

The Tutor Doctors are in

With 15 years of professional experience under their belts, two Abbotsford moms find success as franchise owners

By Jennifer Harrison

Having worked for years helping others build successful businesses, longtime friends Margot Bartsch and Jennifer Meyer decided they wanted the opportunity to go into business for themselves.

As vice-president of business development at **Holiday Trails Resorts**, Bartsch noted, "I had hit a place professionally where I had brought them to a point where I felt they were rebranded, everything functioned well and I had helped increase the profits substantially over a two- to three-year period."

The first of the women to venture out on her own in 2009, Bartsch sought out franchise opportunities with one very strict requirement: she did not want to buy a job.

"When I did my due diligence, that was in my list of questions, discussing with them the scalability of the business," said Bartsch. She ultimately purchased a **Tutor Doctor** franchise.

Launched in Toronto in 1999 and now with international offices, Tutor Doctor is a one-on-one, in-home tutoring business.

Bartsch became a franchisor and area manager of Surrey, Langley, Abbotsford and Chilliwack.

One year later, Meyer joined her friend and bought her own franchise, now covering the North Fraser, Burnaby, Tri-Cities, Coquitlam and Maple Ridge area.



DOMINIC SCHAEFFER

Jennifer Meyer (left) and Margot Bartsch, franchise owners of Tutor Doctor: "the franchise route is a good choice for someone who is entrepreneurial but doesn't want to exist in a void"

Bucking tradition

Having worked together years earlier in an ESL study tour business, the women had experience in the educational realm and saw an opportunity to use their skill sets where they could make a difference.

They balk at the idea of a traditional tutoring model where there are three or four students in a room working independently with one tutor.

"People are paying \$55 to \$60 an hour, and that's not even [for people who are] teaching. It makes no sense," said Bartsch.

Working with autistic students, high-achieving students looking to get into Ivy League schools and student athletes seeking scholarships, Bartsch and Meyer make it their number 1 priority to assess the specific needs of each individual student and to understand his or her goals.

They then create an individualized plan and send in a tutor who is a good match for that student in terms of academic background, personality and teaching style.

"Our hourly rate starts at \$39 per hour," said Meyer. "We offer discounts for families who require ongoing tutoring. Most families pay about \$43 per hour. This makes us \$10 to \$15 per hour cheaper than the study centre model. We don't charge for an assessment or a membership fee."

Each office has more than 100 tutors on its roster, including subject specialists and special-ed instructors.

Meyer says there are a lot of teachers out there who can't get work, so there is no shortage of talent. "Ultimately these people are looking for their own classrooms, but they have a passion for what they are doing and we provide them an outlet, and the students reap the benefits of their expertise and training."

All tutors go through a rigorous application process, which includes a criminal record check.

Successful mentors

Both women also employ four or five full-time employees in their offices, including a manager of tutor services, a manager of family services, a bookkeeper and administrative support.

Meyer noted, "We both started our companies with the intention of bringing on staff as soon as feasible. Our goal with the company was not to buy a job, but to create a company that we wouldn't necessarily have to be involved with on a day-to-day basis if that is what we chose to do. It is one thing for Margot and I to iterate our values, it's another thing to build a team that agrees and carries it through."

Bartsch and Meyer have been so successful at growing their businesses that Tutor Doctor established a mentoring program out of the women's experience starting up the franchises.

Before Meyer bought her own business, she helped Bartsch in her office and got an inside look at what was important. This allowed Meyer to get up and going quickly when she was starting out.

According to Bartsch, "Jennifer won Rookie of the Year last year. She started up in January and they had never seen anyone get up and running and become profitable anywhere as fast as Jennifer did and it was because we worked together. In her first month she had 25 students."

In fact, as both women's franchises have flourished, with revenue over \$1 million in 2010, their husbands have joined the company.

Both Bartsch and Meyer credit their ability to work together, along with an established professional background, as fundamental to their achievements.

"Neither Margot nor I could have been as successful starting from scratch with the franchise if we did not have the collaborative experience that we both brought to the table to begin with," said Meyer.

"Business skills can't be fabricated, you need to have that trial and error. We just did ours elsewhere. By the time we got to Tutor Doctor, we had more skill and insight than many people starting up." ■

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Reader Profile

Amanda Mungal

OWNER / EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT EXTRAORDINAIRE



Businesslines

Business/Organization Name: It's Your Time

Business Focus/Specialty: Executive Support Services for the busy small business and consultant

Business Advantages: Personal one-on-one service provided virtually, face-to-face or a bit of both to suit your needs.

Website: www.ItsYourTime.ca

Foundation

Name: Amanda Mungal

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Occupation/Position/Title: Owner / Executive Assistant Extraordinaire

What I do: I help business owners and professionals shed out from the administrative burden of their business so that they can focus on building their business.

Professional Background: Over 15 years' experience as an Executive Assistant/Office Manager in industries ranging from not-for-profit, municipal government, travel, environment and more.

FAVOURITE STUFF

Favourite Achievement: Successfully start and grow my business while continuing and growing my family.

Goals: To have a plentiful veggie garden in my backyard, turn It's Your Time into a franchised company and live a positive and happy life.

Hobbies and interests: travel, learning, meeting new people, mentoring potential

Current Read, Author: a variety of new parenting books

Someone I Admire/Why: My dad. He never stops dreaming up plans and is always willing to explore my crazy ideas along with me.

Five people (of all time) I would invite to my dinner gathering: Agnes MacPhail, Basil Bristol, Tim Jay, Louis Sorel and my husband (the best dinner companion I've met).

Business Tip or Advice: Being nice is back in style - it's not "just business" - always looks how you can assist others and you can't help but succeed.

Favourite TV Show: Almost anything on HBO - gaily please over. **Appreciate:**

Favourite Holiday Destination: It's a quick holiday - somewhere hot. With a little more time, Paris.

Favourite Community Organization or Charity: Seniors on Home Society

Favourite Reason for Subscribing to BIV: Finding out what's happening in the city's business world.

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