

# Strategic thinking ensures success

By Joey Fitzpatrick  
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When Aileen Reid speaks to young entrepreneurs these days, her message often runs along the lines of: 'Do as I say, not as I did.'

"I didn't have a business plan, and I didn't have proper business financing," she recalled. "There wasn't anything strategic about it."

But that's not the advice the owner of A.P. Reid Insurance passes on when she accepts invitations to address public gatherings — often groups of aspiring entrepreneurs.

"Now you have to think strategically," she said. "Even though I flew by the seat of my pants, I find that now I'm wanting to see business plans, and I want to see those skills in the people around me."

She's spoken to groups at Dalhousie, Mount St. Vincent, the Federal Business Development Bank and other entrepreneur groups.

In March she will be the luncheon speaker for the Canadian Association of Women in the Media. There she will speak about balancing the demands of home and business. It's a territory she knows well — she was a single mother of a four-year-old son when she started the company.

Two decades ago, Aileen Reid had hit the glass ceiling in the insurance world. Her hope was to become a managing partner at her company — not an unreasonable expectation for a highly successful agent. But she was told that for a woman, that was highly unlikely.

So on July 27, 1980 she launched A.P. Reid Insurance. Today it's likely the most recognized insurance name in the offshore in Atlantic Canada, and her son, Jamie Reid, is now managing partner.

In addition to the offshore, much



Joseph Robichaud Photography

**Jamie Reid, managing partner at A.P. Reid Insurance, and Aileen Reid, president, show Ashley Reid the ropes.**

of the company's success over the past two decades has come in the construction, manufacturing and automotive sectors. Clients include the Sable Offshore Energy Project, Strait Crossing Inc., Dominion Diving, Michelin, the Automotive Trades Association, the Empire Group and Survival Systems.

In 1990 Aileen Reid was #52 in the Canadian Business/Chatelaine profiles of the top 100 successful Canadian women entrepreneurs. She has also been profiled on Success Inc. on Women's Television Network.

But perhaps the most remarkable part of the story unfolded a decade ago, and to those who were there, it cemented the name, A.P. Reid Insurance, with the single most important ingredient in the insurance business — trust.

In 1990 A.P. Reid's Bridgewater office was the victim of embezzle-

ment, an inside job in which money was taken for coverage, but no receipts issued. While the story garnered much negative publicity at first, at the end of the day, because A.P. Reid stayed put, stayed open, and honoured its obligations, it gained a reputation as a company that doesn't cut and run when the chips are down.

In 1995 Aileen Reid was nominated as Female Entrepreneur of the Year in the financial recovery category. At a public speaking engagement that same year she was asked why she didn't simply declare bankruptcy at the time and close the Bridgewater office, which was a separately incorporated company.

"It was an opportunity to make good on our first 10 years of promises," Ms. Reid said. "If you become a customer of ours, we will indeed go to the wall for you."