

Intell - Women in Business  
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# Karen cares about people and her company, too

BY BILL HUNT  
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Karen Mifflin started working at Tim Hortons on the night crew selling coffee and donuts 10 years ago and today she is general manager of the Hanley Corporation that operates six of the popular coffee shops in Belleville.

But Mifflin dismisses the notion she is 'self-made'; instead she credits her success to those around her who do the same jobs she did before reaching the top position. And Mifflin, 54, believes that is the case with most people in management or who have reached a pinnacle in their careers.

After finishing high school, Mifflin got married to a man who owned a barber-shop in the Napanee Mall. He was a good barber, she says, but a bad businessman, so Mifflin took over that side of things and the business grew from a one-man operation to two hair salons and 18 employees within four years. That continued for about 20 years before the marriage ended and Mifflin decided to take a job at Hortons until she got back on her feet. She started on the night shift and "worked my way from the ground up, with a lot of help... from everybody around me," she says. After nine months working nights, she became a supervisor. That lasted about two months before she was promoted to manager of the Cannifton outlet, where she remained for approximately two years before assuming the current position as general manager of Hanley Corporation (owned by Mark and Mary Hanley).

Her experience as a trustee on the Lennox and Addington Board of Education for 10 years, five of them as chairperson and four of those negotiating contracts with teachers' groups, helps with financial matters. But it is dealing with the 240 employees of the Hanley Corporation that she enjoys most.

noon, I'm out on weekends. Anytime they need me, I like to be there." That sometimes means calls at home at night but that is by design, says Mifflin because she doesn't want an employee with a problem to have no one to turn to. Problems could be anything from an equipment breakdown to a problem at home requiring their presence, to intoxicated customers late at night, to hold-ups (there have been two robberies during Mifflin's eight years as general manager).

Such nighttime calls are viewed in the larger picture by Mifflin. The employees "get up night after night after night and come into work. It's very rare that I have to," she says.

To keep in touch with these employees, she does a night tour of the stores at least once a month.

"If you don't make contact with them I think they might feel abandoned."

A willingness to accept change is another factor in her success. People unwilling to do so are bound to fail.

"This business, since I've been in it, has changed massively," she says, pointing to new eating habits of customers, improved technology, and the city's no-smoking bylaw. Mifflin (a smoker herself), took the smoking rooms out of the stores long before the bylaw was passed.

Fortunately, the Hanley Corporation sports a progressive philosophy.

"That's what I enjoy about the company I work for the most. No idea is a bad one."

Asked about discrimination in the workplace because of her gender, Mifflin says it still exists, but is considerably less than when she started out in the business world 30 years ago.

While honoured to be nominated for the Women in Business award, Mifflin feels the kudos are almost misplaced. The company's success, she believes, "is just because we have good managers and crews."



Karen Mifflin, general manager of Hanley Corporation

"I have met and worked with some of the most fantastic people ... I am so lucky that way," says Mifflin. She cites several employees with physical challenges as examples. One woman is in a wheelchair. She never misses a day of work. Another woman lost both hands in a fire. "I'm not kidding you (she is) one of the best employees I've ever had working for me," says Mifflin.

Every one of the six store managers worked their way up the ladder to their current positions from crew members, notes Mifflin.

A big part of Mifflin's job, as she sees it, is to ensure the employees are looked after and that they can approach her with any problem they have.

"I'm out in the night, I'm out in the after-