



Greg Boyle of the
Stonewood Group.

Filling the leadership *in Ottawa's tech sector*

Increasingly, Greg Boyle says he hears a disturbing message from his clients: don't bother looking in Ottawa for talented business leaders, because you won't find them. And as a managing partner of Ottawa-based Stonewood Group, an executive placement firm for emerging tech companies, Mr. Boyle adds he typically defers to his clients' wishes.

"They were saying 'there are not really that many good people in Ottawa with the right DNA to lead companies,'" says Mr. Boyle. But as a former CEO and an Ottawa executive himself, he says he doesn't believe high-calibre candidates can only be found in Montreal, Toronto or the U.S.

But what troubles Mr. Boyle is that he also recognizes a grain of truth in his clients' criticism. "There's always been a concern in terms of leadership to allow the technology sector to prosper in Ottawa," he says, pointing to the departure or marginalization of Ottawa high-tech heavy hitters over the past decade — Corel, Newbridge, Mitel, JDS, Nortel, Cognos — as a disturbing trend that has to be analyzed and reversed. Not only do the jobs go south or dry up, but with them go the critical mass and high-tech environment needed to give future leaders the right experience and mentoring opportunities. As it stands now, Mr. Boyle says, it's not the leadership DNA that's absent; natural leaders who emerge in Ottawa either leave or choose careers outside the tech sector. "The environment does not exist for them to flourish," he says. "If we keep just focusing on being a government town, that's what we'll be."

*Written by Jeff Esau
Photos by Darren Brown*

In Mr. Boyle's line of work it's critical to foster homegrown, world-class leaders. During the past few years, his firm has attempted to kick-start that process through seminars and panel discussions with seasoned CEOs in the Ottawa tech sector. While this route has been effective in giving young entrepreneurs and company owners good practical knowledge, it has been a sporadic effort — a series of one-off events. He says those events will continue, but to drill deeper into the well of talent, Mr. Boyle, a Carleton grad himself, decided to hit the problem head-on by organizing the first annual Ottawa Leadership Challenge, a venue for university business and management students to compete for bursaries and paid internships with leading Ottawa tech firms.

"I wanted to nurture some young people to look at tech in leadership roles, and I want the best-of-breed in a business sense," he says. Making it a competition was a natural choice for him, he explains, because that's the way of the real business world.

When Mr. Boyle last fall began looking for partners and sponsors for the event, he says he was overwhelmed by enthusiasm from the local business sector and Ottawa's two universities' business schools — Carleton University's Sprott School of Business and the University of Ottawa's Telfer School of Management.

"The program was designed to encourage the very best local students who hold three traits: strong leadership skills, an interest in the technology industry, and a passion about the Ottawa region," says Bruce Raganold, client serv-

ices director at PricewaterhouseCoopers and a key event organizer. "When taken together, these qualities are valuable to the future of the Ottawa technology community, and specifically to build companies that can grow and stay headquartered in Ottawa." The plan is to make the competition an annual event.

Each school arranged their own mechanism of selecting six finalists, who were judged by a panel of Ottawa business and HR experts on their papers and full presentations on facets of business leadership. In April, judges named two winners from each school.

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Brenda Clark, president of the 1200-member Ottawa chapter of Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario

Brenda Clark, president of the 1200-member Ottawa Chapter of Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario, a key sponsor, teaches at the University of Ottawa's management school and was a presentation judge. She says the Ottawa event could serve as a template for similar programs in other centres, "to develop young, up-and-coming leaders in the community."

Ms. Clark says while the tech sector will remain the event's focus, future years will see the competition broadened to cut across all business sectors. "We believe that human resources very much need to be at the table to promote leadership within the business community," Ms. Clark says. "Every leader needs to have good human resource management skills."

"If you take all of the people out of the building, is the operation still operating? It's not," she says.

"The level of the presentations was astounding," she adds, noting the brav-

ery some competitors demonstrated with such topics as failure as a necessary part of leadership, women's leadership and the importance of choosing one's own leadership style.

Kim Butler, CFO of Ottawa-based Bridgewater Systems — a sponsor of an internship for one of the winners — and also a judge, says she was astounded at the management and technical savvy of participants. "(They) were phenomenal. At 20 or 21, I certainly didn't have the poise and ability to deliver a presentation to a broad group like they did." Ms. Butler says Bridgewater's winning intern, University of Ottawa's Ewa Kisilewicz, will be employed in the firm's IT group devising improved workflow planning with new business tools. "We're looking forward to benefiting from Ewa's technical and educational background in the company's day-to-day operations," she says, adding her presentation focused on the meaning of success in business activities and personal life. "Promoting from within an organization is a great way to obtain essential leaders. However, if business students are not overly attracted to technology in the first place, it is unlikely that they will pursue a career in this area."

Just settling in to his internship at Xmark Corp., Carleton winner Jonathan Dawe says meeting the onrush of expectations and aspirations of "millennials" (people born since 1995) will be a key ingredient for a successful leader to stop the brain drain in Ottawa. "The emergence of the millennial generation presents the Ottawa business community with a unique chance to market itself to the leaders of tomorrow by positioning Ottawa as a city full of opportunity," Mr. Dawe says. "Ottawa is a place that promotes innovative ideas and respects risk-taking. Employees feel a sense of involvement and connection to their work."

While at Xmark, Mr. Dawe will report to president and CEO Dan Gunther, one of the judges on the Carleton panel. "I was extremely impressed with his presentation abilities — he's a bright, bright guy," Mr. Gunther says. He plans to rotate Mr. Dawe through each of the company's six areas to maximize his involvement in the health technology firm. ■

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The 2008 Leadership Challenge

In April, four Ottawa university business and management students each won a \$5,000 bursary and a paid internship at an Ottawa tech firm. To compete, they presented their vision of leadership that will sustain and energize Ottawa's tech sector to a panel of CEO and executive judges.

Here's a sample of what they said.

Jonathan Dawe, Carleton University, "Managing the Millennials": "Canada has long suffered from a leadership brain drain, where powerful and influential business leaders migrate to places where their ambitions can be realized. However, a metamorphosis is occurring. A new generation of workers is entering the job market. These workers are fast-paced, innovative and resourceful. These workers seek to make an impact on the world, produce valuable work and love a challenge. These workers are the Millennial Generation. By attracting and cultivating young talent, Ottawa has the ability to heighten its global profile."

Ewa Kisilewicz, University of Ottawa, "Skipping Stones": "Stone-skipping may seem irrelevant to any explanation of success; however, the two phenomena do have many elements in common. Selecting the perfect stone is recognizing one's own beliefs and having a firm, personal definition of success; this initial understanding determines one's goals and the direction of one's energy. Angling one's body in order to make a toss and 'winding up for the toss' is much like

finding motivators that push one to act towards success. The throw reflects action and the initial contact with water can be considered to be the result of actions. If one's actions are able to help those around them, inspire others, or improve the world, their being will have an extraordinary effect – this resembles the stone skipping across the water. Overall, what separates a successful and non-successful stone skipper is the successful individual's understanding that he or she has total control over what happens to the stone and so must try to improve skills in order to gain better results; much like each person who acts is the ultimate determiner of his or her own destiny."

Melani Bejder, Carleton University, "Passing the Torch": "The tech business in Ottawa has really stepped up to the plate in terms of trying to seek out the leaders of tomorrow to enable them to develop their raw leadership skills. Leadership is all about passing the torch; if you do not teach others your ways and expertise they would be reinventing the wheel which takes time, energy and money. But co-mingling of teaching and allowing people to develop their own unique experiences and techniques is what ensures growth and development in not only the tech market but in every market. Leadership is the inspiration that develops companies and innovations."

Melissa Chartrand, University of Ottawa, "Deciding to Succeed": "Leadership is important everywhere. It is important at work, at home, in school and even in a



hobby. The people that show leadership are ones that will end up living the life they want to live. They will not reminisce on what they should have done and what they haven't done. Leaders take decisions, they influence and guide others; they are the ones that makes this life interesting. A business without a leader will not reach success; it may survive for a while but it will never be among the tops. There needs to be a leader at every level of a business because each unit or division needs to get things done and in order to do so, someone needs to be making decisions. These decisions are usually not easy decisions and successful leaders are the ones that are able to make those kinds of decisions and even be innovative about it."

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