

People who are successful in business don't always take the same road to achieve their goals. A combination of luck, strategy and hard work often contribute to their achievements. But many people are successful because they have found careers that click with their inner passions. The women we interviewed for this article are in diverse careers like media planning, technology and cosmetics, but they all share one thing: they love what they do.

Sunni Boot, President and CEO of Zenith Optimedia, has been working in the media and advertising industries for over 25 years. Some of her team's accomplishments include bringing the Smurfs to Canadian television and the partnership between *Canadian Idol* and L'Oréal.

Robin Mitchell, General Manager of Revlon Canada, has been working there for six years. She has developed a loyal team, and has helped lead them through the relaunch of Revlon's cosmetic line with a hot new ad campaign starring Julianne Moore, Halle Berry, Jamie King and Eva Mendes.

Vivian Kober is the Senior Manager of Dell Americas International Communications. She has worked there for 12 years, and has responsibility for Dell's communications in Latin America and Canada. Dell is the number one company for direct computer sales worldwide.

These women sat down with *PLUS* to tell us about their backgrounds, and how they got to where they are today. They hope that their advice can help you get further in following your dreams. ▶

Top women in business reveal how they got ahead, and how you can too. By KIM EDWARDS

SECRETS OF SUCCESS



Robin Mitchell
in her office at
Revlon Canada

LESSONS LEARNED AT HOME

Family is often the place where people learn skills that will carry them through life, and all of these women said that they learned important career lessons from their parents.

Boot said her parents taught her to be fair when making decisions, and that there are "absolutely no excuses." Mitchell says that her family taught her to work hard, never give up, and treat others the way she wanted to be treated. They also taught her to be honest in both her personal and professional lives.

Kobeh's family showed her the importance of honesty, as well as to take her studies seriously. They also encouraged her to look for a good employer, preferably a multinational one. She listened to their advice, relocating to Central Texas after spending her formative years in Mexico City. Lessons your family and other mentors teach you about integrity and hard work come from their life experiences, so they can often be beneficial.

LEARNING, IN SCHOOL AND OUT

It's funny how many people

who are successful in business were not necessarily great students. However, they took what they needed from their education and ran with it.

Boot admits that "by today's standards, I was a pathetic student," however, she enjoyed the arts aspects of school, like the theatre club and the newspaper. Mitchell says she worked "best when cramming," that at the last minute she'd pull off great assignments. Now, this ability to perform under pressure works to her advantage in the fast-paced beauty industry. Kobeh said she was a persistent student, but that school alone was not responsible for her success. "While school provides a good base of knowledge, practice can be quite different,

that's why it's very important to learn from people with more experience on the job." Formal education may not be for everyone, but it is respected and can provide you with a good foundation that you can develop. Kobeh recommends taking language and computer courses, as she found they were great door openers.



Sunni Boot

"FIND SOMETHING THAT YOU ENJOY AND ENJOY DOING IT. YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE CURIOSITY AND ENTHUSIASM FOR WHAT YOU DO, IF NOT, YOU'RE NOT GOING TO GET AHEAD,"
SUNNI BOOT, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF ZENITH OPTIMEDIA.

THOSE FIRST JOBS WERE ABOUT MORE THAN FLIPPING BURGERS

Even high-powered people toiled in food service, retail and clerical positions for their first jobs. But you can learn valuable experience in lower-level jobs, even if it is simple things like the importance of being on time for work and taking your job seriously. Mitchell worked at the Old Mill restaurant in Ancaster, Ont. from high school all the way through her studies at McMaster University. She said there she learned the important lesson that "the customer is always right." Boot's first job was typing insertion orders for advertising agency Ronald Reynolds. She ended up staying there for several years, moving her way up within the company to board of director and vice president positions. No matter where you are in your career, try to learn what you can from your work environment, so that you can take those lessons elsewhere if necessary.

FINDING YOUR NICHE

Sometimes it takes awhile to figure out exactly what you want to do in life. Both Boot and Mitchell said that while they vaguely knew that they wanted to go into business when they were in their teens, they did not know specifically what area they wanted to work in.

Boot enjoyed her taste of the advertising industry in her summer position at Ronald Reynolds so much that she ended up staying at the company after she graduated from high school, and her career took off from there. She says that finding something that you like is important. "If work's a priority, you have to enjoy doing it."

After Mitchell graduated from university, she started as a sales representative with Faberge Canada. After several company acquisitions, she ended up at Unilever, moving up through several management positions, and then moved on to Alberto Culver, finally ending up at Revlon.

Kobeh wanted to be a correspondent when she was growing up. She started her career as a marketing specialist in the food industry, then worked for four years at Dell Mexico, when she was transferred to Dell's headquarters in Central Texas.

It often takes trial and error to find out where you fit in the business world, but when you do, try to get as much relevant experience as you can in your chosen field.



Yvian Kobeh at Dell Headquarters

SECRETS OF
SUCCESS

LEARN FROM THOSE MISTAKES

We all make mistakes from time to time. These women have learned that it's important not to focus on these glitches, but to learn from them and keep going. Boot says that she's "made a million mistakes," but they've all been corrected. Kobeh says that none of us are perfect, that's why it's "very important to listen to others with more experience than you, to get informed about all parts of the business and to hire the right personnel." So don't get too discouraged when mistakes happen, but try to rectify the problem and learn from it, so that you can avoid the same thing happening in the future.

BE PART OF A TEAM THAT YOU CAN TRUST

The group of people that you work with is very important. You see them every day, and if you can't rely on them, it can create a very toxic work environment. Mitchell emphasized that one of her biggest accomplishments was creating trust within her team. "It was earned through honest communication. I would never ask them to do something I wouldn't do myself, and I will always stand up for them - anytime, anyplace." Take the time to develop a good relationship with your team, to increase your shared success and to improve your work environment.

KEEP A GOOD WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Many people who are dedicated to their careers do so at the expense of spending time with their loved ones, but it is important to try to balance the two. Mitchell says that she learned that it's essential to make

time for her family and friends, particularly after a time when she was so dedicated to work that she had not seen her best friend in eight months. Now she understands the importance of keeping up relationships with friends and family. "They are the ones who will be there when your career has ended," says Mitchell. She says she maintains this by sticking to priorities and staying focused.

Sometimes keeping up a balance between work and her family can be difficult, but "it can be done," says Kobeh. By sharing tasks, asking for help when it's needed, and finding a good workplace, she says that she now has the best of both worlds.

Boot takes a different perspective, saying that career is the foundation of what she does. She says that friends, interests, learning and romance can all come out of a fulfilling career, if one is dedicated to it. Having a work-life balance means different things to different people, but try to create a situation that you are happy with.

SOME FINAL TIPS

"Find something that you enjoy and enjoy doing it."



Robin Mitchell

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Be resourceful - use all the people and resources that you know of to make a goal happen.

Be decisive - after gathering all the information you need, make a decision and stick with it.

Be accessible - make it so that your colleagues and contacts can communicate with you.

Believe in yourself - if you don't, then how can you expect anyone else to?

Be honest - if you lie in business, like anywhere else, most likely you will eventually be found out.

Pay attention to the details - they can often make or break a project.

Listen to others - you may find a perspective that you did not consider.

Prove yourself to the company before seeking recognition.

Try to find opportunities for continuous learning.

Treat others with respect - so that they will respect you.

Keep a good work-life balance - so that you will be able to keep up the pace for the long haul.

You've got to have curiosity and enthusiasm for what you do, if not, you're not going to get ahead," says Boot. She also advises people to be resourceful, decisive and accessible in their careers.

Kobeh says it's important to pay your dues in order to get rewards. "I often see young women that want to be recognized and promoted early in their careers, without realizing that they need to prove themselves to the company by showing mastery and leadership in their roles," she says.

Believing in yourself is very important, says Mitchell, as well as honesty, paying attention to the details, and listening. Kobeh agrees about the importance of paying attention to what others have to say. "It's important to stop and listen to people who are more experienced. They have helped me

realize my potential, and at the same time pushed me to move forward by taking on new opportunities outside my area of expertise."

These and other career tips that you've heard may not apply to your current situation, but try to take what you can from them. With a little effort and perseverance, you'll be on your way to a more satisfying career. ■