****

**The Young Professional Women’s Symposium on Leadership**

A landmark professional event for young and emerging female leaders, May 3, 2018

The inaugural Young Professional Women’s (YPW) Symposium on Leadership took place at the YWCA in Toronto on May 3rd, and brought together senior and emerging leaders in support of women’s professional advancement. Spearheading the event is Ruby Latif, entrepreneur and CEO of Milieu Strategy and Consulting Inc., and her team of 20 young professional women. Special guest speakers include Mayor John Tory, the Hon. Harinder Malhi, Ontario Minister of the Status of Women and Professor Wendy Cukier, founder and director of Ryerson University’s Diversity Institute.

Through research and consultations with young professional women in a variety of industries, Latif recognized the gap that exists in current career programming that fails to address the needs and concerns of young professionals and entrepreneurs including those from diverse backgrounds seeking to enter or advance in the Canadian workplace. She notes, “I have had similar experiences, and many of the young professional women attending today’s event have as well. A recurring theme in our preliminary consultation with diverse young professionals was the need for advice on leadership, mentorship and access to networks to help navigate the unspoken rules and pathways to success. Our intent for this event is to explore what young professional women need and what they can offer each other. This event will allow these young women to network with other established and ambitious women, help them become successful in their careers, take on new challenges, and develop new skills.”

Professor Cukier, who recently published a [study](https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/diversity/reports/Diversity%20Leads%202015%20Report.pdf) on women’s representation in senior leadership roles in the Greater Montreal and Toronto Areas and consulted on the development of Bill C-25, noted that “women, particularly those from minority backgrounds, continue to be severely underrepresented in leadership roles in almost all industries. It is clear that organizations need to prioritize diversity and inclusivity at all levels of management. However, there is a gap between the pool of talent that is clearly available, and the pipeline that connects them to senior leaders. This event offers young women an opportunity to gain the professional support and mentorship necessary to expand their network of opportunities and develop their own path forward.”

Mayor John Tory is proud that this event is being held in Toronto. Said Mayor Tory, “Here in Toronto, one of the most diverse cities in Canada, our youth are eager to contribute to society and the economy through their careers. This unique event will showcase the incredible professional talent we have, while supporting the advancement of young women in all industries.”

Ontario Minister of the Status of Women, Harinder Malhi, is pleased that that senior and emerging leaders are gathering together to develop events that focus on supporting and mentoring young female professionals. Said Malhi, “As Ontario youth come together to expand opportunities for each other, gain leadership skills and develop the social networks necessary for success, it is key that senior leaders from all industries engage closely with our youth, and devise strategies to increase the participation of young professional women at all levels of industry.”

Research shows that gaps exist in the support available to diverse, early career professionals, particularly for those who lack the social capital that accompanies a well-developed network. Other studies indicate that diversity and inclusion offer organizations a competitive advantage through the creation of a well-rounded workforce reflective of the diverse backgrounds and skills present in the population. Leading organizations are now turning their attention to retaining and promoting diverse candidates and closing the gender gap. As Kenneth J. Fredeen, General Counsel for Deloitte LLP & Chair of Legal Leaders for Diversity notes, “My observation is that to be a successful leader today, you must be an inclusive leader. And furthermore, only inclusive organizations will succeed in a world of constant change and global competition.”

On an individual level, Sonu Dhanju- Dhillon, Partner at Torkin Manes LLP, believes this event offers young women a unique opportunity to gain transferable skills that enhance their success on a personal and professional level. Dillon says, “Leadership starts with one’s own life. When all aspects of your life are in order, you can attain your goals. In attaining your goals, you will attract the support necessary to be given opportunities to learn how to lead. With repetitive opportunities, you learn to lead.”

Future aims for this event will be centered around developing opportunities for coaching and mentoring while highlighting inspirational speakers and delivering skill-centered workshops. The organizing committee has been surveying participants, and plans to release research in the next few months focusing on the leadership pipeline.

The Young Professional Women’s Symposium on Leadership is thankful to the Government of Ontario, the City of Toronto, and LinkedIn for their generous sponsorship and support of this event.