

Cap U BOSS program scaled back

Funding from the provincial government for the entrepreneur program only open to EI recipients will be cut in half

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In two years, Capilano University has taught 120 employment assistance recipients how to be their own BOSS.

Students accepted into the 48-week BOSS self-employment entrepreneurship program have their tuition waived and continue to receive Employment Insurance benefits.

“We get three times as many applicants as we can take,” said Patricia Lambert, Cap U BOSS program manager.

Creativity, flexibility and curiosity are the attributes that Lambert is looking for in potential students – along with a solid business plan. She explained that it’s the outcome that attracts them to the program: heading up their own company.

“They are doing what they wanted to do, working with people they want to work with, earning what they want to earn,” said Lambert.

BOSS graduate Jennifer Abbott was a hearing aid practitioner who wanted to bring that service door-to-door. A classmate helped her come up with the name for her business. Hear at Home is currently the only 100-per-cent mobile hearing aid clinic in B.C.

“I feel the BOSS program for me was like winning the lottery,” said Abbott.

Six months ago, Abbott hired her first employee: a client care coordinator. In the BOSS program there aren’t tests, there are “milestones”, which is what Abbott has achieved with her new hire.

The most important lesson she learned was how to balance work with her home life. At a previous job, Abbott, a single parent, was working for a boss that “didn’t take to little ones.”

“He always reminded me that I needed back up,” explained Abbott.

And it was that type of work situation that forced her to miss her young daughter’s school Christmas party. This year, Abbott will be there with bells on.

BOSS is composed in two phases. The first 10 weeks is an intensive period with plenty of work inside the classroom and a lot of research. These future business owners begin preparing financial statements before they head off and start their business in the second phase.

“You have professionals coming in to talk to you about everything under the sun,” said recent BOSS graduate Katelynne Katona.

The 31-year-old proud owner of The Wine Thief found a way to take the sommelier out of the restaurant and transplant the role into people’s homes and the Okanagan for vine-



MEET THE BOSSES - Graduates of Cap U’s BOSS program reconvene to talk about their business successes. Back row L-R: Jennifer Abbott, Gerry Spitzner, Heather Walker, Front row L-R: Ben Lean, Katelynne Katona, Clinton McDougall.

Rob Newell photo

yard tours.

The six gathered BOSS graduates nod their head in agreement when asked if the recession played a role in helping them finding this program. It was right around the time the economy tanked that BOSS started up at Cap U.

Ben Lean, a father of two young children, was laid off from a small engineering company two Christmases ago. An engineer with 28 years experience, Lean’s role was to look after commercial elevator construction contracts. The prestigious Shangri-La hotel in downtown Vancouver was his final project.

“I was the highest paid,” explained Lean. “I was told ‘you’re good but you are too expensive’”

Two young engineering grads were hired to replace him. Soon after, Lean applied for the BOSS program.

“It was a good thing in the end,” he resolved. “I can do any calculation [but] business sense is new to me.”

Lean now outfits homes in West Vancouver and Shaughnessy with glass elevators for \$60,000 a pop.

November was the last intake for students under the current BOSS model, managed by the Ministry of Social Development.

“A new ministry is coming in and shifting contracts,” explained Lambert. “They have different priorities, areas of interest.”

She estimated that half the amount of money will be on the table for BOSS, resulting in a rejigging of the program. It costs the provincial government approximately \$17,000 to fund each of the 14 students for the 48 weeks.

Jerry Spitzner, a BOSS graduate and now independent retail consultant specializing in pharmaceuticals, believes the program is a cost effective way for the government to make an investment in small business.

“There are over 400,000 small businesses driving the B.C. economy,” said Spitzner. “Over 60 per cent of those are sole proprietorship. You are looking at six of us.”

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