

Meeting her needs with a little Imagination+

by Christine Baker

"Imagination is more important than knowledge, for knowledge is limited, while imagination embraces the entire world."—Einstein

Sandy Biback didn't choose her career so much as it chose her. As an office manager for a telephone consulting firm, she was responsible for planning a few seminars. When the 'few' turned into about 120 a year, Biback realized she had 'the knack' and soon developed her own style – and a career.

Although there was little available in terms of training or education, Biback took a very basic meeting planning night course which was available at the time.

"Now there is lots of [training] – at various community colleges, through hospitality and/or communications programs," says Biback.

Twenty-two years later she is the owner and operator of Imagination+ Meeting Planners Inc., a company which she started in 1990. She has also recently launched Meeting Essentials A-Z which designs and implements training workshops to corporations. It allows those assigned with the task of planning meetings insight into the basic requirements of the job.

So how did she get to where she is without any formal training?

"I left myself open to opportunity, educated myself on the industry, joined associations and am active in them," says Biback.

She subscribes to about 20 industry publications, continually invests in professional development, is a member and past vice-president of Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and has a strong belief in lifelong learning. As well, she has gotten two very significant industry certifications - she is one of

only 250 Certified Meeting Managers worldwide and one of 7000 Certified Meeting Professionals.

In addition to running Imagination+, she teaches meeting planning and management at George Brown College of Hospitality and sat on a task force with the Ministry of Training,



Sandy Biback

Colleges and Universities to help design an apprenticeship program for Meeting and Special Events professions. Add the fact that she is currently the President of the Independent Meeting Planners Association of Canada (IMPAC), and it is clear that Biback is committed to improving industry benchmarks.

Sandy's greatest planning effort to date was the "Welcome to Canada" event for the February 1997 Special Olympics World Winter Games held in Toronto. She managed the event for over 2500 athletes, coaches and celebrities. It was voted the best non-athletic event of the Games. Sandy and her entire com-

mittee volunteered all their time and expertise.

A firm believer in giving back to, and promoting, the industry, Biback received the Accepted Practices Exchange volunteer of the month award in October 2002 as well as the MPI's Meeting Planner of the Year 2000-2001.

Although there is no established mentoring process in the industry, Biback has found strength and support from an independent planner, Joan Eisenstodt, who is based in Washington.

"Mentors are where you find them," says Biback. "I know I'm considered a mentor to many in the industry."

With all of these things on her agenda, Biback has to work to find balance in her life.

"This is very hard for me as I tend to put blinders on when working on a project," says Biback. "I often don't know when to stop."

When she does stop, Biback enjoys spending time with her two children, working out and getting regular massages to cope with stress. If she had more time, Biback says she would devote it to photography – a hobby that resulted in a photography show last year. *BWC*

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A Few Facts

- **IMPAC website:**
www.impaccanada.com
- **90 percent of IMPAC members are women**
- **75 percent of MPI members are women**
- **Meeting planning is a \$102.3 billion industry**