



looking for a reason to do what you do After 13 years building a stellar sales career in educational publishing, Laurie Pringle found the thrill had gone. That became glaringly apparent last fall when she closed a huge deal with a major university.

"Sure, I was happy," recalls Laurie. "But I should have been over the moon."

She wanted more. So Laurie left the company car, travel and expense account and decided to pursue her love.

"I realized it didn't really matter how many interactive whiteboards I sold," says Laurie. "I wanted, I needed, to be doing something important, something that mattered."

She was able to finance the dream using her commission from that big sale. This fall, Laurie enrolled as a mature student in *Humber College's Fundraising and Volunteer Management program*. She's had to downsize—giving up a great two-bedroom apart-

ment in a grand century home in downtown Toronto for a small one-bedroom unit—but she doesn't mind one bit.

This 40-year-old has always been single-minded. A native of Oshawa, Laurie had a less-than-perfect childhood. She dropped out of high school and left home at the age of 15 due to family issues. "I was a rebellious young lady and ended up in a homeless shelter for a while, did some bartending and waitressing and basically stumbled around in those early years," says Laurie candidly.

It didn't take long to realize that working a bar was not a good bet for a long-term career, and by her mid-20s she was back in school to get that high school diploma. Keen to start a post-secondary education—but "too insecure" to head into a university setting—Laurie enrolled in *Humber College's university transfer program*.

"It was a good choice," recalls Laurie. "It let me get my feet wet through small classes. By the time I went to university, I felt very confident and I had great grades."

Speaking to her today, it's hard to imagine Laurie being anything but self-assured.

She landed a position at an educational publishing house just before she graduated, planning to "get back to it later." Real life intervened, however, and it was nine years before she went back to school. In May 2004, she finished her sociology degree.

Later, selling media and technology products in publishing, Laurie ended up approaching a competitor for a job because she liked their product better. After two years with the American company, Laurie had arguably reached the pinnacle of success when she closed a half-million dollar deal with the University of Western Ontario.

As it turned out, that was a turning point.

"I thought, this is crazy. I should be overjoyed but I'm just not," said Laurie. She didn't want to feel good about what she did; she wanted to feel great.

"We all work 70 to 80 hours a week, and I didn't want to do that for the sake of money anymore," she says. "I wanted to feel passionate about it, and to feel passionate, I needed to make a difference."

Turns out her skill set in sales and marketing serves her well in filling her need to make the world a better place.

But it won't be easy, even for this driven woman. The 12-month fundraising program is chock-full, and Laurie said the workload is overwhelming at times.

"The great challenge for me is the aspect of teamwork and group projects," she observes. Coming from a managerial background in a fairly autonomous environment, Laurie is on a steep learning curve working with people from varying educational and work backgrounds.

Her dream job once she's finished the program? It is an executive director of a medium-sized charity, ideally a humane society, or an organization for the homeless and disadvantaged.

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Laurie's prepared to put her time in the trenches first, and hopes to draw on her knack for marketing, using copywriting skills for promotional publications. "I enjoy ad writing as it allows me to express the passion I need to get out," she said. The "strategy and the art of communication" is compelling to her.

"Historically, the majority of donors are older women and people who have been through the depression," says Laurie. "There's a cultural basis to giving for those folks."

In 2006 the total amount of charitable contributions in Canada grew, but the amount of people contributing shrunk, notes Laurie. "What is motivating those people and how do we address changing trends in current and future populations?"

"I've been one of those invisible people that folks would rather look away from than at," she says quietly. "I have empathy for those people that are better served by a strong mental health care system than a band-aid approach."

Laurie tends to be a very driven person in her work, so her leisure pursuits are usually

quiet, solitary activities. An Internet addict and political volunteer, she also likes fishing and biking and is starting to hone an interest in photography.

But what motivates her in every aspect of her life is to "pay it forward."

"It's a large part of what drives me," Laurie says. "All of my sales success—the President's Club, income, car and travel—wouldn't have happened if it weren't for very supportive people."

Staff at the homeless shelter, university professors and understanding bosses all helped shape the woman she has become.

"Having people like that in my life changed my life," Laurie says. "I could have ended up being a homeless person or drug addict and I didn't because there were people who said, 'You are worth something'."

"I accepted those gifts, and now I want to pay it forward and help someone else." ■

WRITTEN BY REBECCA DIKA

laurie pringle, age: 40

Position: Student

College: Humber College

Years in Program: 1

Awards or Recognition received:

Leadership Council - Pearson Education

Organizations you volunteer for:

Interim Place Women's Shelter • Annex Cat Rescue • Political Candidates

Organizations you are a member of:

- Association of Fundraising Professionals
- Canadian Professional Sales Association

Great things about volunteer work:

- the wonderful people I've met.
- the "reality check" and perspective.
- the ability to express my feelings in actions.
- the hope and joy it provides...to me and to others.

Reasons you do what you do for the cause:

The success I've enjoyed has come as a result of caring people in helping professions. I want to be a part of that for someone else.

Hardest thing about volunteering:

Finding time to do all that I'd like to do.

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