

Karen Cross

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How did you react when you heard Kingston was Canada's top city for women?

As someone who has just recently become the first female leader of the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce since 1841 I shouldn't have been surprised. It's a great city with a variety of opportunities for women whether it be for work, volunteering or simply enjoying life.

Quote or book that sums up your philosophy on life and leadership?

"Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right" – Henry Ford. That's a favourite.

One of my favourite books is "The Leadership Challenge" by Kouzes & Posner. It speaks to the five practices of leadership. What resonated for me was listening. Becoming a better listener was a key turning point in my career.

What do you like about working in Kingston?

There are so many great things about working and living here.

This is a high energy community with a healthy and diverse economic base. The community is focused on progress, investment and job creation. The work life balance is unsurpassed with dining, live entertainment, shopping, recreation, and night life.

In my position as Executive Director of the Chamber I'm able to spend time with this diverse business community, to understand what their needs are and how we as Chamber can support them.

Who are some mentors that have played a formative role in your journey?

Sue Menzies was Vice-President operations when I worked for Tabi International and she put me on my road to success. As one of her direct reports she demonstrated a leadership style I had never seen before. She gave me the confidence to grow and pushed me to work outside my comfort zone, expanding my capabilities. With her guidance and tutelage my career took off.

How are you helping other women attain or succeed in leadership roles?

My time at Tabi International shaped my leadership style. I learned that as a leader it is my responsibility to provide my team with the tools and resources that they need to grow and succeed. I hope I have passed this wisdom on and that I have opened doors and removed barricades that otherwise would have impeded their development. The greatest reward for me is to see them outgrow their position and move on the next phase of their careers.

Advice for girls seeking to lead in the future.

Always be honest, open, and humble. Step outside your comfort zone. Take that leap and don't self-doubt. Just take that next step and go forward.

Favourite places to spend time in Kingston?

Don't ask me to pick a favourite, there are so many great places in Kingston. I love to go for a walk in Lake Ontario Park, it is such a magnificent natural environment with glorious views and access to the water. Nothing beats going to Springer Market Square on a chilly fall Saturday morning, or any Saturday morning for that matter, to browse the many stalls for fresh fruits, vegetables. Confederation Park is a an ideal spot to have lunch, an ice cream cone or a coffee, while listening to live music.