



WISE conversations with inspiring women

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Between chunks of cheese and slices of cake, 25 women swapped career advice at WISE's opening event at Carleton University on October 1, 2014. First year students mingled with PhDs and industry experts long past 8:00 p.m.

The event began with brief presentations by Judith Lockwood, Gina Courtland and Catherine Lemay about their mentors. For the rest of the night the speakers led informal discussions. Here are their thoughts on some of the topics covered:

Gender discrimination

"Ignore it, and if it's too much to ignore, go through it," said Gina. She never paid attention to discrimination. If your workplace is not supportive of women, find one that is.

One of Judith's mentors had a different view. According to him, women have an advantage because they know exactly what prejudices they will face at work, an advantage many men don't have.

Jobs in a tough economy

Judith said that today's job market is much like the one she faced in the 80s; few jobs in science and engineering and no job security.

For job seekers she advised making contacts in your industry, and knowing what you can bring to a company.

Mentorship

Mentorship gives life continuity and direction. Mentors can be supervisors, peers or even family. They don't need to work in your field, and they don't even need to be female. "Ironically, I'm coming (to this event) and I don't have any female mentors" said Judith.

Balancing family and career

Students should consider their priorities before they start their career, advised Catherine. If you want to start a family, look carefully at a job's benefits such as paid maternity leave and flexible work arrangements. If you value work-life balance, find an employer who does too.

Networking

Everyone knows that networking is important, but not everyone likes cocktails and conferences. Networking just means meeting people, any kind of people. Get involved in activities that interest you like volunteering or recreational sports. When you do things you're passionate about, people will see you at your best. You never know who will be able to help you get where you want to go.

Confidence

"As women, we always want to be liked" said Judith. "You don't have to like the people you work with, you just have to work with them."

Reflecting on a mentor who ran an interior design firm, Gina said "She was stylish, she was confident, she was herself." Gina says women should be risk takers, and even a little bit cocky. "You are strong, so be strong."

As a student, this event was a great opportunity to speak with women of all ages and interests. It also helped me think about the big picture. For example, what networking can I do at the clubs I already attend? How will children fit into my career path?

It was especially comforting to learn that ours is not the only generation to face a tough economy upon graduating. While it was good to get advice from women well into their careers, I also realized the value of networking with my peers. For example, I was able to connect a computer engineering student to a few of my friends who work in her field. It was a great night and I am eager to attend future WISE events.

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