

Katherine Magee (MBA '00)

Founder, Greenopolis

Interview by Stephen Watt

After working more than 15 years in strategic marketing and communications, you created a new company, Greenopolis. Describe how that happened.



Although my background is in small business and start-ups, I went the corporate route after Rotman, and ended up running the national marketing department for a large investment management company. After six years in that environment, I was ready for a change. I knew that I wanted to go back to my roots, but wasn't quite sure what form that would take. So in early 2006, I quit my job and went to Johannesburg for a few months to do volunteer work with CIDA City Campus (the free university for blacks in Africa), then returned to Toronto with a completely open mind, lots of questions, and really only knowing that whatever I did had to have some social impact.

Following up on a long-term interest, I started to do my own research into the 'green' area, and became overwhelmed with the sheer volume of information out there, primarily delivered by people preaching from their soap boxes or full of scary statistics with no practical solutions. As friends started to call me for information and resources, I realized that there was a business opportunity to make it easier for busy Canadians to live a greener life. So many of us know we could be doing more, but we're too busy to do the research or we're simply paralyzed about where to start. So we provide the practical ideas, solutions and resources to help out.

What is the best thing about your job?

Not having worn a suit in over a year! Seriously, the best thing is that I'm having fun and learning new things every day. No day is boring: if I am having a block on writing and research, I can work on sales or accounting. And the people I get to meet are amazing. I don't know if it's because I am now dealing primarily in the green and entrepreneurial sector, but as a whole, the people I deal with are positive, engaged, committed, collaborative and inclusive. It is inspiring and motivating work.

What is your greatest challenge?

The biggest challenge is finding the time to focus on longer-term strategy. Despite best intentions to spend time thinking about the long term goals of the company, it is easy to get caught up in the reactive side of things, dealing with the day-

to-day aspects of running the business. This is also a challenge as I don't have a partner to bounce long-term ideas and strategies off. I love working independently, but the office wall isn't always the best partner for brainstorming about future growth of the company.

What are you 'questing' for in life?

I'm questing to build a life that allows me to connect more meaningfully with the world around me, on my terms. Ideally, I will find a way to contribute to society, make a decent living, have autonomy over my schedule, stress and life, and continually be challenged with new ideas and experiences.

What's the biggest personal or professional risk you've ever taken?

Although I am a big believer in taking calculated risks throughout your life – we only go around once, so might as well make the most of it – the biggest risk so far has probably been quitting the corporate world without a clear idea about what my next steps looked like. But I have absolutely no regrets; it's been a fabulous journey so far. I have learned over time that what seems like a massive risk at the time usually turns out to be the first step in discovering new opportunities, experiences and takes you in unimaginable directions. It's simply a matter of creating the right environment to nurture the opportunities.

What is your fondest memory of your Rotman MBA experience?

The incredible people I met, worked with and interacted with, the fellow students, faculty and other staff around Rotman, many of whom I still see on a regular basis. I also have to say that the summer I spent working with **Impact Consulting** was truly amazing: I gained experience in running my own business within a partnership, built confidence and experience in selling myself, and learned how to work effectively with a great deal of ambiguity.

What do you do for fun?

Though my fun time has definitely decreased since launching Greenopolis in early 2007, I love traveling or planning the next adventure, shopping at Kensington Market for good food to cook and enjoy, training for the next half-marathon, volunteering with Rotman NeXus and the Toronto Public Library, photography, trying to squeeze in time to read, seeing the latest movies and just hanging out with friends. **R**