

Women Entrepreneur Guest Blogger

On the ground with women entrepreneurs

First Tales From the WPO Conference Virgin

By: Hilary Kaye | 04/22/2010



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If last night's impromptu gathering is an indicator of what's to come, I'm in for an intellectual and social treat for the next three days here in Ft. Lauderdale at the Women Presidents' Organization annual conference. Just a few hours into the experience, I can already see I'm going to be making good friends, engaging in intellectual conversations spanning the worlds of [business](#) and politics, and definitely being part of the personal storytelling that women do whenever and wherever we get together, whether friends or strangers.

I've already been called a WPO conference virgin. It's my first one, and I'm meeting women who've been coming to these year after year. I guess it works--they have all been successful in their individual [businesses](#) and they credit WPO--and these conferences--for helping them get--and stay--there.

OK, I'm game, bring it on! Last year was my 25th year in business, but my first year in WPO. Yes, I'm successful too, but WPO has been designed to help women business owners who have already gotten to the next level--get to the NEXT level, and the next after that. And for me, my three days here will be a time to soak it all up--from the speakers as well as fellow WPO members.

I'm looking forward to blogging about my experiences here. I don't plan on summarizing what's happening--I'll be too busy immersing myself in the experience to be a diligent reporter. But I'll deliver key impressions and perhaps this will give a flavor of what's going on here. This year's theme is *Thriving in the New Economy*--and after surviving the last couple of years, I can't imagine any [business owner](#) not wanting to listen up to any smart ideas out there.

Last night, my impromptu gathering consisted of five women who had all flown in from Southern California. The other four knew each other; I just knew Deb Valle, a smart and funny marketing strategist and executive coach who is chair of my WPO group in Orange County. I learned about the others as we sat at a waterfront table near our hotel and sipped a fine bottle of Sauvignon Blanc, and I nibbled a pepper-crusted seared ahi appetizer. The slightly humid Florida air was loved by all of us, who had left L.A. amid unseasonable rainy and cool weather.

Impression No. 1: terrific meeting Diane Williams, who has been coming to WPO [conferences](#) faithfully each year. She swears by them and can't believe I'm the only one from my chapter to venture east for this experience. Perhaps Diane should know--her company, Precision Tube Bending, based in Santa Fe Springs, Calif., has gotten her into WPO's Platinum level, indicating even more [business success](#) than the average WPO member. Her company sells products to the aerospace industry, with major clients such as Boeing. I suspect she's a hard-core businesswoman, but I couldn't find a nicer, more down-to-earth dinner companion. I HAVE to chat with her more these next few days--I can tell she's got lots to reveal about her own path to success.

My other dining companions were women who help other women [achieve success](#): Besides Deb Valle, there was another WPO chair, Lindsay Shields, from LA (on a different track entirely, as a lifelong Dodgers fan, I was intrigued to learn that her husband formerly was a sportswriter who journeyed to Vero Beach every year), and Reri MacClean, whose work is similar to Deb's and Lindsay's and is actively recruiting another WPO chapter in LA. So, three executive coaches and a platinum business owner--not bad dinner companions.

What's on tap for today? The conference officially begins at 1 p.m. And I think my dinner companions are either sleeping in or catching some rays at the pool or beach. For me, the conference virgin, I've signed up for two focus groups this morning. More on that later . . . *Hilary Kaye is the founder and president of HKA Public Relations, an award-winning public relations agency in Tustin, Calif., and a first-year member of WPO.*