



BY PETER MITHAM

Training needs to evolve as you move up the corporate ladder

Getting on the executive track was more than a matter of determination, hard work and luck for Andrew Tong, one of 27 real estate professionals recognized in San Francisco this past November as emerging leaders by the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties.

Tong, the 34-year-old vice-president of acquisitions with Vancouver-based developer Concert Properties Ltd., started out with a bachelor of commerce degree in real estate from the University of British Columbia in 1994.

Up curve: Andrew Tong has heeded advice from family, friends, work colleagues and a mentor



## Education

But schooling was only his first step.

He's spent the past dozen years honing his knowledge of the real estate business through practical experience, business relationships and, most of all, learning from the people around him – family, friends and colleagues.

"Our world is so small that, inevitably, everything is very interchangeable. What you learn, even among your family, can be applied in how you relate to people when you do work and when you do business," he said.

The people Tong mentions as mentors reflect that. Those who have influenced his growth include the pastor of the church he attends, his father and Concert president David Podmore.

"My pastor has been a very great teacher and friend who has helped me along and given me advice over the years," he said. "Dave Podmore has been a significant mentor over the years and has given me lots of opportunities to grow and learn."

The overall corporate environment at Concert has also been important, Tong said, noting that he researched the various companies he interviewed with on graduation to make sure the corporate culture not only meshed with his own values but would support his future growth.

"[Concert] was a small company with big dreams. But when you looked at the individuals, and who was involved with this company, when you looked at their reputations, it was superb," he said.

Tong's own commitment to embracing the support he had was also important, Podmore said. Tong has continually improved his skills to meet the challenges he's faced, refining his "management and motivational capabilities."

TBWA\Vancouver president Andrea Southcott, head of one of the biggest advertising agencies in Vancouver, believes executive training needs to evolve as one moves up the corporate ladder.

Southcott said most graduates fresh out of university focus on learning the ropes of the business, training their employers are usually able to give.



**Andrea Southcott: executive training needs to evolve as you move up the corporate ladder**

But as employees rise into management roles, they need to develop management skills and sector-specific knowledge that grooms them for greater responsibility. Personal growth, networking and other opportunities to broaden relationship skills can also help.

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**—Andrea Southcott, president, TBWA\Vancouver**

"There's stuff that feeds you for your job, stuff that connects you with other people, and stuff that you might do for your own personal training," Southcott said.

Personally, Southcott has benefited from forums hosted by the Young Presidents' Organization. She currently chairs the B.C. chapter of YPO, an organization she joined in 2002.

"For me, I found it helpful being in the forum group because it's people who can sometimes see things in you that

you're blind to yourself," she said.

While courses can help with content, other business people that command your respect or whom you can trust can help you make decisions and feel comfortable taking the risks your business needs to take to grow.

"Surround yourself with people you can trust and you can talk to," she said, adding: "Trust is almost more important than knowledge."

But when a trust exists, it comes with responsibility, and Darlene Bailey, senior vice-president responsible for operations and human resources with WCG Consultants Ltd. in Victoria, believes executives have a responsibility to exercise a leadership that helps others advance. For her, leadership is the work of "removing boulders from people on their path to success."

She points to her own experience, noting that the honesty of others and the feedback she received was important to her developing the skills that she needed to be a leader.

"I've had the privilege of being mentored by executives who encouraged me to be my best," she said. "Yes, you have to have an aptitude, but you also then have to be encouraged and directed on a course."

Encouragement is something Justin Webb, vice-president of Olympic Services with Bell Canada in Western Canada, tries to give his staff.

Webb graduated from the University of Alberta in 1988 with a bachelor's degree in computer engineering. His professional training gave him an ability to analyze problems, but he's now more likely to be analyzing staff overseeing the \$60 million in communications infrastructure Bell is handling for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

"There's a certain kit of tools that you need as an executive," he said.

"You need to be a strong communicator, you need some financial skills, you need to be able to coach people, you need to be connected in your community, you need to be able to network. For each one of my management team, I look at where they are, where their passion is and try to help them get there by giving them opportunities to do those sorts of things." ■