



THE BOOK STORE BALANCE:

Keeping the Doors Open

THE TORONTO WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE ~ A Case Study

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This publication is the result of a number of partnerships. The partners are:

- ◆ **The Toronto Women's Bookstore**
- ◆ **The Ontario Women's Directorate Change Agent Program**
- ◆ **The Anti-racism Secretariat, Ministry of Citizenship and Culture**
(who facilitated the bookstore's successful jobsOntario application for funds to assist with improving the management of the bookstore.)
- ◆ **The community of bookstore supporters**
(The number of supporters is very extensive. We therefore, at the risk of exclusion, chose not to list any names.)
- ◆ **The women's communities in Toronto** and especially those women who contributed resources, time, energy, and funds leading to the collective synergy of goodwill keeping the bookstore doors open when there was danger of it closing.

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THE TORONTO WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE IS A BUSINESS OPERATED BY WOMEN.

ITS MISSION IS:

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- ◆ To provide a space for women's writing, voices and cultures
 - ◆ To provide a workplace for women that embodies equity in the community
 - ◆ To provide service to the community
 - ◆ To inform others about women's issues
 - ◆ To reflect difference and change among women, feminism and related social movements
 - ◆ To be an example of a professional and competent business
 - ◆ To prove that mixing ethics and business can work
 - ◆ To be financially responsible
 - ◆ To provide good management and have accountability to job descriptions and co-workers
 - ◆ To work towards supportive structures for the staff
 - ◆ To be a model of communication between customers and staff
 - ◆ To provide a warm, caring and welcoming place to shop and work in

~ Revised 1995 January ~

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DEFINITIONS

COLLECTIVE

A way of working in which all decisions are made by consensus. All tasks and duties are equally valued. Usually all members of the collective receive the same amount of pay. Each voice is equally important and hierarchies, informal or formal, are discouraged and resisted.

COMMUNITY

In the context of the Toronto Women's Bookstore "community" refers to the various communities within the women's movement, the community at large which supports the bookstore, and specific individuals and organizations with whom the bookstore works in partnership.

FEMINIST ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES

Feminist organizing is based on values and actions carried out in a democratic, humanistic framework. Its central imperative defines its unique character. Feminist organizing must affect the conditions of women while empowering them. It is based on women's contributions, functions, roles and experiences and is derived from their strengths, while recognizing the limitations of their socially ascribed roles. A women's perspective affects: which issues are selected and worked on; how a problem is defined; what needs will be met; what tactics and strategies are used; and how success or victory is defined.

HIERARCHY

A structure in which a person or persons is in a position higher than others, who gives instructions and orders to those in subordinate positions. While input or opinions of those considered to be in subordinate roles may be sought, they are not necessarily taken into account by the decision makers. Hierarchy is the opposite of collective.

WOMEN OF COLOUR

This term is used to describe women who are not white. It includes, women who are described as being Black, Asian, East Indian, South Asian. It is not usually used to describe First Nations women.

CHAPTER 1

The Balancing Act

In moving forward, the TWB seeks to create a working environment that recognizes both the bookselling industry and its limitations and also the value and importance of the workers. It strives to combine feminist culture with the culture of the bookselling industry.

"In August 1993, the TWB suffered a financial crisis which had been looming for some time, that forced the existing collective to take emergency action or face bankruptcy. While some members of this managing collective refused or were unable to support the store in this period of critical need, others with the input of concerned members of the women's community, took on this difficult and overwhelming situation and gave tremendous time, energy and effort to struggle against the real consequence of having to close the doors of a 22 year-old feminist institution. Some members of the former staff worked as volunteers without salary 5 days a week for over 10 months to keep those doors open. This commitment, good faith and belief in feminist organizing principles, is what has pulled the TWB from the brink of financial and organizational catastrophe. It is in this spirit that the existing volunteers and staff must move forward toward a model of worker cooperation and community relations that is proactive, connected and grounded in the business of feminist book promotion and sales."¹

¹ Background to transitional project staff job descriptions October 1994-1995.

WHAT ARE FEMINIST ORGANIZING PRINCIPLES?

The following is from a document published by the Hunter College School of Social Work:

"Premises: Feminist organizing is based on values and actions carried out in a democratic, humanistic framework. Its central imperative defines its unique character. Feminist organizing must affect the conditions of women while empowering them. It is based on women's contributions, functions, roles and experiences and is derived from their strengths, while recognizing the limitations of their socially ascribed roles. A women's perspective affects: which issues are selected and worked on, how a problem is defined, what needs will be met, what tactics and strategies are used, and how success or victory is defined."

Value Base

- ◆ Belief in the dignity of the individual; respect for life.
- ◆ Belief in an individual's capacity to grow and change.
- ◆ Personal is political: The interconnectedness of problems and solutions.
 - a. Personal problems have political (cultural, historical) causes and solutions.
 - b. Personal choice and action is political and affects solutions or lack of same.
- ◆ Women have distinct perspectives, experiences and histories based on their functions and socially defined roles.
- ◆ Cooperation rather than competition is the rational way to relate.
- ◆ Acceptance of different ways of thinking and knowing (multi-dimensional, intuitive, divergent).

Goals

- ◆ Democratization and egalitarianism: reduction of class, status and power differentials.
- ◆ Social change and transformation of society.
- ◆ Meeting human needs through resource recovery and development.
- ◆ The elimination of sexism.
- ◆ Building community (cooperative economic, social and political relationships.)
- ◆ Recognition and respect for diversity and differences (by color, class, sexual preference, ethnicity)."²

² Education Center for Community Organizing at Hunter College School of Social Work. Adapted from the writings and ideas of 16 different women.

In practice, feminist organizing principles are defined by the way in which we interact with one another. You should feel that some one genuinely cares for, and about, you. You know that your voice is heard, acknowledged and finds a place where it can be recorded. Ultimately something will be done about it. It means interacting with each other in a respectful manner. We know when an exchange was respectful — it felt good. It means challenging ourselves through our interactions with each other and recognizing differences. It means finding ways and means to nurture each other and celebrate our diversity in an inclusive manner.

For the TWB, this means that our various feminine selves, however we care to define ourselves, are reflected on the shelves, in the faces of the staff, in those who use the bulletin board, and the shoppers at the bookstore. It means the politics of who we are and what we represent can be discussed and that we hear each other. It means we have no excuses to make for who we are and why we choose to be the way we are. It means cooperating with each other and working with each other, in spite of our differences, towards a common goal.

Today, the common goal for the TWB is providing a space for women's writings, voices and culture in a warm, caring, welcoming environment — an environment which reflects the diversity of women's communities, specifically in Toronto, and mirrors the dream of women's communities globally.

Is this really what the Toronto Women's Bookstore is all about?

Yes. But it did not happen overnight. Let's start at the beginning.

In the beginning...

In 1973, the TWB started as a bookstore which was set up to fund the Women's Place, a collective dedicated to responding to a variety of women's needs. In 1974, the bookstore got a grant enabling it to establish itself independently. In keeping with the ideals of the Women's Place, the bookstore became a collective in 1974 and remained so until 1975, when it moved to Harbord Street.

At some point in 1975, the grant which established and supported the bookstore, ran out. The two women running the bookstore were not being paid, yet continued to work. They could see the potential of the bookstore as a money-making venture. In the meantime, the collective, consumed with making decisions around which books to buy and why, did not seem to be progressing in a business-like fashion. The bookstore was not making money. The two women took charge, borrowed money, invested it in the bookstore and began to operate it like a business, dedicated to making a profit. This led to the lock-out of the collective in the winter of 1976 and the end of the collective structure.

The bookstore, operated by these two women, was successful as a business and maintained a reasonable financial stability until 1983 when the bookstore burnt down.

By the 1980s...

In early 1984, staff members decided that they wanted to participate more in the management and day-to-day operations of the bookstore. They wanted to be more in control of decisions which affected how they did their work. They wanted to return to being a collective and to operate as one. There was a desire to work in a more egalitarian manner. The self-appointed managers expressed their unwillingness to be part of a collective and left in 1985. The staff remaining formed a collective in January 1986.

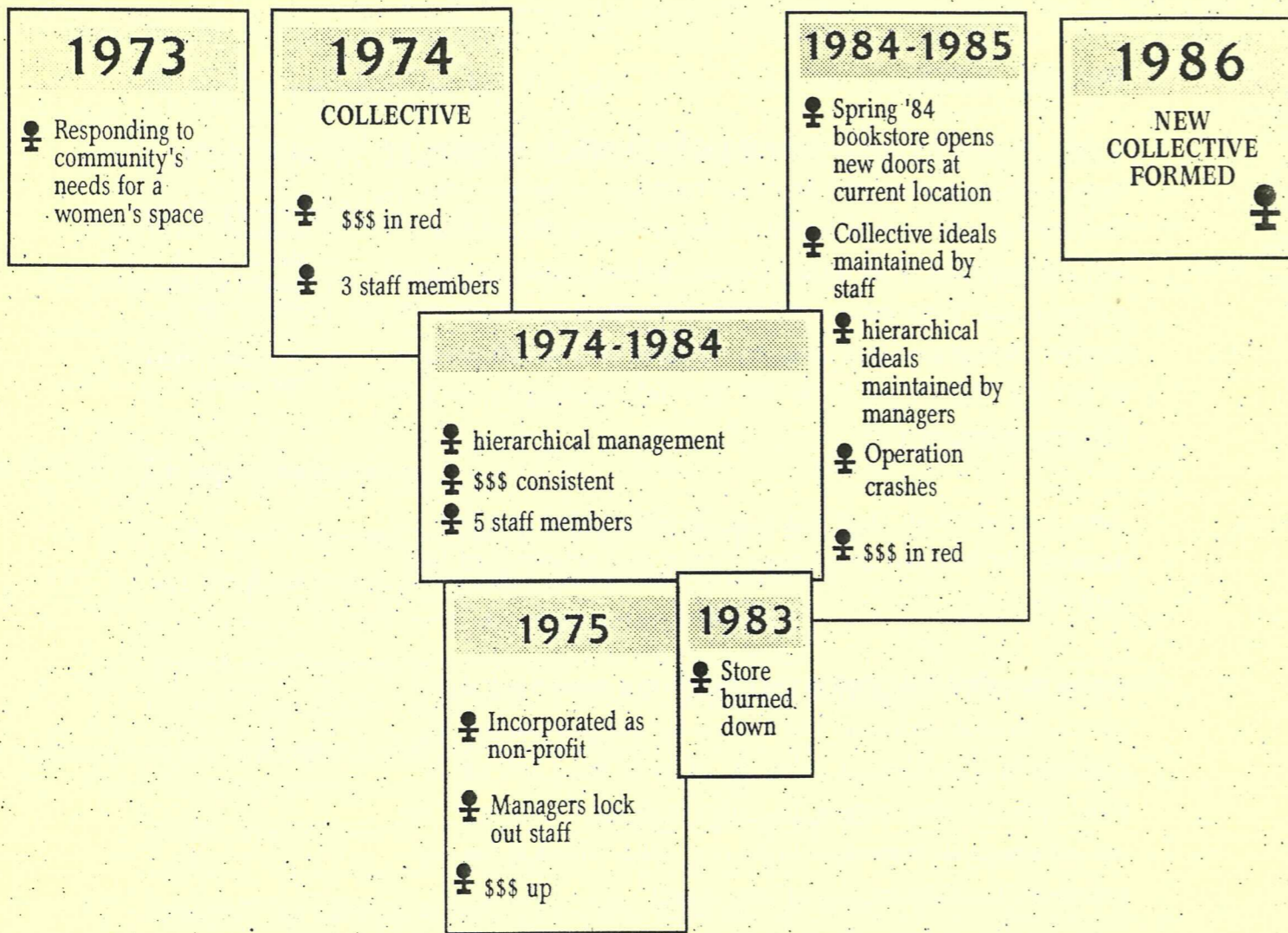
The new collective structure kicked in and with five full-time staff members, the bookstore ran as a successful stable operation from 1986 until 1990.

During the period from 1989 to 1990, there was a membership shift. Attitudes towards each other and towards the business changed. The commitment to working as a collective was not as strong as it was in 1986. Upon reflection, some of the women think that the vision of 1986 was not adequately transmitted to the new membership and that this contributed to a different kind of environment.

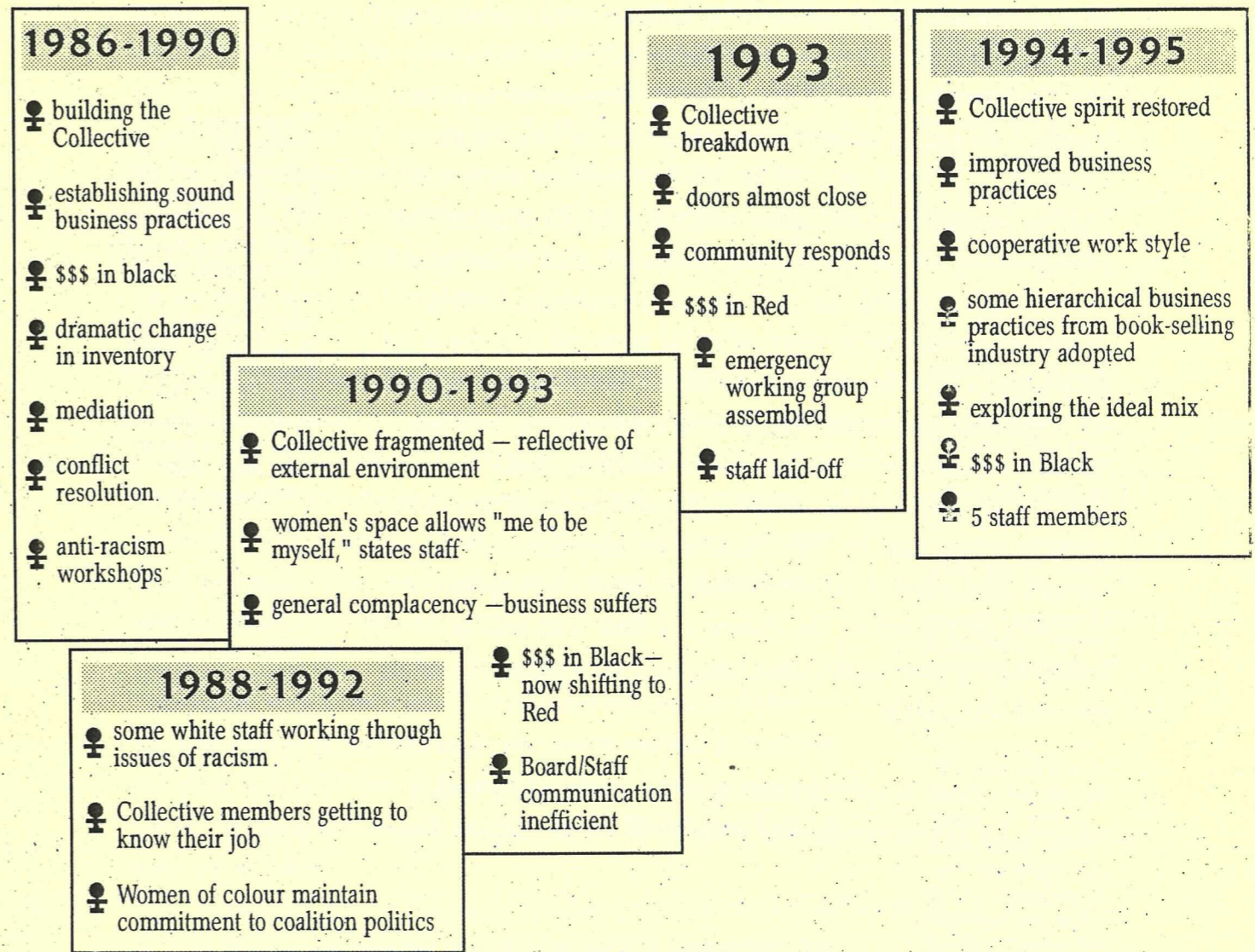
On the following two pages, you will find a historical chart. This chart should be read based on your interest in a particular period. It is not meant to be chronological. Its logic lies in taking a glance at a specific time period. The content of each box represents some highlights of events, important realizations, and identification of issues or challenges faced by the bookstore during this time. Therefore, each box stands on its own and is not necessarily related to any other box.

"1985 was important to me, to help pull the bookstore out of the deficit. I need to be a part of a group of people with a common goal, something bigger than myself."

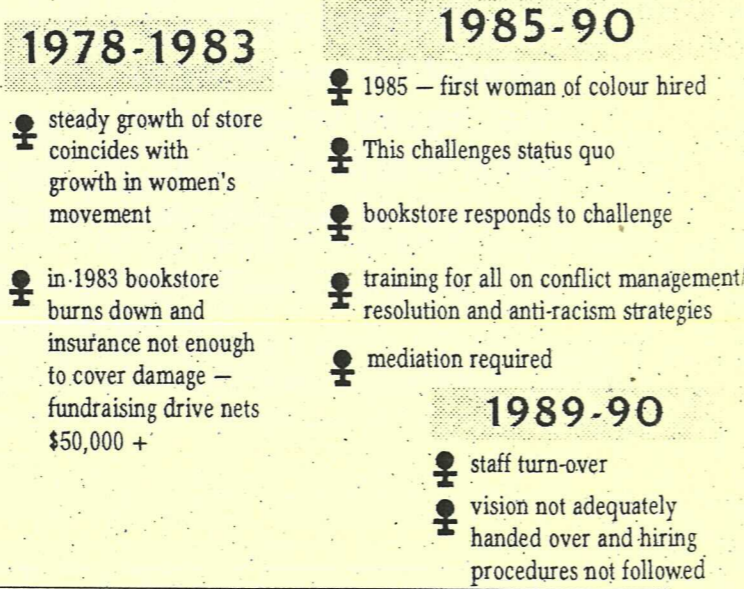
TORONTO WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE



YESTERDAY, TODAY & BEYOND ~



Other significant highlights, consequences, and changes over the years



Much of what was happening within the bookstore was a reflection of what was taking place in the women's movement and in society at large. For example, women of colour working alongside white women brought to the surface issues of racism and power. In 1985, the first woman of colour was hired at the bookstore. The second was in 1987. By 1990, the majority of the bookstore staff were women of colour. This progression did not take place without challenges. With the hiring of a woman of colour in 1985, there was enormous pressure on her. Her community expected her to represent all the needs and concerns of her community to her colleagues in the bookstore. Her colleagues expected her to shoulder the responsibility for being the fountain of knowledge regarding any and every issue pertinent to women of colour. The bookstore felt that hiring her was all they needed to demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity. Issues included the expectation that she was responsible for research and identification of books which spoke to issues of women of colour. The challenges of these issues lead to participation by staff in anti-racism workshops, management of conflict, and conflict resolution.

As a result of this change in the staffing of the bookstore, the subject matter on the shelves became more reflective of a wider range of issues and cultures.

By the 1990s...

In 1990, the bookstore was successful. Success was reflected in the profit margin. It was also reflected in the collective structure which was fully established and operational. Operational in the sense that issues were being identified, acknowledged and attempts made to work through them.

"I have been in Toronto for 25 years, I know the bookstore from the beginning. As a customer buying books from a feminist point of view, there were no women of colour writings, I had to go to Third World Bookstore. It was not until '86 that this started to change and there was a move away from white middle-class books."

However, there was at the same time, a development of complacent attitudes from some of the women working in the bookstore.

Inappropriate behaviour towards customers was reported by a number of long time supporters of the bookstore. The business habits necessary for managing and maintaining a successful business began to slip.

Inventory was far too high. Books were not being returned. There was no consensus around which books should be returned. Customers relations were not good. Complacency set in.

Customers did not feel welcomed. Orders were not been filled or filled months after the order was placed. Follow-up with customers was at an all time low. The resolution of conflicts was inadequate with some conflict leading to mediation. Co-operation between and amongst members were non-existent. Members of the staff watched each other. Work and participation was based on each person's perception of whether or not a colleague was pulling her weight.

This erosion built up over time. It was a long-term process which involved a series of staff turn-overs, poor board and staff interactions, and some customers' view of the bookstore being for the employees and not for the community. A club mentality set in. The business began to suffer on all levels.

In 1992, it was recommended that the store declare bankruptcy. The existing collective decided to try and pull out of the crisis despite the recommendation. This effort was futile as the collective structure and commitment disintegrated.

This slipping and sliding continued until the summer of 1993.

"I got the impression that certain members of the staff were hired because it was politically correct with little thought given to their professional abilities."

"I'm a bit concerned about comments regarding staff being hired because it was politically correct. What does this mean? I wonder how much of this reaction (and I have heard it several times) came from white women reacting to having a mostly women-of-colour staff at the store... do you know what I mean?"

"We thought that by hiring a woman of colour we had demonstrated that we were inclusive. We did not understand that this was not enough. We did not prepare ourselves nor did we make it a welcoming environment for a woman of colour. We needed to confront our own issues of racism, understand power dynamics and work together as a group, what this meant within the context of the bookstore..."

In August of 1993, the bookstore was in serious financial trouble and bordered on declaring bankruptcy. The situation was reviewed by one of the bookstore's supporters. An accountant by profession, her assessment of the situation indicated that given the external environment of a recession on the rampage, it was thought that while the bookstore was in deep trouble, it was no worse off than some other recession-hit businesses. With concerted effort she thought that the bookstore should try and regain a firm financial footing.

The word got out to the various communities that the bookstore was in trouble. Offers of help, calls to the bookstore with the message, "tell us how we can help" overwhelmed the bookstore staff. The message was clear "My bookstore must stay open!" With this outpouring of concern and commitment, members of the staff called on community members, specifically two, whose names were still on the incorporation documents, to return to the bookstore in this time of need. They, and other community members, responded positively.

Strong community supporters of the bookstore were invited to an emergency meeting in August 1993. At that meeting, an emergency working group was formed with the sole purpose of working at bringing the bookstore back from the brink of total collapse.

Members of the staff indicated that they needed help. They were no longer capable of managing the bookstore. The collective gave up their board responsibilities and asked the group at the meeting to assist them, indicating that they would abide by the group's decisions. The working group consisted of past staff, customers, past board members, friends and people who read of the bookstore's dilemma in a newspaper article.

The collective gave this working group the power to make decisions regarding the management and operation of the bookstore.

One of the first decisions the working group made was to lay off all staff. This was done based on an analysis of the bookstore's financial statement. There was not enough funds to pay staff and pay all the routine business operating costs. The next steps were discussed. As a result of these discussions, it was decided to keep the bookstore open with volunteer staff. The bookstore remained open for 10 months, operated solely by the working group, some of whom were volunteers. Others acted in the capacity of management consultants, financial advisors, and marketing strategists. This combination of expertise allowed the bookstore to begin to operation (once again) efficiently as a business, and identify the areas of weakness which needed attention both in business practices and personnel management. With community representation in the group actively participating, the wealth and depth of community resources available to the bookstore was revitalized. The bookstore re-connected with the community. A sense of being accountable to the community was re-established.

This working group remains in place but makes less day-to-day decisions. At this time, (1995 April) emergency community working group members are retiring and being replaced by new board members. The intent is to continue with a working group as very specific issues are resolved. These include the revision of personnel policy and procedures, an updated marketing strategy, and the full investigation and review of the various structures which will allow the business to continue to operate within a feminist framework. In short, the design and operation of a model that maintains the collective spirit, along with feminist organizing principles, but with clearer and improved business practices.

With the emergency management strategy of the summer of '93, a strategy which was driven by the need of the bookstore at that time, the bookstore has stabilized. It is not yet out of the woods. The reality of this situation dictated that the two "elder" collective members, who remained as members of the working group, became managers by default.

"We realized that we needed a better understanding of the relationship to sales, inventory and our salaries. So, we are trying to have our accountant review, explain and assist us with understanding this relationship by having regular financial status meetings."

By 1994...

In February 1994, in attempting to respond to some of the daily problems encountered in the past, a manager was hired. This did not work well. The fit was not right. The attempt aborted. The bookstore is now managed by two senior staff members. Tasks are divided between them based on joint work planning. They support each other on a daily basis and work hard at complementing each other.

In March 1994, a Jobs Ontario Community Action grant was secured, and by May of the same year, the bookstore was in a position to start paying staff.

Treading slowly, two new staff members were hired on one-year contracts, with one part-time staff as relief. Given the hierarchy of information, the two senior persons are in effect managing the store and its three staff members. How this new structure is working and its implications for the future, continues to unfold.

You are invited to stay tuned to the ongoing evolution of the TWB by getting in touch with them at any point in the future. As we all know, the only thing that is certain about change is that it is continuous.

"I decided to stay (on as a staff member) because of my commitment to feminism. My own history, my commitment to a group effort, the importance of this place to feminism. Books have changed my life and they are all here. Books written by women, here... the support of these writers. 1993-94 was very difficult, but we got a lot of support from the community and this kept me, us, going. I cannot imagine the store not being here."

Management Styles Over The Years

The TWB has operated under two distinctive management styles. In the beginning (1974), it was a collective. By 1975, it was managed in a hierarchical manner with this lasting until a new collective management style emerged in 1986. From 1986 until the August 1993 emergency, the bookstore has operated in a collective manner. From August 1993 until the recording of this story, there has been an informal cooperative management style in place, with the emergency working group making managerial decisions. The styles and the primary results of those styles are detailed below.

Collective — 1974

Based on its creation by the collective — Women's Place — the bookstore is operated as a collective.

Hierarchical — 1975-1985

The management style consisted of two managers, who it is reported, ran the bookstore like a private enterprise. Staff members did not feel a part of the bookstore, there was no sense of ownership. Salary differentials were significant with the managers earning more than staff. They were earning \$30,000 per annum while staff earned \$13,000 per annum.

A number of events occurred during this period. Some of these include:

- ♦ the lockout of staff by the managers in the winter of '75/'76
- ♦ the bookstore burning down in 1983
- ♦ a financial crisis towards the end of 1985
- ♦ the first woman of colour hired — also in 1985

These series of events and challenges contributed to a change in the management style.

Collective — 1986-1993

- ◆ All members of the collective formed the management team of the bookstore.
- ◆ Tasks were performed on a rotating basis with everyone being responsible for themselves and each other.
- ◆ A personnel policy was drafted in August 1987. The draft included: statement of philosophy, collective guidelines, basis of unity, personnel committee, hiring procedures, probation, termination of permanent staff, performance appraisal, salary structure, staff development, benefits, parental leave, bereavement leave, compassionate leave, burn out, and policies review. While this draft was not finalized, it was used by the collective. Specific sections, the salary, and leave guidelines, were used more than others.
- ◆ All staff members received the same salary.
- ◆ A business plan covering the 1988-93 period was developed.

NOTE: The major objectives have been realized. For example, the bookstore space was expanded, and based on a customer survey done in 1988, the inventory improved to reflect a more diverse community.

Collective input — 1993-present

- ◆ All staff members, including contract staff, have input in major decisions with consensus reached some of the time.
- ◆ Major organizational decisions are made by the working group.
- ◆ Day-to-day decisions are made by staff on the floor, in the back room, or in the office, depending on the scope of the decision.
- ◆ The boundaries of decision-making are being worked out by trial and error.

As you can see, to operate a business which integrates feminist organizing principles, requires performing a balancing act on the tight rope of reality. This reality includes a range of external societal factors.

Some of these factors include the competition poised by bookstores that can operate on a more competitive profit margin, who are not specialized and who can move more volume. Also significant, are the politics of operating a non-profit business in a capitalist market, the politics of being a woman's initiative, and operating within a patriarchal society.

As we are all aware, we live in a society filled with phobias and "isms" — ageism, sexism, classism, racism, heterosexism, homophobia, et al. Working through what these factors mean individually, and their impact on working collectively, is very much a part of the balancing act.

CHAPTER 2

The Tightrope

Walking on a tightrope requires great balancing skills. Operating a business venture (read need to turn a profit) and caring for the community in a demonstrative manner (read feminist values and principles) presents a number of challenges.

The main objective of this chapter is to give you an overview of the bookstores' structures over the years and the challenges which each structure has presented. We will look at two main structures — **Collective** and **Hierarchical** and the impact each has had on the bookstore. The description, feelings and impact of both structures are presented through the voices of the women interviewed. We will also look at the various **decision-making** processes implemented by the bookstore.

The Business — An Overview

The TWB is a registered non-profit organization which manages a business — a bookstore. Being non-profit means that the business is a community venture, owned and operated by the community. Because it is non-profit, any profit which the bookstore makes must be re-invested in the business and the community.

"The bookstore needs to recognize that it is no longer the only game in town... I helped because of my interest in publishing. Toronto needs a women's bookstore, we need a place of our own. The challenge is to combine business with politics. By this I mean what publications to carry, how long to carry them. Ask yourselves, what is the role of the TWB in the community statements like — "I saw it at the Women's Bookstore" is an important statement..."

The Culture

Over the years, the norm and culture of the organization has moved from a collective to a hierarchy back to a collective and is now situated in between being a collective-in-the-process-of-evolution-into-a-different-kind-of-organization. In responding to how the collective has worked, both in the management of human resources and the running of a business, the TWB is in the process of re-working its operations model. It is in the process of moving on to another kind of structure which embodies selective aspects of collective principles with business systems, procedures and processes which will encourage a more effective and efficient business. All of which continues to evolve within feminist organizing principles.

The Board / The Working Group

Until the breakdown of the structure in August 1993, the TWB was managed by a Board made up of 4 community members and all the collective staff members. Community members were recruited informally by utilizing the network of the various collective members. Since August 1993, it is managed by a working group made up of two former collective members, who are current staff members and co-managers, and three community members. The two contract staff members and one relief/part-time staff member are invited and welcomed to attend the working group meetings. They are encouraged to participate fully and do. Working group meetings are held as often as is necessary, and at a minimum, are held once a month. Immediately after forming, and for a few months after, the working group met frequently and also consulted with the volunteer staff by telephone on a daily basis. As the bookstore's performance, both financially and in providing good customer service improved, consultation became less immediate.

Working group agendas are set two days prior to each meeting. The agenda is circulated to all working group and staff members for revision or additions. Drawing up the agenda is the responsibility of the co-managers. At working group meetings, decisions are made after a reasonable amount of discussions. Contract staff input is taken into consideration but final decisions are made by the working group. Decisions are recorded; working group minutes are kept in a binder in the office.

The Board — Role and Responsibilities

Throughout all stages of the bookstores' development, the board's roles and responsibilities has been to set policy, give advice on effective management of the bookstore, and to make organizational decisions. This has not always worked. For example, board meetings held between 1983 and 1985, and 1990 through to 1993 were not effective. Had they been effective, the bookstore would not have run aground financially in 1985 and in 1993.

Lack of Sound Business Practices

During the period from 1990 to 1993, the board and the collective did not listen to members of the collective who called attention to the high level of inventory. It was repeatedly pointed out that the inventory was too high and that books were not being sold within the normal time frame. The publisher's return policies were ignored. This meant a loss in revenue to the bookstore which drastically affected the cash flow of the business and its ability to meet its liabilities and pay salaries.

This lack of attention was partly due to the complacency of the collective, the low level of business acumen by the collective, and the general desire to have all decisions made by the collective. So, while members individually knew what decisions they should have made to put the business back on track, the priority of acting collectively got in the way of making decisions, of what inventory to return, for example, and contributed to mismanagement. The staff felt that the bookstore was just an employer and not a community-owned business. Therefore, they did not have a vested interest in its performance, as community members. There was a sense that being women was enough and that the women's movement somehow owed them the opportunities they found themselves in.

Sound Business Practices

In 1976 to 1984, as a hierarchy, the goal was to run a viable business. This was done with the result that the bookstore did very well financially. While the finances were in excellent order, the other factors which contributed to a feminist business were 'out of sync'. For example, in an hierarchical structure, staff do not (and did not) participate in significant decision making. Their opinions may or may not be sought, if sought, they may be taken into account or discarded. While in any system which works at implementing feminist values, all voices are encouraged, acknowledged and taken into consideration. The value of the financial decision is weighed alongside the humanist values and a balance sought.

As a hierarchy, the challenge faced by staff was how to run the bookstore in a manner which integrated the feminist principles which most of them held dear.

"Look at your sales and compare it to your expenses, ask the question do we have enough profit? I think that in the past, they (the collective) forgot to focus on the running of a business and got caught up in being a collective."

"I felt that I would like to work here because I liked the concept of a retail business that caters to women's books. I also liked the spirit of working in a feminist space. I believe at times the focus of running a business is forgotten."

The Impact — Hierarchy vs Collective

In 1986, in facing this challenge, the staff re-affirmed its commitment to being a collective by reclaiming the collective style of working. For those who wanted to demonstrate feminist principles, a collective model was the only way they knew how to work with each other. Those who disagreed, left.

The 1986 collective was effective because of a commitment to a common goal — operating a business. This commitment included working towards an understanding of what was meant by feminist values and principles and how best to gain an understanding individually and collectively. While admitting that their business know-how was limited, the commitment to serving the communities of women in the provision of a space for women's writings was strong enough to drive the business. The synergy was intuitively driven and understood. As the collective membership changed (1989 to 1991), the oneness was lost in transition.

By 1993, the collective structure broke down. (see sidebar for examples of this breakdown) The organizational norm and culture no longer reflected a cooperative, caring environment.

What does this tell us?

1. The norms and culture of the organization must reflect its stated mission.
2. There must be an agreed-to process in place which allows for ongoing re-visiting and refinement of organizational assumptions, re-confirming of common understandings, goals and strategies.

The breakdown of the collective structure

- members of the collective were not working co-operatively with each other. The level of caring for each other deteriorated. Nor were they calling each other on issues in a constructive manner.
- Staff members who had previously worked with each other now had to be scheduled for different days in order to avoid conflict situations.
- The level of attention to operating a successful business went up and down. By 1993 the atmosphere in the bookstore radically shifted, where customers felt they had entered a privileged club and should be 'thankful for the privilege' instead of feeling they had come into a community space.

Staff and Volunteers

Staff and volunteers are classified in the same breath because a significant amount of volunteers perform staff functions or compliment those functions. Over the years there have been challenges in both areas. For the bookstore staff: how to work effectively and efficiently. For the bookstore: how to acknowledge and utilize the goodwill and talents offered by the volunteers in an effective manner. Volunteers are an investment in the community, a recognized contribution to holding costs to a minimum and a way for the bookstore to keep in touch with the issues of importance to the community.

What then are the challenges faced by the bookstore around staff and volunteers?

Staff

A long time staff member of the TWB describes the signs of the business not operating effectively and of the collective breaking down, in 1993. It is interesting to note that there are similarities in some signs which another long term staff member lists in relating the erosion which took place in 1985. (She left the bookstore from 1988 to 1993 to attend university and returned in May 1993 as a contract worker) Here are the tell-tale signs as she names them:

- Lack of shared vision
- Staff arriving consistently late for work, and not feeling badly about doing so
- Staff arriving one hour late for training and offering no reason
- Not showing up to work at all, and not feeling badly about doing so
- Some days, the bookstore doors are opened up late
- Staff rude to customers

" Part of effective management means having the right staff. In order to find and keep good women, the bookstore has to find a way to make staff feel good about what they do as the money will never be enough. The opportunities in the bookselling industry has to be clearly laid out and the fit with the women's expectations and life goals checked. For example, everyone thinks that they can do buying. This is not so. It involves a maturity of judgment, understanding the current issues and knowing when the price (of the book) is right. This sort of expertise is built up over the years. Training to buy should be part of the process, the ongoing daily hands on training. Staff has to know that being on the floor, listening and hearing what customers are saying, receiving and returning are all part of training to be a buyer."

- ◆ Unreasonable length of time spent on personal telephone calls at front desk.
- ◆ Staff not doing their job
- ◆ Tasks being performed depending on who likes to do what — work tied to personality instead of agreed to workplan
- ◆ Staff not enjoying working with the books
- ◆ Staff fighting with each other
- ◆ Lack of regular meetings
- ◆ Board meetings where only one person turns up
- ◆ Decisions not being made
- ◆ Inventory out of proportion

What does this tell us?

Not only is it necessary that re-visiting and refinement of organizational assumptions occur regularly, but staff development and training is essential to the survival of any business. This includes a clear understanding of the role of volunteers.

Volunteers

Volunteers are a part of the heart and soul of the TWB. If volunteers had not rallied around the bookstore over the years, it is safe to say that it may not still be around today.

From August 1993 to May 1994, the organizational management and day-to-day operations of the bookstore was the responsibility of volunteers. Volunteers from all walks of life, covering a wide age range, representing a mixture of sexual orientation, a rainbow of colours and politics, enabled the bookstore to stay open through the '93/'94 crisis and on an ongoing basis.

"Staff members glared at you, were not responsive, interacted confrontationally with each other in front of you, and generally gave the impression that they were being bothered and detracted from what was important to them, which was not the customer or the bookstore."

"This is a place to work where one feels a part of a family. This feeling comes from a supportive caring environment. In 1988 my mother was sick and I went off to look after her until she died, the bookstore supported me through this, they replicated family for me."

Volunteers provide specific hands on training, act as consultants in the fields of human resources management, general management, marketing, information technology, financial management and book buying strategies, and so forth. These volunteers see the bookstore as **their** bookstore, as a part of **their** community. They have been involved with the bookstore from day one. For some, their years of service range from 7 to 20, with the majority in the twenty-year range.

In the TWB submission to jobsOntario for the revitalization grant, the in-kind contribution of volunteers is calculated at \$140,400. There can be no doubt. The bookstore is a community business. The main challenge for the bookstore is how to best use the assistance offered by volunteers.

Staff positions have always had job descriptions. Volunteer positions do not. Staff complement has been between three and five over the years while volunteers' numbers are directly related to specific store needs and activities. Because a feminist value is caring for one's community and valuing its input and involvement in activities, volunteers are an important part of the bookstore's life. As they continue to be involved, it is becoming clearer that a volunteer strategy needs to be articulated.

Staff Training and Development

Although there is a commitment to staff development and training, funds are limited. This commitment is demonstrated by staff requests for a variety of training, all of which is relevant to the bookstore, and by 100% attendance at all meetings and training sessions. More importantly, there is agreement that staff development and training is a necessary investment to sustain the vision of the bookstore. Staff development over the years has included:

"This is my bookstore. I liked the idea of a locally owned and operated women's bookstore and wanted to support it. I have for a number of years and could not see it closing. I immediately called and volunteered to help."

- ◆ Introduction, briefing and orientation to the bookstore in which the values are stressed and input sought from new staff regarding how to make it their place
- ◆ How to humanize the workplace
- ◆ How to use the software programs effectively
- ◆ Time management
- ◆ Anti-racism strategies
- ◆ Power dynamics
- ◆ How to mediate conflict
- ◆ The planning and running of effective meetings
- ◆ How to read, understand and use financial statements in relationship to the \$\$\$ status of the business.

The current challenge is costing in the time of organizing staff development, effective sharing of information and learning to communicate effectively.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

These questions are intended to help you focus your thoughts and analysis on your own venture. Given the overview of the bookstore presented on the previous pages, we have formulated the following questions. Under each question is a suggestion on how to begin your answer. We have not included suggestions for implementation as this will vary from venture to venture. All these questions should be asked at the start of your new business. They are also appropriate for an established organization that is interested in re-evaluating its mission and structural foundation.

- 1 WHAT IS MY COMMITMENT TO INVESTING IN TRAINING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT? WHEN FUNDS ARE TIGHT, SHOULD I REDUCE THE BUDGET FOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Your answer could begin like this:

No. I will not reduce the budget. Training and development is an investment in my business, not an expense.

- 2 WHAT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES DO I NEED IN PLACE TO SUPPORT MY ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE?

Your answer could begin like this:

I think to develop these in a manner that demonstrates inclusivity, I will organize a working group of the staff and the community. I will make sure to include at least one member from the group that assisted with determining the structure.

- 3 WHAT WORK MANUALS WILL WE NEED IN PLACE TO PROMOTE THE DOCUMENTATION OF HOW OUR WORK IS DONE?

Your answer could begin like this:

Each staff member as they are trained and as they begin to improve on the system, will be asked to develop and build a "how to" list. With this, a manual can be developed.

4 HOW WILL MY STAFF KNOW HOW TO MAKE DECISIONS?

Your answer could begin like this:

I'll make sure that the policies and procedures and the work manuals are clear and helpful. For example, when they receive a request for involvement with the community, they will have a criteria checklist for saying yes or no.

5 HOW DO I EVALUATE REQUESTS FROM THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES? DOES THE REQUEST MIRROR OUR COMMITMENT TO FEMINIST VALUES?

Your answer could begin like this:

I will make sure that what we mean by feminist values is clearly articulated and documented. From this we will develop a checklist of questions to guide our decisions.

6 WHAT DO I NEED A VOLUNTEER TO DO? WHERE WILL THE VOLUNTEER DO THE JOB? DO THEY HAVE TO COME TO THE SITE OR CAN THE DUTIES BE PERFORMED SOMEWHERE ELSE? HOW DOES WHAT THEY DO FIT INTO THE PAID JOBS PERFORMED BY MEMBERS OF THE STAFF?

Your answer could begin like this:

Volunteers are usually very busy persons. Usually they are committed to what they believe to be important to them and will contribute invaluable time, knowledge and skills. I will state what I need in clear, specific terms. I will make sure that their role, in relation to staff members, is clear.

How Decisions are Made

Decision making at all levels is a challenge. Major organizational and business decisions are made by the working group. Day-to-day decisions are guided by individual's job descriptions and knowledge of the industry. Staff members with the limited knowledge of the industry and exposure to the bookstore, are expected and encouraged to seek advise rather than make inappropriate decisions. For example, a relatively new staff member with limited knowledge of event management agreed to sell tickets for an event at the bookstore. Normally, the bookstore will sell tickets for events which involve very little administration. In this case, the administration was detailed and involved, cutting into the time allocated for other bookstore work. A more experienced staff member would have known not to agree to sell tickets for this particular event. This example demonstrates the struggle in striking a balance between what is sound business judgement and what demonstrates caring, valuing and respect for each other. The TWB tries to do what intuitively feels right. This feeling of what is right includes giving a woman the space to manage herself and her tasks to the best of her ability with the understanding that she will delegate, ask for help, and accept the wisdom and knowledge of the 'elders' in the business.

CASE STUDY

Based on an analysis of the level of work and accomplished tasks that serve to maintain a viable business, the working group decided that staff hours should not be reduced but remain at the current level. Recently a staff member made a personal case for less hours and was granted this request. This was done at a working group meeting at which not all working group members were in attendance. The question is: What is the impact of this decision on the business? While it demonstrates listening, hearing, and caring about meeting the needs of the staff, where is the balance between the individual's needs and the needs of the business? Should this decision be reviewed and what should be the criteria used for determining what is best for both the individual and the business.

Book Ordering Decisions

All bookselling tasks — receiving, ordering, special orders and book tables, have documented protocols which are updated as systems are improved. For example the ordering of books is done by computer now — very different than how it was done in 1977. Book ordering is now ultimately the responsibility of one of the co-managers. However, in working inclusively, she does not order books based on her judgement alone. This is one of the areas where the politics of operating the business guided by feminist values is best demonstrated. All staff, customers and volunteers have input.

- Staff are asked for their opinion on specific titles
- Staff are expected to, and do, read titles based on their own interests and will bring a title to the attention of the buyer which they think should be on the shelves. If it is not ordered, an explanation is given to the staff member.

The co-manager will also:

- read reviews of the title
- listen, hear and remember what she overheard from customers on the floor
- look at each title and ask herself, "What have I heard being said about this book?" "Who will buy this book?" "Who would want to see it on our shelves?" "Is it important as a community business to have it on the shelf?"

For example, there are a number of books which deal with anti-racism, often mirroring what is happening in the community at large. As far back as 1986, the bookstore took a stand on cultural appropriation. They made it clear that they found it offensive to the native community and buying was done accordingly.

Customers also regularly make suggestions and requests and give their own ongoing critique of what should be on the shelves.

"The women's bookstore in Winnipeg and Kingston are closed... this was due to the lack of diversity of publications. The focus was a specialized one, hence no appeal to a broad-based community. In Kingston, they were located upstairs and therefore not visible enough. A good location and caring about it, is important."

Financial Decisions

Financial decisions are made based on the answer to the following questions:

- What is the value of this decision to our community?
- How much will it cost the TWB in dollars?
- Is it an investment in the community which demonstrates our commitment to the community?
- Can we afford not to find this money?
- If we do not have the money, how else can we contribute?

The answers to these questions are determined by a cost benefit analysis which includes the values of caring for the community and a commitment to social change. The amount of funds needed for any expenditure must be guided by the bookstore's budget. If there is no budget for the item, activity or event, it has to be discussed with the co-managers in order to arrive at a decision. Very often by partnering on a venture, limited community resources are maximized to the fullest, with benefits touching a wider community than just those of the bookstore. (See "Community Commitment Decision Making" below)

Community Commitment Decisions

Committing the bookstore to an event, for example, participating in a conference, providing a community service, doing a book table, and so forth, can be done by any individual staff member. Again, it depends on the amount of time needed, amount of energy/effort to perform effectively, the impact on the bookstore running effectively and efficiently, and who will be responsible for managing all aspects of delivering a result which the bookstore can be proud of. As with financial decisions, the boundaries of decision making are informally known and are tested and re-established with each decision.

A number of factors contribute to determining the bookstore's co-sponsoring a community event. These include the importance of the event, to the women's community and the contribution to social change. *Take Back the Night* for example, is an event which the TWB works with the Rape Crisis Centre to actively promote the event.

If, on reflection, an inappropriate decision is made, the situation is discussed at a staff meeting with the intent of all learning from the experience. This is documented only in the oral tradition. It is expected to contribute towards the overall understanding of how decisions are made and what factors should be considered in making them.

"This is a women's bookstore. There is a sense of community that other bookstores do not have. Here I have a different level of expectation. I expect it to be more personal. I expect the staff to be knowledgeable about my issues, for example, if I am looking for information on abusive situations, I expect a feminist perspective. This is what I expect and this is what I am getting."

"Continue to make any woman feel welcome. Do not serve one community over another. Please maintain your equality of service..."

MORE QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

1. WHAT IS THE BEST ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR THE VENTURE I AM UNDERTAKING? FOR EXAMPLE, IS A BOARD NECESSARY?

Your answer could begin like this:

The board I work with should have a range of specialization but more importantly they should be inclusive in every sense of the word. They must also be committed to processes which allow issues to be worked through for the good of the business.

2. WHAT ARE THE ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES I SHOULD BUILD INTO THIS VENTURE FROM DAY ONE?

Your answer could begin like this:

I would like a racism-free working environment. In order for this to become the norm, I will have ongoing anti-racism training as a part of our investment in training, from day one.

3. GIVEN WHO WE ARE, HOW DOES THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT AFFECT US?

Your answer could begin like this:

I must assess the extent to which, how we do our work is valued. I'll ask the communities which I will be serving.

Expanding the answers to these questions based on your own operation will assist you in designing a solid foundation for a successful business.

CHAPTER 3

The Safety Net

Is there a safety net under the tightrope? Does the TWB operational structure provide confidence in walking the tightrope?

In this chapter, we examine the extent to which past lessons (management styles, personnel, diversity, etc.) are informing the future.

Major Lessons Learnt

The integration of lessons learnt, organization, and the running of the bookstore is ongoing and at different stages of development, presenting challenges on a regular basis. Goals need to be clarified and prioritized. The primary goal must be to encourage a sustainable feminist economy.

Over the years, three major lessons have been learnt. These lessons are grouped below into the following major categories:

Education, A Healthy Structure and the Management of Diversity.

Education

Education is used in the broadest sense of the word. It is used here as a learning process which starts from the beginning of the interaction of an employee with the TWB. Included are the following factors.

"At this stage, the bookstore should have a core active group that develops policy and facilitates direction and the supporting group (staff) day-to-day running of the store. There should be a recognition that the present configuration of two new staff to one experienced staff member (by experienced, I mean three years in the bookselling industry) is inadequate and will fail the store in the long run with regard to its goals."

- ◆ The recruitment and selection process for bookstore staff which must include an examination of the person's lifestyle/politics and its fit with the bookstore. This allows for the development of an educational process which recognizes where the new member is in her development and understanding of feminism, the bookselling industry and the communities served. It is important to ensure that a balance be maintained between experienced booksellers and new staff. An experienced bookseller is one with a minimum of three years in the trade. A ratio of 3:2 is recommended by those in the trade. Core staff, (four persons) should all work five-day weeks. (The co-managers acknowledge that the recruitment/selection process requires improvement and are addressing this issue.)
- ◆ The development of an orientation and training plan for each individual based on a common understanding of the individual's and the bookstore's needs and their willingness to learn. Proactive systems for information and knowledge sharing, and specific provisions for staff development, should be implemented. (This is done informally with a recognition that it must be formalized for improved effectiveness.)
- ◆ Joint commitment by the bookstore and the staff to resources and time necessary to work at maintaining a workplace and a business which integrates feminist principles and values. There must be commitment to group goals, leading to clarity for all organizational goals, rather than individual agendas. This is essential to the operation of the bookstore. (This is recognized by all as being necessary, but the levels of individual commitment vary and are determined by the level of importance of the bookstore in the individual's life. There is always an ongoing struggle to maintain a balance.)

A Healthy Structure

A Healthy Structure is one in which all systems, policies and procedures are documented and accessible to all staff. This allows everyone to understand the rationale, what is expected of them, and their place at the TWB. This includes the following:

- ◆ Completion of tasks balanced with process
- ◆ Roles and responsibilities are clearly stated and documented
- ◆ There is a communication strategy – external and internal
- ◆ Policy, procedure and work manuals are current and accessible
- ◆ Levels of decision-making are clearly articulated: widely visible decision-making power requires clear delineation of staff tasks
- ◆ There is an agreed-to accountability framework
- ◆ Creative conflict management: tools for negotiation
- ◆ Salary reflecting skill and experience
- ◆ Recognition of skill and experience and reward

All of the above are at different levels of documentation, ranging from embryonic to 'document in progress'. For example, all tasks associated with operating the bookstore have a documented protocol. These various protocols still have to be transcribed into an efficient work manual.

Management of Diversity

The bookstore interacts, and works with a variety of different communities. The staff and board represents these communities. In order to understand and manage the challenges this mix presents, there must be a framework in which diversity can be managed effectively. In recognizing the commitment which the bookstore has demonstrated in being inclusive, the following framework is suggested. This framework has been developed by the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat and is commonly known as "The Building Blocks to Equity Framework".

"It's mine in a way, it feels good. It is my way of knowing what is happening in the community. By increasing its diversity and the perspectives represented it continues to maintain its relevance to the various communities."

All three areas present challenges for the bookstore and it is struggling with how best to move forward in order that past mistakes are not repeated now or in the future.

By using the following analytical tool, it allows the bookstore to examine how they are doing, and develop strategies for continuous improvement. To date, the management of diversity has been done in an ad hoc manner.

	INCLUSIVE	EQUITABLE	ONGOING	RESULTS ORIENTED
INFORMATION	To/From whom?	How?	Is it sustained?	What are the results?
CONNECTIONS	With whom?	How?	Is it sustained?	What are the results?
EXPERIENCE/ EXPERTISE	Who is valued, used and developed?	How?	Is it sustained?	What are the results?
DECISION-MAKING	Who is involved?	How?	Is it sustained?	What are the results?
RESOURCES	To whom?	How?	Is it sustained?	What are the results?

The tool presented above has not been used by the bookstore to date. As indicated earlier in this section, it is a suggestion to the bookstore. There is a plan to introduce it into a staff training session where it will be explained in detail by a volunteer who uses the tool on a regular basis.

Informing the Future

The collective style of management no longer works for the TWB. A collective style of management works well when all members of the collective are in tune with each other, share common values and goals, and are more or less at the same level of maturity regarding what is meant by feminist values and organizing principles. This is not always feasible.

Hierarchy, on the other hand, does not work with women who are committed to working within feminist strategies and principles. How then does the TWB balance its operational principles? How can they ensure that during crisis situations, they can fall back on a plan of action that encompasses feminist values and at the same time effectively resolve conflict, and land safely in the net?"

Based on past experiences, the TWB has determined that a collective management style only works with perfect fits who remain together and are so in tune with each other that 'managing' becomes second nature. (e.g., the '86 collective) However, this does not lend itself to effective and efficient management of a business once there is staff turn-over on a regular basis. With turn-over, there is a natural hierarchy of information and bookselling know-how which has to be passed on, accepted and respected. In this case it is the senior booksellers, who are also senior in age, who would be passing on knowledge and skills. An understanding of ageism and how this could become an issue in this situation should be addressed.

Additionally, the external environment has changed. New staff members, while they are enthused about the bookstore and being in a 'feminist space', admit that working at the bookstore is only a small part of their lives. The dedication and depth of involvement demonstrated by the elders is not the same for new staff members. The overall values maybe similar but the level of participation is different.

Managing Personnel & Strategies

The challenge faced by the bookstore is how best to manage the business and the staff in a manner which is caring yet gets work done in a effective and efficient manner. This involves the exploration of ways and means of ensuring staff accountability. The two main strategies used are 'work dialogues' and 'staff meetings' designed to review how the organization is doing as a whole.

Work Dialogues

- ◆ A scheduled meeting designed to allow for feedback. (scheduled on a yearly basis)
- ◆ Discussions are two-way and held between: the 2 co-managers and a staff member; a community board member and a co-manager. Scheduled on a yearly basis.
- ◆ While there is a schedule, anybody can call for a session.
- ◆ Informal, no formal record of meeting kept
- ◆ Sessions are booked for 1 hour
- ◆ Sessions usually last 2 hours
- ◆ Process: using the woman's job description as a guide, each major task is discussed
- ◆ Staff is asked to speak first

QUESTIONS ARE:

- ◆ How do you feel about working at the bookstore?
- ◆ How do you feel about your job?
- ◆ Are there any issues around your job?

- ◆ Issues are then named and strategies developed to deal with them with short-term, medium-term and long-term time frames identified.
- ◆ Room is left for the impact of personal life events on performance. If during work dialogue personal issues take over, these are dealt with and the work discussion is re-scheduled.
- ◆ This contributes to joint accountability regarding performance on the job.

While this process is straightforward and honest, it is not an easy one. It demands openness, honesty and demonstrated caring from all parties for the sessions to work.

The results of this kind of mutual commitment is that:

- Staff members recognize that they are valued and are working in a caring environment
- Managers and staff recognize and acknowledge that time dedicated to this process is important and must be maintained.
- They recognize that it is important enough to delay routine tasks and they must then find additional time to complete interrupted tasks.
- It is recognized that the process is an organizational one built-in for accountability.

Management continues to be challenging for the bookstore. Given the framework in which the store operates, it is difficult for the managers to act in what can be described as a traditional manner. Because of this, staff are not reprimanded, nor are they issued warning letters, nor are they fired. There is, however, an attempt to understand the underlying reasons for the behaviour and appropriate feedback is given.

Staff Meetings

The process for the staff meeting is as follows:

Each person is required to fill in a form ahead of the meeting in order to facilitate a more focused discussion. At the meeting each person takes a turn reporting under each section. Discussion follows and issues coming out are sorted out with agreement recorded. A copy of the minutes from the meeting are kept in a binder in the office.

This strategy is one year old. Both the managers and staff indicate that both work dialogues and structured staff meetings are contributing towards improving the quality of the workplace by clarifying expectations assistance, and providing general information about the industry.

In recognizing that there is a cycle of rebirth, growing and maturing each time there is a personnel change, the bookstore is moving towards having regular scheduled organizational check-ins.

The Future — Steps in the evolution process

A new style is evolving at the TWB. A process is developing which allows for openness, honesty and demonstrated efforts to provide new staff members with an understanding of the organizational culture and norms, work habits and acceptable ways of behaviour.

A working group is being formed to undertake the re-assessment and revision of the current structure. Community members are being recruited against a criteria which identifies the knowledge, skills and level of commitment (time and intensity of energy) which is needed to meet the organizational needs.

Orientation, training & development includes a process of working with staff on building a common understanding around current issues facing the bookstore and how best to work with each other on these issues. This mostly involves ongoing dialogue, in group meetings.

One of the main challenges of the working group of 1995 onward is to maintain and continue building financial viability, to craft an improved organizational structure — which will work best for the business while maintaining a feminist framework.

The overall organizational challenge is how to encourage new staff to 'buy into' the culture; gain a sense of ownership and an appreciation for the financial limitations of the bookselling industry.

"We need visionaries, you know the big picture persons as well as those of us who operate at a different level."

The bookselling industry does not routinely return high dividends for its staff. It is, however, an industry which attracts those who love books and who have a desire to work in the industry. It attracts writers, publishers, graphic artists, illustrators, promoters, to name a few. For these, the bookstore is an essential part of training for the industry. This training is an equally adequate precursor for any other profession or career where the ability to plan and execute an event, and to take an idea and carry it through to its logical conclusion, is essential. Public relations and customer relations are examples of fields where training is provided on a daily basis at the bookstore. By trying to demonstrate the worth of working at the bookstore far beyond its dollar reward, the hope is that each person will be encouraged to develop to their full potential. The inevitable growth that is a result of the experience of working within this extremely supportive environment, can be used either at the bookstore or anywhere the persons wants to work.

In keeping with the belief in an individual's capacity to grow and change, assistance with this process needs to be formalized. The informality of an oral tradition does not lend itself to clear procedures, rules and regulations. Documentation of policies must be formalized and helps to clear up any ambiguity.

Documentation is perhaps required more within a feminist framework than any other. This will go a long way to build the knowledge base, provide support for each other and make it easier for women who are at the threshold of expanding their understanding of their commitment to being a feminist.

TOMORROW

One step at a time

"The Toronto Women's Bookstore is a delightful place. Warm. Light hearted. Thoughtful. I have enjoyed working with all of the women who work in the store and those with whom I spoke in their varied capacities. I felt welcomed at all times whether I was expected to be in the bookstore or not. I found them open, honest and very critical of themselves. I see them working hard at walking the talk and helping each other to do so. I see them naming issues and struggling to resolve these issues in a manner that enables them to maintain an honesty in dealing with challenges. One of the women with whom I spoke, thought that the bookstore felt that by hiring a woman of colour in the eighties, they had demonstrated their commitment to inclusivity and diversity. The bookstore may have thought so then, but the confrontation with members of the black feminist community is given as an example of how they were faced with developing strategies to understand, challenge and continue to work with each other. I would say that they have managed to do so. The bookstore is one of the few feminist organizations which has not seen efforts to work through challenging the status quo, end in groups splitting and going their separate ways. The TWB continues to take one step at a time in attempting to maintain a balance.

What has been shared with you, is the way in which the TWB operates and struggles to maintain its ideals. We have talked about how the bookstore got started in response to a need in the women's community and its evolution into a community business. We have explored the challenges faced at different time periods over the life of the bookstore and how it got to where it is today in 1995. We have also looked at the direction in which it is

headed as it faces the challenges of the 90's. It is our hope that you have found some, if not all, of the discussion presented here informative and useful.

Staff, volunteers and customers of the bookstore will be the first to agree that the tightrope becomes more taut and efforts need to be doubled to maintain a balance.

Some of you may think that this is no different from what is taking place in the rest of the business world. To some extent this is true. Mainstream businesses, however, are beginning to realize that the principles documented here are in fact a necessary foundation for the viable success of **any** business.

In the Globe & Mail Report on Business, January 1995 there is a Special Report from the National Quality Institute in which a number of issues are discussed. Included in the article, is the following 10-point Excellence Checklist.

Is your organization building its quality improvement efforts on a solid foundation?...In my organization, by our actions, we demonstrate the following principles every day:

- 1 • Co-operation and teamwork is a way of life in my organization.
- 2 • I am aware of the direction my organization is taking and understand my part in the overall plan.
- 3 • Our primary focus is on serving our customers.
- 4 • People in my organization have respect for one another and everyone is encouraged to develop his or her potential.
- 5 • Everyone is contributing to our focus on achieving excellence.
- 6 • We all focus on continuous improvement and don't just accept things as they are.
- 7 • We always use measurement data to help us make decisions and don't simply rely on our intuition.
- 8 • I appreciate and understand the expectations of our stakeholders and how what we do satisfies those expectations.
- 9 • We are an organization that is driven by quality and innovation.
- 10 • I am having fun doing what I do!

The two missing pieces which make a business operating within a feminist framework separate from the crowd, are:

- 11 • the commitment to diversity and inclusivity in a warm, caring welcoming environment.
- 12 • A commitment to contribute and facilitate social change.

Good luck in your new venture or in re-thinking how to improve your current enterprise! Remember — on a tightrope, it's one step at time — one foot in front of the other.

Don't stop... keep moving... keep evolving... keep growing!

the END...



the BEGINNING...