

WHO DO YOU WORK FOR?



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“Don’t you think it’s a conflict being a speech pathologist and the CEO of a software company?” asked a student engineer during a recent presentation on entrepreneurship. I took a breath as the 30-odd group of engineers looked at me skeptically. “Most founders of companies,” I responded diplomatically, “are inventors of the intellectual property. My case is therefore no different from the norm.” But the bright-eyed student was not stopping there. “But don’t you feel the need to go back to doing therapy with children?” I paused. “Well actually, I realized that I can do much more for many more special needs children in my current position.”

As the CEO of Virtual Expert Clinics with approximately \$4 million in seed financing a little more than a year after starting, I have had more than one puzzled look. In New Brunswick, venture capital opportunities are rare and many far more seasoned entrepreneurs have chased start-up money without success.

Without big business experience or an MBA to back me up, I have moved from the owner and operator of a private speech clinic to a company voted by analysts at Branham Group in Ottawa as *one of the top 25 up and coming IT companies in Canada*.

I believe I owe much of my success to-date to my professional training.

It is true that I have learned a tremendous amount over the last 16 months but most of the learning is linguistic – understanding the meaning of words like “*value proposition*,” “*exit strategy*,” and “*organizational chart*.” My profession had already taught me the key skills I would need – problem-solving, intuitive decision-making, conceptual analysis, teambuilding, communication and negotiation. My professional background also, surprisingly, has taught me key concepts used in big business – goal setting, strength vs weakness analysis, performance measurement, customer-centered care and making it fun for everyone involved.

The strong ethics, focus and dedication inherent to my profession translates well into the passionate leadership fundamental to my current success. When people ask how I’ve had the determination to stick through the tough times and make the difficult decisions, I tell them that VEC is like a child under my care and I am as focused on its optimal health and development as I was in the context of my career as a therapist.

Luckily for me, my mission to make expert therapy guidance accessible to many people world-wide is perfectly aligned with the business-oriented ambition to grow the company into a global success.

The way I respond to challenges had led me to a focus on providing autism therapy and now, to creating and leading an Internet-based software solution that will bring

the North American educational therapy model to homes everywhere. The journey is exciting and full of rewards.

Despite being in a non-traditional role for women, I feel both my gender and my profession are perfectly suited for it. One day I hope to prove this theory and be successful enough to inspire other female professionals to solve problems within their field of work and turn their innovative solutions into business opportunities. Maybe one day, women attending a conference for CEO’s of software companies will no longer be alone in a sea of men in suits and hear the question, “*So who do you work for?*”



L to R: Margaret Whalen, Director of Geneva Center for Autism, Neil Walker, Director of Geneva Center for Autism and Cynthia Howroyd, President & CEO, Virtual Expert Clinics Inc.

Cynthia Howroyd worked until 2005 as a speech-language pathologist, graduating from Dalhousie University in 1990. Her company, Virtual Expert Clinics Inc., based in Fredericton, New Brunswick, is launching its first software product, AutismPro at the Geneva Centre for Autism’s International Symposium on October 25 -27, 2006 in Toronto. AutismPro (patent pending) was inspired by Cynthia’s work in the field of autism, and arose from her close collaboration over the past year with Dr. Kathleen Ann Quill, a world-renowned author and educator in autism. The empowering online program combines the latest in web-based software technology and expert clinical know-how to provide parents and therapists with comprehensive guidance and support. The subscription-based program available from a website helps novices to autism to develop, implement, and monitor a preschool program for children with autism. Supporters and contributors to this comprehensive solution to increasing accessibility of expert guidance include: the Geneva Centre for Autism, the Autism Society of Ontario, and the Canadian Autism Research Consortium, as well as an impressive autism advisory board with such names as Dr. Gary Mesibov, Dr. Brenda Smith-Myles, Dr. Cathy Pratt, and Dr. Pamela Wolfberg.

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