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Isolation dooms women in top roles, speaker says

Put priority on growing firm, not proving self

By Kimberly Peterson
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Ambler

At the Women's Enterprise Breaking Barriers and Beyond leadership conference Tuesday, business consultant Aldonna Ambler encouraged nearly 150 local women to think big about their businesses and take the next step.

Ambler has 36 years of experience helping rapidly growing companies and hosts a weekly Internet radio show on VoiceAmerica Business. She said many women business owners work too hard and often refrain from getting the help they need to make their business successful.

"The obstacle is not money. ... The enemy of entrepreneurship is isolation," Ambler said in her keynote address at the Fort Wayne Marriott.

Ambler is president of the international firm Ambler Growth Strategy Consultants Inc., based in Hammonton, N.J.

Ambler said female business owners have to move past the goal of proving something to the world and decide they want to make money and grow their business. Ambler said making the transition requires a woman take a leadership role and go from owner to president.

"It's an out-of-body experience to become a president," Ambler said. "Just because it's on your business card doesn't mean it's real."

Carla Fields, an assistant vice president for cash management at National City, said the speaker was informative.

"Even though I'm not in business, she said things even I could relate to," Fields said.

About 130 people registered for the half-day conference but including staff and volunteers, Women's Enterprise director Rebecca Ravine estimated about 150 attended.

The seventh annual Breaking Barriers conference included breakout sessions on topics ranging from "doing business with the government" to "perspectives of franchising."

At the award luncheon that ended the half-day conference, Stacey Smith, founder of Prairie Quest Consulting, was honored with the first Women's Enterprise Small Business Leadership Award. Although this is the first year the award has been given, Ravine said she plans to present it annually at the conference.

Smith is president and chief executive officer of Prairie Quest, a company that specializes in business transformation and project management.

Prairie Quest, which has been operating for four years, won a contract with the Navy in January worth \$6 million over six years. Smith said the large contract came after successfully completing many smaller contracts.

Smith said she was honored to be chosen among so many other successful woman-owned businesses.

"I was stunned," she said.

Ravine said that Prairie Quest won the award because it was a woman-owned business experiencing strong growth. The fact that Smith began her company as a Women's Enterprise client was also a factor.

"It's a success story," Ravine said.

Carrie Van Daele, president and chief executive officer of Van Daele & Associates Inc. in Fort Wayne, said this was the first Breaking Barriers conference she's attended, but she was glad she attended.

"It's excellent information," Van Daele said. "More women need to attend something like this."

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By the numbers

- *Less than 5 percent of venture capital goes to women-owned businesses*
- *Less than 5 percent of government contracts are awarded to women-owned businesses*
- *Less than 5 percent of paid corporate board positions are filled by women*
- *Women are five times more likely to dissolve companies than men*

Source: Aldonna Ambler