





# Agent of Change

**FEI Canada CFO Line Trudeau** is helping pave the way for more female senior executives in the financial industry through networking and educational events *by Christopher James Palafox | photos by Samantha Simmons*

In 1981, Line Trudeau, the current CFO of Financial Executives International (FEI) Canada, entered the business world as an auditor at KPMG after earning her CPA designation. Today, her 23-year-old daughter Roxanne works at PricewaterhouseCoopers, seeking to earn her own CPA designation. Trudeau is understandably proud that her daughter followed in her footsteps, but she wants to do more to ensure Roxanne continues to find good footholds in the workplace. Working for FEI Canada has brought Trudeau the opportunity to advance the role of women in corporate Canada.

FEI Canada is a membership-based professional association of senior financial executives with 11 chapters across the country and about 1,700 members, 20 percent of whom are women. It's the number one organization informing, educating, and preparing financial leaders, and it manages more than 100 events per year across Canada, offering members the opportunity to network, refine their technical and leadership skills, and advance their careers.

Before becoming FEI Canada's CFO, Trudeau advanced from her auditor's position at KPMG to a management role at RBC. It was mainly at RBC, working alongside leaders such as Monique Leroux (currently the president, CEO, and chair of the board at Desjardins Group), that Trudeau refined her skills and was recognized for her leadership and team-building skills in a variety of senior positions in finance, strategic planning, external reporting, risk management, internal audit, and systems development—in both Canada and the United States. "It is important to have a mentor that believes in you," Trudeau says. "Monique was my mentor at RBC." Knowing it would be a great investment, Leroux granted Trudeau a leave of absence to complete her MBA at HEC Montréal. Trudeau ended up earning two scholarships: one for best academic results from HEC Montréal and one for her leadership skills from the MBA Association.

In 2009, Trudeau joined FEI Canada as the CFO and corporate secretary of the board. Since joining, she has accomplished a variety

## FACTS & FIGURES

FEI Canada

**1,700**

Senior financial executives belonging to FEI Canada

**320**

Female senior financial executives belonging to FEI Canada

**200**

Member volunteers within the organization

**100**

Events per year where members network and get educated to advance their career

**11**

FEI Canada chapters across the country

**7**

Thought-leadership platforms across which the organization shares ideas

of feats, including becoming chair of membership for FEI Canada's Southern Golden Horseshoe (SGH) chapter in 2010 and becoming a board member and chair of the chapter's Women's Financial Executives Network (WFEN) in 2012. When her daughter decided to enter the business world and get her accounting designation, Trudeau was inspired to do something for her and all women working in corporate Canada by creating FEI Canada's own WFEN. With the help of member volunteers, she began organizing events tailored to female senior financial executives. Two long-

standing members of FEI Canada—Cynthia Devine, the CFO of Tim Horton's, and Mary Lou Maher, then KPMG's CFO and now its chief diversity partner—cohosted the first networking event.

Trudeau has seen the number of female members in her SGH chapter double since 2010, and they now represent close to 30 percent of the group's membership. She was able to create her women's network through the support of the SGH chapter's board members, following a convincing market research report that showed of the 4,700 Canadian

female CPAs who were CFOs or vice presidents of finance, FEI Canada only had 360 of them in its membership base. There was definitely room for improvement.

"My main goal is to offer a venue for women to network in order to gain professional and business advantages and to acquire skills to help advance their career," Trudeau says. "We are fortunate in Canada to have organizations such as Women of Influence, WXN, the Institute of Corporate Directors, and the Ontario Securities Commission that advocate for the advancement of women in corporate Canada. The business case to have more women on boards is top of mind in Canada. Women make up 50 percent of the Canadian labour force, yet only about 15 percent of directors of the FP500 are women, and about 50 percent of publicly traded companies

"It is important to have a mentor that believes in you."

Line Trudeau, CFO



#### ↓ THE BOTTOM LINE

JOB TITLE  
CFO

INDUSTRY  
Nonprofit

YEARS IN THE  
BUSINESS  
33

WHERE DID YOU  
START YOUR CAREER?  
KPMG

DESCRIBE YOURSELF  
IN THREE WORDS  
Driven, curious,  
change agent.

ADVICE TO THOSE JUST  
STARTING IN FINANCE  
Get a good education,  
work for progressive  
organizations,  
network, brand  
yourself outside your  
organization, and  
find mentors.

have no women on their boards. There are definite benefits of having women on boards, including stronger financial performance, heightened innovation, and improved board effectiveness."

A few months ago, under the umbrella of the WFEN, Trudeau led the volunteer committee in organizing a "Women on Board" event to educate senior financial executives about the value of increasing the number of female directors. She wants to ensure that when her daughter is ready to contribute to boards, she will have plenty of opportunities. Trudeau's advice to her daughter and everyone who aspires to become a senior financial executive is to get a good education, work for progressive organizations, network and brand yourself outside of your organization, and find mentors to support you. **\_a**