

MAJOR LEAGUE SUCCESS

Through Junior Team Canada trade missions, young entrepreneurs are opening doors for themselves and for Canadian business.

Candice Bazinet started knocking on the doors of companies in Ottawa's biotechnology sector last spring. Her pitch: let me represent you and sell your products in China and Hong Kong.

Prospects such as Toby Shannan, vice-president of sales and marketing at DNA Genotek, were skeptical when they first heard from Bazinet, a 24-year-old student at the University of Ottawa's school of management. However, Shannan, whose firm sells devices for collecting DNA to scientists and researchers developing molecular roadmaps for disease, was quickly convinced by Bazinet's grasp of her business. "After a couple of minutes of listening to Candice, I thought she could do anything."

Bazinet, from Blind River, Ontario, is one of thousands of Canadian youths aged 16 to 25 who have plunged into the global marketplace through Junior Team Canada (JTC). A 14-year partnership between the public and private sectors and sponsored by International Trade Canada, the program equips youths with the skills, knowledge and experience to compete in the global economy.

The program has a number of facets. For example, young exporters are sent on Canadian trade missions with the Prime Minister or Minister



Nils Engelstad in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 2005 while volunteering on a Junior Team Canada mission: Going beyond borders.

photo: courtesy of Nils Engelstad

of International Trade. There are also biannual JTC missions where teams of youths such as Bazinet travel to foreign markets to meet with industry and government leaders and explore business opportunities on behalf of sponsoring companies, preparing market briefs upon their return.

"We gave Candice a list of 24 contacts in Hong Kong, and she came up with an exhaustive and amazing report," recalls Shannan, adding that DNA Genotek can directly attribute at least one contract to Bazinet's role.

Amy Giroux, who directs Global Vision, the organization that manages the JTC program, says that the process of becoming a participant in one of the JTC missions is highly competitive. For the 2005 mission to Brazil from August 11 to 27, the program accepted just 35 out of some 500 applicants. To apply, young people "brand" themselves in a 50-word statement and identify their skills, approach and target sector. Once accepted, participants must match the \$4,000 in funding that the program provides for the mission by asking companies in their selected sectors to hire them as junior consultants.

"You really put your neck on the line with those cold calls, but it's an important lesson to show that you can provide 'value added,'" says

Nils Engelstad, from London, Ontario. In 1998 Engelstad, then just 18, convinced Hetek Solutions, an engineering consulting firm in London, to defray his travel costs for the JTC mission to Malaysia and Thailand.

"We were looking at doing work in Malaysia, so it was a good opportunity to get involved," says Hetek president Wayne Hennigar. "Nils was a very progressive young man, and we were impressed with his credentials." In fact, the following summer, the firm hired Engelstad as a researcher.

Candice Bazinet also found employment with one of the three companies that sponsored her recent mission, a biotech start-up firm that has hired her to help prepare for its launch into the marketplace. "After all the cold calls through JTC, it's easy to sell myself now in a job interview," she says.

Engelstad, who is now completing a law degree at the University of Windsor and continues to volunteer in JTC training centres and missions, says the program makes participants realize that "everything is global... you automatically look at opportunities that go beyond our borders." 🍁

Learn more about how to get involved in Junior Team Canada by visiting Global Vision at www.gvconnects.com.