

Rainwear store owner makes use of multiple mentors to achieve success in franchise retail

Under my umbrella

The Canadian Youth Business Foundation provides startup financing, mentoring and online business resources to entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 34. In a regular series, the Financial Post features CYBF alumni who discuss the hurdles faced en route to success. This week, Shanda Jerrett, owner and operator of Gumdrops Wet Weather Boutique, discusses the value of identifying not one but many mentors to assist with business development.

BY DARYL-LYNN CARLSON

The more mentors, the better off the entrepreneur, Shanda Jerrett figures. Inside of two years working with a mentor through CYBF, the Vancouver-based owner of Gumdrops Wet Weather Boutique has expanded her list of business advisors to include retail legend Harry Rosen and an inventory consultant from the United States.

But it was only through being candid about her weaknesses that she has been able to expand her network. "I have an idea of where I want to go but exactly how to get there I'm not sure I know how," Ms. Jerrett says.

As a result of her looking to others for insight, Ms. Jerrett is preparing to franchise her trendy rainwear store called Gumdrops Wet Weather Boutique, which employs five people and sells fashionable gumboots, raincoats, umbrellas and accessories in rainy Vancouver.

At the outset, the courage to ask for guidance didn't come easily, Ms. Jerrett, who describes herself as strong-willed and steadfast, says. She perceived the prospect of asking for help as a weakness.

"I felt I had to know everything and know it yesterday," Ms. Jerrett says about launching her store in 2006. "It was a huge thing to put my vulnerability out there and say, 'I don't know how to do this.'"

When she first met with her assigned CYBF mentor, Fi Dastoor, an information technology consultant with an MBA, the two hit it off. Ms. Dastoor helped Ms. Jerrett find ways to market her business, get media coverage and select advertising venues. The relationship also helped Ms. Jerrett realize the value of tapping the expertise of other professionals, she says.

It was through a supplier that she first gained guidance from another valuable expert. "Inventory has been a real challenge," she admits. "I'm in such a unique market, there's no rainwear mentor."

mouth," she says. "It's not like you can go through the Yellow Pages and say, 'Oh, here's someone to solve my problems.'"

And how did she come to get the advice of Harry Rosen? When her fledgling business was selected for an Achievements in New Retail Concepts award, Mr. Rosen was the presenter at the gala ceremony. Within weeks of receiving the endorsement, she called his office and asked to meet with him. He is helping her franchise Gumdrops Wet Weather Boutique.

Ms. Jerrett also continues to meet with Ms. Dastoor, who affirms her protege has progressed by leaps and bounds. "I think I've had a calming affect on her," says Ms. Dastoor. "She's very enthusiastic and self-motivated."

These days Ms. Dastoor helps market the store by wearing the decorated gumboots and trademark rainwear, fuelling sales by word of mouth.

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smallbusiness@nationalpost.com



Shanda Jerrett's interaction with mentor Fi Dastoor, right, made her value expert advice.

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