

Ruth Rappini

Vice-President, Organization Development, Medavie Blue Cross, Halifax

In 2004, Ruth Rappini heeded the call of the east and joined Medavie Blue Cross. In her role as vice-president of Organization Development, she has a front-seat view on the growth of the organization, not only in Atlantic Canada, but also in Ontario and Québec. "Constant growth is what makes my job interesting and challenging," Rappini says. That growth drives change not only within the organization, but also in her role, which includes HR, strategic planning, corporate communications, change management, facilities, as well as the development of the Medavie Health Foundation.



Getting my MBA was the smartest career move I ever made. My degree is in English literature. Believe it or not, that English lit background has really helped me in business because I'm often called upon to build a case using the facts, and use language to pull an argument together. But in the beginning of my career I lacked the financial background I needed to be successful as a business leader, and that made me nervous. So I took my executive MBA, which has been a key milestone in my career. It gave me real confidence.

Don't underestimate the value of confidence. I've worked in some very large companies, and I have seen fabulous people held back in their careers because they've been afraid to promote themselves. Looking back on my early career, I think I could have been more assertive in promoting myself and my accomplishments. It takes courage and confidence to move to the next level. But it's worth it.

Successful leaders bring focus to their organizations. Clarity and concentration can really help organizations and individuals see opportunities and take advantage of them. Earlier in my career, I was with a company that went from \$1-to-\$2-billion in sales to \$10-billion in two years. At the time, I worked closely with the president in the area of strategic planning. Growing ten-fold in two years is exciting but also a tremendous challenge. Afterwards the president came to me and said if we didn't have that core vision and

focus, we wouldn't have been able to handle that much growth.

I tend to draw inspiration from people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, especially those who have overcome personal hardships, because I admire the fortitude it takes to do that. If you listen, opportunities to learn are all around you. Everyone has knowledge and experience to share and I try to learn from a lot of different people.

Someone I greatly respect once told me something I'll never forget. He said, 'don't be impatient. Enjoy every stage of your career for what it is. Get as much breadth as you can and learn from it, both the positive and the negative. Then move on.' That advice has proven invaluable.

Family experiences have had a powerful impact on my development as a leader. My father grew up in Northern Italy and was a prisoner of war during the Second World War before immigrating to Canada in 1951. His experience has instilled in me the importance of having the tenacity to keep your focus and move forward with your life, no matter what cards have been dealt to you.

I want to keep learning and taking on new challenges, especially expanding my leadership role in our community. I'm interested in taking on more board work because it's a wonderful chance to meet and learn from interesting senior leaders who are making a difference in their communities.

Interviewed by Anna Stuart, vice president, Knightsbridge Robertson Surette – Atlantic Canada's leading recruitment and human resource consulting firm. Leader's Insight conversations are published in each issue of *Atlantic Business Magazine*. Feedback: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com