

“THERE ARE SO MANY STORIES OF PHENOMENAL WOMEN WHO ARE UNABLE TO WORK BECAUSE THEIR RÉSUMÉS OR CIRCUMSTANCES DON'T FIT THE NORM. WE GIVE THEM AN OPPORTUNITY TO WRITE THEIR OWN FUTURE BASED ON PERSONALITY, STRONG WORK ETHICS AND LOYALTY. IN MANY INSTANCES, THEY BECOME THE PRIMARY BREADWINNER IN THE FAMILY — **ELEN STEINBERG, SPP MARKETING SERVICES FOUNDER**

ELEN STEINBERG SPP MARKETING SERVICES

KATHRYN BOOTHBY
POSTMEDIA CONTENT WORKS

A fearless entrepreneur, committed advocate for advancement of women and strong proponent of women in sales careers. These attributes, combined with keen business acumen, have earned Elen Steinberg her second Women's Executive Network CIBC Entrepreneurs Award in addition to being recognized numerous times in the top 40 of the Top 100 Women Business Owners in Canada by Profit and Chatelaine.

Steinberg is the president and chief executive officer of SPP Marketing Services, an integrated company offering experiential customer acquisition services for credit card and consumer goods companies. She is also the publisher of Real Style, an award-winning fashion magazine that was the first to offer shop-able content direct from digital pages.

Steinberg left university with a communications and journalism degree in hand and took on freelance assignments and internships in the Toronto broadcasting scene. Working as a brand ambassador at a TV station's booths for community events taught her about the promotional staffing industry — which provided sampling, product demos and other experiential services for various consumer focused companies.

Although still pursuing a position in journalism, Steinberg enjoyed the public interaction that came with the events. At 21, a transit advertisement caught Steinberg's eye. The federal government was looking for young entrepreneurs to help set up in business. “I called with the idea of creating a promotional staffing agency,” she says. “They gave me a \$5,000 loan and a marketing consultant who motivated me to get out of bed every morning and make sales calls.”

And that's how Steinberg brought SPP Marketing Services (SPP) to life in 1987, in a downtown Toronto apartment. She managed to get a one-page brochure offering product demonstrators and hosts inserted into an exhibitor package for the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE).

It brought in her first client — an agency working with the Ontario Lottery Corporation. Steinberg's company at the time consisted of her and a girlfriend.

“We were asked if we had announcers who could go on stage to present. I knew we could do it and said yes, despite having never done it before. The event was a great success and really got me ex-



Elen Steinberg earned her second WXN Top 100 award for her commitment to championing women in the workplace.

cited about building the business,” she says.

On the heels of the CNE success, Steinberg's perseverance, ambition and cold calls to hundreds of companies gained SPP new clients and saw the company participate in more than 1,600 corporate events and trade shows expanding across Canada with hundreds of well trained brand ambassadors.

In 1995, after a successful campaign at Toronto's Pearson International Airport for a telecom client, Steinberg saw a new opportunity in the travel and financial sector at this venue. She wrote the rules of conduct for airport sales kiosk staffing — a document that was subsequently adapted to all North American airport leasing agency agreements for manned display kiosks — and developed an airport-based new customer acquisition program specifically for credit card customers.

“These programs brought a trifecta of success,” says Steinberg. “Our top-notch

DONE RIGHT, AND WITH PASSION AND INTEGRITY, SALES CAN BRING GREAT REWARDS BOTH PERSONALLY AND FINANCIALLY

staff met the behaviour and professionalism needs of airport authorities and brought quality, long-term customers to our clients. It also helped SPP build a passionate and effective sales force and be the primary sales agency in the Canadian airport space.”

Since then, SPP has expanded to every major city in Canada, with over 500 staff and long term management, has gone on to launch almost every major travel credit card in the country and has signed up millions of customers for financial institutions that include CIBC, RBC, Scotiabank, Amex, BMO and TD. Steinberg credits her dedicated staff for helping SPP become the leader it is today. “I may have the ideas, and fearless-

ness, but a team that supports and believes in you and keeps you on an even keel is priceless,” she says. “I couldn't have done it without them.”

Her hiring strategy for the organization has been clear from the start. Steinberg is a champion for women in sales and believes it to be the fastest way for a female to rise through the ranks.

“You can be a top sales representative in any organization, the financial rewards are great and you are basically writing your own paycheck,” she says. “There is much less of a gender bias nor glass ceiling, and sales can be the stepping stone to executive positions.”

Women from diverse backgrounds represent 70 per

cent of the SPP workforce and fill 80 per cent of management positions. “Many of the women we hire are immigrants, visible minorities or those re-entering the workforce,” notes Steinberg. “There are so many stories of phenomenal women who are unable to get work because their résumés or circumstances don't fit the norm. We give them an opportunity to write their own future based on personality, strong work ethics and loyalty. In many instances, they become the primary breadwinner in the family.”

Developing these amazing women has paid great dividends — SPP has the highest retention rate in Canada's direct sales industry, says Steinberg. Sales reps have an average tenure of over seven years and on the management team longevity is typically more than 10 years.

“It is a symbiotic relationship — the better our employees do, the better the company does. We want them to be the best they can be. That

they stay is a testament to our belief and investment in them. It is a true partnership with no limits.”

By helping others you help yourself, adds Steinberg, which is why her business is centred on mentorship and empowerment. “Great sales people begin with the right personality traits such as drive, ambition, intelligence and warmth,” she says.

“At SPP, we have a very comprehensive and effective training program which includes both classroom and floor sales to guarantee the best chance of success. We also actively promote from within. Most of our management have risen through the ranks, including Liz Fernandes, our vice-president of client services, who has been my right hand and staunch supporter for more than two decades.”

When she started her business, Steinberg says being young and female represented a double whammy when trying to engage corporate clients. However, “entrepreneurship is built on being a risk-taker, having confidence in your own ability and presenting with passion to prospects,” she says. “I asked clients to take a chance on us, let us prove we could get the job done and pay us when we delivered results. It's what got our foot in the door.”

Along with a confident and audacious attitude, Steinberg encourages up-and-coming female entrepreneurs to embrace sales.

“Sales can be perceived negatively; however, it is an area in which women can — and do — excel. We are more focused on helping people to live better lives and get great deals than aggressively trying to make a sale,” she explains. “Done right, and with passion and integrity, sales can bring great rewards both personally and financially.”

Of all the direct credit card sales agencies in the marketplace, SPP is the only one with female ownership and a workforce made up primarily of women, notes Steinberg.

“This is what really set us apart in the industry. We are still here after almost 30 years in operation and we remain dominant in the airport space. It is a testimony to female empowerment and putting your trust in the right people.”

This is the second time that Steinberg has been selected as one of Canada's Most Powerful Women. “When I saw the company I was keeping the first time around I thought the win was a fluke, as entrepreneurs can be somewhat isolated,” she chuckles.

“With WXN, you are in the big leagues competing with presidents of large corporations,” she says. “This time around, it feels like validation. I am extremely honoured that a very senior group of leaders has recognized the value of my achievements.”



SPP Marketing Services and Real Style Magazine congratulate CEO and Publisher, ELEN STEINBERG and all the nominees, on the WXN Top 100 Canada's Most Powerful Women Award for 2016

SPP Marketing Services (SPP) has been successfully creating and executing national credit card and intercept sales programs for over 28 years. Pioneers in the airport and retail credit card acquisition industry, SPP has enrolled over 4.5 million Canadians for premium card products on behalf of partners such as CIBC, RBC, TD, BMO, AMEX, Scotiabank and more.

SPP is dedicated to promoting women in their workforce and strives to create opportunities to mentor, train and develop women for successful sales careers.

SPP MARKETING
SERVICES INC.

Real Style
Magazine