

Springboard holds steady

Courses to encourage women to assess skills and set goals are just as relevant — 20 years on

Nearly 20 years ago, *The Oxford Times* reported that training consultant Valerie Fawcett had launched the Springboard Women's Development Programme in Oxford.

This spring, she will be running the course as an open programme in Oxford for the 20th consecutive year.

Springboard helps women to assess their skills, values, abilities, strengths and weaknesses, set goals for themselves and start achieving those goals over a three-month period. Participants attend four one-day workshops and complete a workbook during that time.

Since then Springboard has run a National Training Award and over 190,000 women worldwide have been through the course.

With the advances women have made in the workplace in 20 years, is Springboard still relevant?

Valerie, of Syntagm Ltd, says that interest in Springboard is still as keen as ever.

"It is true that women have made progress, and the conditions for them in some organisations have changed dramatically," said Valerie.

"When I first started running Springboard programmes, the idea of flexible working, for example, was just a pipe-dream. Those of us who suggested it were laughed at by many people.

"That was before businesses realised it was to their own benefit to provide working conditions which would enable them to continue to have the talents of experienced female staff after they had their children."

However, Springboard is a personal and work development programme, and women still need to take initiative in both these areas, set and achieve goals and present themselves assertively.

Every woman sets her own agenda for the course. Women who are not ambitious to climb the career ladder benefit from working on their confidence, initiative and motivation. The course caters for women at different levels, ages and stages.

Organisations have found that Springboard also helps people to cope with change, which has become increasingly



Valerie Fawcett

important, considering the gathering pace of change in organisations over the last 20 years.

A number of organisations in and around Oxford have run Springboard courses for their staff and others take places for individuals on the open programme.

Has Valerie noticed any difference in the applicants coming forward since 1991?

"I would say that the younger women now take it for granted that they will have a continuing working life, even if they have children, and now that "jobs for life" are unusual, they are thinking of different ways to fulfil career and mother roles," she explained.

"I also get more women on the open course now who are thinking of starting their own business, or have already done so. I think that reflects the dissatisfaction women still have with breaking into senior roles in some organisations, and the conditions of carrying out those roles."

Sue Bale, now publishing director for dictionaries at Macmillan Education, was on the first course in 1991.

She said: "The course helped me to think more clearly about how to achieve my own goals. At the same time it provided valuable insights into how to improve confidence and

engagement within my team. The course couldn't be more aptly named — it provides a springboard to taking the next career step with confidence."

When Valerie ran the first Springboard in Oxford in 1991, she was pregnant with her own daughter, who is now 18. What does Valerie think will be different for her daughter's generation at work?

"I am delighted to say that I think she is more likely to be valued for her talents by people who recognise that women are capable of carrying out many more roles than they were doing in 1991.

"However, I think that, like all women, she will still need to be proactive in shaping her career, and take responsibility for her own development, rather than expect that others will shape it for her."

The Springboard course has become international, now running in 32 countries, and the workbook has been translated into 12 languages. The developers of Springboard, Liz Willis and Jenny Daisley, won a European Women of Achievement award in 2000.

■ *The 2010 Oxford Springboard course starts on April 21. For more details visit the website: www.syntagm.co.uk or call Valerie Fawcett on 01235 522859.*