

2008 Mentor of the Year - The Mentoring Partnership
Michael Stern

Caring for Clients (CFC): Tell me about the program that gave you this award.

Michael Stern: The Mentoring Partnership provides new immigrants in the City of Toronto and the regions of Halton, Peel and York with occupation-specific mentoring. Participants entering the program possess the education, experience and language skills needed to excel in the workforce —all they need are the connections and knowledge that can only be gained from real-life experience. The Mentoring Partnership opens networks and builds relationships, leading to employment.

Every organization needs to hire the very best talent available, whether or not that talent was born in Canada. Everyone loses if superior employees are passed over because employers don't know they're available. The Mentoring Partnership helps prepare professionals for the Canadian job market place and helps them showcase their abilities.

CFC: Why do you think you won?

MS: I was never lucky enough to have a formal mentor. But the people who helped me most along the way were those who were sensitive to my needs at the time; people who spoke my language and communicated in a way that was meaningful and appropriate for "where I was at". That's what I try to do as a mentor with the Mentoring Partnership.

I feel strongly about the Mentoring Partnership and I take the program very seriously. From 25 years in Executive Search & Executive Coaching, I know how difficult and awkward it can be even for Canadian-born professionals to find rewarding employment in Canada - even with their knowledge of the country and the Canadian business community. It is much more challenging for newcomers.

Over the years, I have consulted in a broad variety of sectors with dozens of professional disciplines. And I've been actively involved in hundreds of hiring decisions. So I know how organizations work; I know how hiring decisions are really made. I volunteered as a mentor because I thought my experience could help newcomers navigate the Canadian employment system.

Claudia Williams is the mentee who nominated me. I think I was able to offer her some help with networking, presentation, and insights into employer-think. But Claudia made the mentoring job easy. She is open, articulate and optimistic. She showed a great deal of initiative and was clearly committed to making the mentoring process work. Claudia is a very capable communications consultant who writes with warmth and sincerity. I'm convinced that my Mentor of the Year win was facilitated enormously by the way Claudia's nomination submission so eloquently expressed her experiences in the Program.

CFC: How does mentoring relate to your Executive Coaching practice?

MS: In both cases, I am working with already-successful executives who can benefit from an outside perspective to help them further their careers. The processes are similar. In each case there are specific objectives agreed upon in advance. Then we work together to achieve those objectives. The mentor's/coach's role is not to drive the change process and not to give advice. Rather, I am there to act as a catalyst; to harness the executive's own resources and focus them for greater success. The individual executive remains responsible for making decisions, designing solutions and taking the steps to produce the desired results.

With Mentoring Partnership clients, the primary objectives are to learn about the Canadian business community and secure full-time employment in Canada.

With Executive Coaching clients, the primary objective may be to hone leadership skills: e.g: strengthen traits responsible for successes to date; alter behaviours hindering further success.

But both my Mentoring Partnership and Executive Coaching clients are very successful, capable people. It is not about "fixing" (nothing is broken); it's about "mastery".

CFC: What is next for you in 2009?

MS: I will continue working with the Mentoring Partnership. I believe I've been able to add value. And the rewards of being a mentor are far greater than I'd imagined.

The newcomers I have met are bright, capable and motivated. Their only weakness is lack of familiarity with the Canadian business scene. The Mentoring Partnership bridges that gap. This is not charity – the newcomers have a lot to offer Canadian organizations and both parties benefit when that connection is facilitated

The Mentoring Partnership does an excellent job of screening out the newcomers with unrealistic expectations and/or insufficient talent. The program is very well run and extremely "buttoned down". I am proud to be associated with such a worthwhile venture.

And our Executive Coaching program continues to grow. Over the years, I have advised some of North America's most talented executives on career management, maximizing their organizational contribution, mastering new challenges attaining work/life balance, and more. That work as coach, confidant and mentor is equally rewarding.

Feel free to contact Michael to learn more about the Mentoring Partnership or Executive Coaching by going to his website, www.michaelstern.com

Congratulations Michael!