



THE LADDER

Gerri Sinclair of Kensington Capital: ‘When people tell me I can’t do something, I want to do it even more’

BRENDA BOUW

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Gerri Sinclair, Managing Director of Kensington Capital, also founded NCompass Labs, the digital content management company acquired by Microsoft in 2001.

DARRYL DYCK

Gerri Sinclair is a managing director at Kensington Capital Partners and leader of its Vancouver office, where she’s in charge of directing the \$100-million BC Tech Fund. She is also a digital strategy adviser at Vancity Credit Union. Ms. Sinclair was the founder and CEO of NCompass Labs, the digital content management company acquired by Microsoft in 2001. She was also the founding director of the ExCITE lab at Simon Fraser University, the first digital media technology centre in Canada. Ms. Sinclair has a PhD in Renaissance Drama as well as an honorary doctor of science in computing science from the University of British Columbia.

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but when money got tight, she took a job selling shoes at Woodward's department store.

I grew up in Vancouver, where I live now, but I also lived in Toronto and Montreal at different points in my life. My husband (Canadian poet and writer Lionel Kearns) and I also spend about six weeks a year in Barcelona, which is our second home. We also have a place on Saturna Island in British Columbia. I generally say I live on an airplane. I am a bit of a whirling dervish, always on the move.

My childhood was free and unencumbered and open to exploration. It helped me understand what it takes to be self-directed. I was given the freedom to choose my own path. So many kids today don't have that opportunity. Their schedules are set up by their parents and schools. I believe the freedom I was given shaped me. From my perspective, there is always something new and exciting to see and do and learn. I think that has been a constant in my life.

I've been lucky, I've had many mentors in my career to date, both men and women. My husband has also had a huge influence on my life. He's always told me that I could be anything and do anything and supported me along the way. I chose well.

I've also mentored a number of young people. I think I've learned equally from young people as well as the older people who have mentored me. I love the exchange of ideas with the younger people I help mentor. Their passion and energy inspire me.

What I love doing more than anything is creating a kick-ass team and them winning in the world. There's leadership involved in building the team, in developing the individuals and in working side-by-side with them. There are many different facets to leadership; there's the inspiration but also learning from the team members as you lead and teach.

I remember when I decided to form NCompass Labs out of my work at Simon Fraser University. A person in a position of power said to me, 'You aren't seriously thinking of becoming the CEO of the company, are you?' I said, 'As a matter of fact I am.' He suggested I couldn't do it because I was green and because I was a woman. It made it clear, that was exactly what I was going to do. It was a huge motivating force for me. It's part of my personality: When people tell me I can't do something, I want to do it even more.

My mother always told me to roll with the punches. That was good advice. The best advice I received was the idea that I could have an impact on the world. The impact could be economic, social, intellectual, it could be an act of kindness. The concept is that you have the power to make a difference. That was a big thing for me.

I get a lot of energy from connections, whether it's with people, ideas or building something that has meaning in the world. Innovation drives me. At 71 years old, I'm older than anyone I work with in all aspects of my life. People always ask me when I'm going to retire. Retirement doesn't compute for me. I will continue to be active and engaged as long as I can.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

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