

Architects of brave new world

■ By Stephen Clare

Pernille Fischer Boulter can't figure out what all the fuss is about.

"Where I come from, the issue of gender in the workplace is not something that is even discussed," says the president and founder of Kisserup International Trade Roots, an international consulting firm based in Halifax. "The concept of equality is merely accepted as a given fact."

Born in Copenhagen, Denmark, Fischer Boulter has over 20 years of experience in marketing, sales, training and consulting. She has held several executive positions in Europe, has worked on projects in over 30 countries around the world and speaks five different languages.

Since arriving in Nova Scotia nearly a decade ago, she has been busy running her own business and working with the Small and Medium Exporters Federal Advisory Board, the Offshore Onshore Technology Association of Nova Scotia and the province's Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association Advisory Committee on Immigrant Business Development Services. Last November, she won the 2007 Women of Excellence Award from the Canadian Progress Club in Halifax.

"You could say that I have enjoyed a very interesting career," she laughs. "And it has certainly afforded me a rather unique perspective."

While she has managed to maintain that worldly point of view, Fischer Boulter admits that she has often been challenged by many North American ideas.

"There is a conservative manner here that has taken some getting used to," she says. "Any sort of divisionary thinking or prejudice has always been quite foreign to me. And the belief by some that there still exists a 'glass ceiling' and that women should know their place in the working world is something that I have never accepted and I never will. My place has always been exactly where I have wanted it to be."

Fischer Boulter is not alone in her thinking as more and more women across Nova Scotia are making a place for themselves in the provincial economy.

"The trending is definitely there," says Shelley Simpson-McKay, executive director of the Centre for Women in Business at Mount Saint Vincent

University (MSVU) in Halifax. "It is very encouraging to see so many positive steps being taken by women in the workforce here over the last decade."

Simpson-McKay has reason to be optimistic, as recent statistics suggest that women are now on "nearly equal" footing with men in the workplace.

"In Nova Scotia, we comprise 50 per cent of the entire labour force," she says. "We also account for 36 per cent of entrepreneurs. And that number is sure to keep growing as two to three times as many women are now starting up their own companies compared to men."

As well, women owned-and-operated businesses are proving to be an anchor of the economy bringing an estimated \$2 billion into the province each year.

With all the successes, Simpson-McKay cautions that there are still hurdles to be overcome.

"Thankfully, the challenges faced by women here today no longer really have much to do with gender," she says. "Given that so many of us are now involved with the emerging service sector and run small or home-based businesses, the real issues have to do with access to proper funding, resources and information — no different from any other small business."

McKay adds that with "mama-preneurs" making up a significant percentage of the new economy, there are more options available today to help them better juggle the high demands of motherhood and earning a living.

"Facilities like the Centre for Women in Business at MSVU provide business management skill development and resources to women entrepreneurs across mainland Nova Scotia," she says. "A large part of what we do now involves offering educational opportunities for self-employed women who are looking to achieve balance in their multi-tasking lifestyles."

With the doors wide open to opportunity, both Fischer Boulter and Simpson-McKay agree there is a lot to be excited about in the years ahead for women in business.

"I am convinced that the next generation of women will be the ones to drive the Canadian economy," says Fischer Boulter. "They are fearless. They are risk-takers. And they will be the architects of a brave new world — one where there are no borders."

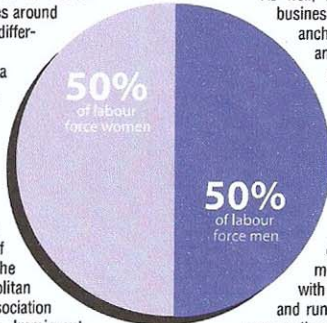


Photo: Contributor

Pernille Fischer Boulter is a "women in business" success story. Last November, she won the 2007 Women of Excellence Award from the Canadian Progress Club in Halifax.

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