

ENTREPRENEURSHIP | How and where to get your next big idea

Creativity Café helps stir up new ideas in Greater Vancouver's young professionals

BY HAYLEY WOODIN

Nils had a big problem. The world was coming to Sweden for his two-day ice sculpture event, and the ice was melting.

On April 14, a room full of Company of Young Professionals Members with the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade brainstormed, roll-played and challenged each other's ideas as they tried to solve the dilemma with outside-the-box thinking at the CYP Creativity Café, hosted at SFU's Harbour Centre.

The discussions were led by Mia Maki, CPA and FCMA, who has been mentoring entrepreneurs, start-up and early stage companies for over a decade through Royal Roads University, University of Victoria, as an independent consultant, and as an accredited mentor in the BCIC Actech VIATeC MVP Program.

The topic of the evening, sponsored by CPABC, was how and where to get those

next "big ideas." According to Maki – and a wealth of research she shared with CYP Members – thinking creatively involves using all types of logic and reasoning. It requires effectuation, or focusing on what you can do with what you have, and leveraging your means to reach your goals. It's also about interactions, information gathering, intrapreneurship, having an entrepreneurial mindset, and commitments from others.

The case study of Nils is a real-world success story: his challenges eventually led to the creation of the world's first ice hotel, and a partnership with Absolut Vodka.

On May 18, CYP Members will take the challenges facing Greater Vancouver's young professionals and present innovative and entrepreneurial ideas on how to address them.

Over the past three months, Members of the program have been working in teams to create short videos on how our region can attract and engage more



Mia Maki, a CPA and Professor at the University of Victoria, led a 'Creativity Café' with Members of the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade's under-35 program on April 20, 2016. | NORAVERA VISUALS



millennials. The top videos will be shown at the event, with the winning team being crowned as the "Big Idea Champion." (View the videos and vote for your favourite video today at boardoftrade.com/bigidea.)

The May 18 event will also

feature an exciting panel of speakers, moderated by the editor-in-chief of Vancity Buzz, Farhan Mohamed.

Just announced, the panelists are Janet Austin, CEO of YWCA Metro Vancouver; Michael Geller, President of The

Geller Group; and Meredith Powell, co-founder of The Next Big Thing. **SB**

Don't miss our May 18 event on the pressures facing Greater Vancouver's young professionals! Register at boardoftrade.com/cyp.

NETWORKING | How to be a connector and not a seller

Tips on leaving a positive lasting impression at your next networking event

BY MIKE PLUMB

It has been more than three years now since I started working for the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade.

Through my role as an account executive, I've had the opportunity to meet and spend time with thousands of businesspeople from a wide variety of backgrounds — from small business owners to tech junkies, C-suite executives, millionaires, billionaires, consul generals, NHL general managers, Prime Ministers (yes, two!) and the list goes on.

In addition to the conversations I have in person or on the phone, I also attend upwards of 80 to 90 networking events each year. This is a mixture of our organization's events (we host up to 150 each year) as well as external events that I attend out of personal interest or to support our partners.

What I've found while attending those events is that everyone has a different idea of how to network and what will result from becoming a Member

of a board of trade or chamber of commerce. Some people I meet have been networking for many years, while others are engaging with us for the first time through our program for professionals under 35, the Company of Young Professionals.

In my opinion, one of the biggest mistakes people make when networking is approaching it in search of their "ideal customer." Networking is about meeting many different individuals from all walks of life. In fact, that's really all that a chamber of commerce is — a group of businesspeople representing a wide variety of industries from that region.

With that in mind, networking is about *creating a great impression*.

Recently I was approached by someone who was considering joining our organization. After attending an event, she told me she was disappointed that she didn't meet a direct end-user of the service she offers. I was not surprised, given that I often come across this concern with those who are new to chambers of commerce, such as ours, so



Mike Plumb, Account Executive, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade

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I walked her through what I thought would be a better approach to networking.

It's important to remember that when you connect with an individual through a board of trade or chamber of commerce event, that individual is likely someone who is actively engaged in the local business community. These are the types of people who volunteer their time in the community, and often sit on the board of directors for other charities and associations.

You may not realize it, because you didn't have a chance to speak with them about their passion projects, but these individuals often have input on important projects in the community and are viewed as being an influential "connector."

People turn to individuals like this for advice, because they are well-connected, reputable, and hard-working. For that reason alone, it's crucial that you leave a positive lasting impression.

Networking is about consistency. Jeffrey Gitomer is the author of the world's best-selling sales book, *The Sales Bible*. In that book, Gitomer uses a spectacular example from his own experience. He attended every networking breakfast at his local chamber of commerce for a year and a half. Out of the blue

one day, he was approached by a woman who offered to help distribute his book in China. This connection resulted in \$100,000 in sales that he would not have had otherwise.

Once again, the key to networking is consistency. It becomes part of your business routine, much like paying the bills, making necessary phone calls, or unlocking the front door of your store each morning. You have to incorporate your networking efforts into your business development schedule.

In my view, networking is about three or four degrees of separation. The first person you meet — the one who you bond with over where your family is from or the hobbies you enjoy — is often the person who spreads the good word of your name or business.

So, the next time you are at a Greater Vancouver Board of Trade event, networking with your peers or volunteering your time in the community, try to be a connector, not a seller. **SB**

Mike Plumb is an Account Executive with the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. He has worked for the association for more than three years. His background is in real estate and the automotive industry. To learn more about becoming a Member, email mplumb@boardoftrade.com.