

MPI Ottawa: “Education Doesn’t Just Lead to Prosperity—It’s Pure Gold”

Education is a key component to prosperity that not only encompasses financial success but also extends to overall wellness, said **Deirdre McMurdy**, one of Canada’s most respected business journalists. Speaking at the April 15 National Meetings Industry Day (NMID) event hosted by the Ottawa Chapter of Meeting Professionals International (MPI), McMurdy told participants, “Used strategically, education gives you the chance to optimize your ability to control your destiny, and these days, that doesn’t just lead to prosperity—it’s pure gold.”

Addressing this year’s NMID theme, “The New Prosperity: Building Prosperity Through Education,” McMurdy said the recent economic downturn has affected many people’s jobs and confidence, but “the reality is that we always recover from these setbacks.” She said, “Crisis situations prompt us to innovate and improve in a very focused effort to save ourselves.”

While change and upheaval are becoming constants in today’s world, they can also present opportunities, McMurdy said. Exercising control and protecting one’s interests while taking advantage of those opportunities “requires careful calibration, a strategic mindset, and a willingness to take considered risks, to be flexible, to act quickly.”

McMurdy encouraged participants to leverage their diplomas and other formal qualifications, which are now more important than ever. At the same time, she advised them to constantly build on that foundation, budget time for personal development, and empower themselves to shape change rather than passively allow change to happen.

This approach requires a strong sense of self-awareness—something that education encourages, because education can help you refine your grasp of your strengths and weaknesses. “It allows you to optimize your focus, to respond quickly.”

You also need to have a sense of direction, McMurdy said. This includes asking questions, such as where you see yourself in five years and what must you do to get there, and setting deadlines and targets to quantify and measure progress. People no longer spend an entire career with one employer, focused on one specialty; “education gives you that mobility and the confidence to take risks.”

Companies no longer limit the definition of prosperity to financial successes. Prosperity now includes commitments to social and community values, environmental sustainability, and engagement of a wide range of stakeholders. It is similar for individuals—prosperity now extends to sustainability, balance, and engagement.

McMurdy summarized her philosophy:

1. Don’t kid yourself. Do a ruthless self-examination; honestly assess your shortcomings, and focus on improvement. “It’s painful, but valuable.”

2. Do your homework. “That can be as simple as keeping up with current affairs, networking with others in your field, studying what your competition is doing, researching a client before a meeting.”
3. Listen and learn. “Learn not just from people above you, but from those all around you,” McMurdy said, adding that her “ability to ask for help and learn from people who were of a lower rank in the organization was a turning point.”
4. Be a Boy Scout: be prepared. Build flexibility and mobility into your job strategy and shift emphases according to changing market conditions and demand.
5. Manage your personal brand. Consciously develop a reputation—your “personal capital”—and manage it actively. “That will ensure you optimize control over it and get the recognition you deserve.”

McMurdy described how she takes a modular approach to her own career, adding television and a regular column to her core work in print journalism. She also became a speaker with the National Speakers Bureau.

In 2008, McMurdy was appointed as a vice president at the Public Policy Forum, an independent think tank that does policy research and analysis for government and business. Currently she works for Environment Minister Jim Prentice in a position that serves as an interface between the department and the minister’s office. She also tends to look for assignment-oriented work that maximizes new and diverse experiences transferable to other assignments.

Asked how she manages her personal brand, McMurdy said she is able to maintain a “clear eye view of things.” She added, “Always be very honest and straightforward with others on what’s realistic and doable and what’s not.”

Meeting professionals can apply this advice by becoming more involved in the strategic production of meetings beyond the logistics functions. “Offer to be involved early on,” McMurdy said, and “be very proactive about identifying your ability.” This includes giving specific examples, providing briefing notes and customized solutions, and simply “being straight on” about how you can help your client take the experience to the next level.

Standards, Tools, Community, and Relationships

Prosperity is bigger than money and broader than school. It is about what one gives to and gets back from one’s life, family, friends, and community, said **Marie-Louise Doyle** of Doyle & Associates Event Planners, MPI Ottawa Chapter’s director of strategic education and chair of Ottawa’s NMID celebration. Doyle read a statement issued by Ottawa Mayor Larry O’Brien declaring April 15, 2010, as National Meetings Industry Day in Ottawa.

Panelists elaborated on the theme of education, prosperity, and community relationships.

Doreen Ashton Wagner, co-founder of Greenfield Services, described MPI's Global Training Program, which is designed to increase participants' employability, transferability, and compensation. The globally recognized program is based on a set of meeting and business event competency standards that cover a broad range of topics, including strategic planning, project management, event design, marketing, professionalism, and communication.

Global Training has a defined series of training and career development milestones beginning with "introduction" and ending with "executive." Wagner invited participants to apply for financial support under four scholarship programs that include college education funding, general leadership education or academic funding, MPI programs, and the Anna Lee Chabot Scholarship.

Wagner also noted that the MPI website, www.mpiweb.org, offers a wealth of resources, such as webinars, industry research, conference information, and the CultureActive self-assessment tool, which allows its results to be compared against those from 94 countries.

Jim Durrell, chair of the Ottawa Convention Centre and Ottawa's mayor from 1985 to 1991, provided insights on education from the community perspective. Noting the important role parents play in influencing their children, he shared his father's philosophy on life: "The world should be a better place because you've been here."

Durrell urged participants to do volunteer service and to support charities in the community. The impact of volunteers is immeasurable, he said. Meanwhile, "the benefits that will flow back to you are incredible. . . . I encourage you to grow, get involved; you'll love it."

Joanne Joham, regional director of North America for the International Congress and Convention Association, holds both the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) and the Certification in Meeting Management (CMM) designations. She talked about her journey of achieving these goals and encouraged participants to apply. She is president of the MPI New Jersey Chapter and also teaches CMP review courses, ESL, and meeting and event planning courses locally and globally.

Joham emphasized the great group of people in the CMP and CMM educational programs who are available to give support, adding that it is extremely important to maintain personal relationships and continue to help each other.

National Capital Commission Wins MPI Influence Award

MPI Ottawa Chapter presented its fourth annual Influence Award, which recognizes a person or organization that has made a difference to the meetings industry. This year's award, sponsored by the signage company Nothers, went to the National Capital Commission (NCC). NCC representative **Jean Cardinal** accepted the award on behalf of the commission.