new responsibilities — in particular the management of staff and the divisional administrative function.

Brian Evoy is a manager, administration, who oversees about 15 administrative staff members at the Registration and Claims Branch (RCB) in Kingston. He also chairs the learning subcommittee of the Managers of Administration Council. Evoy said he believes at first some staff members had reservations about the new model, but in time they have come to embrace it. "I think they see opportunity where there wouldn't have been before," Evoy said.

He noted that a lot of the administrative staff in Kingston have been with the OPS for many years, but didn't have a performance development plan (PDP). "The PDP process has been started with all administrative staff," Evoy said. "It's an opportunity for them to discuss with their managers their goals, their objectives, their dreams."

Evoy said in his area he has seen a lot of changes in the roles of administrative assistants. Examples include:

- Groups of administrative staff take on a large project and divide the work between them
- A number of staff members split their time providing support for more than one program area
- Administrative staff members are more readily able to step in and take over the role if someone is absent for a short- or long-term period.

"I really give the accolades to the staff in their willingness to adapt and their commitment to make this new model work," Evoy noted. ■

Kay Wallace

For Kingston's Kay Wallace, acting administrative assistant for Registration Programs, CDS, the duties she has taken on under the new administrative model have become more diverse. "I'm filling the administrative role for two different areas in the ministry, as well as being involved as record taker for some regularly scheduled meetings. I'm involved in scheduling activities, as well as arranging catering and booking meetings," said Wallace, who came from the Ministry of Government Services about one year ago. "I'm meeting a lot of people and getting a good grounding in the ministry." She thinks that the new model offers a big boost to her aspirations. "It's a great way to see where you can best fit in and fast track your career."

Faye Thompson

Administrative co-ordinator in Kingston's Business Operations and Claims Unit, Faye Thompson said the new model has brought administrative staff together as a team. "Before, administrative staff belonged to separate program areas, now there is more networking and supporting of one another," said Thompson. She has welcomed her expanded role — ensuring that various program areas have sufficient administrative coverage, as well as supporting administrative staff members. "Taking on my new responsibilities has been a huge confidence booster. Working closely with staff has been rewarding. Administrative staff are more engaged because the model is making a difference to their careers."