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## Head of the class

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Suzanne Boles || October 28, 2003

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Like most entrepreneurs, Allen Chan wears many hats. The president of Pulse Scientific Inc., a growing manufacturer of medical diagnostic kits in Burlington, Ont., spends his days juggling operations, sales and marketing while managing and mentoring six employees. It's the perfect training ground for Chan's other job: teaching. Twice a week, Chan heads to Toronto's Humber College to teach business and technology students the ins and outs of quality assurance. "I think that it's important to share what you've learned with other people," says Chan. "And I learn from my students, so it's never one-way communication."

As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Knowledge exists to be imparted," and business owners seem to agree. Chan epitomizes a trend among entrepreneurs: the desire to share their real-world business experience with students. For many entrepreneurs, teaching is about wanting to give something back, says Steve Bodsworth, associate dean of Humber's School of Applied Technology. But the relationship cuts both ways. Having entrepreneurs as teachers, he says, "is better than any textbook you can buy. The students are exposed to experienced individuals who are actually working in the field."

While many entrepreneurs-turned-teachers are motivated by a desire to give back, teaching can also do wonders for your business. Taking on a class can create valuable networking opportunities, improve your business's community profile, boost your professional credibility and give you first crack at potential employees. Still, it's not something to be undertaken lightly. Teaching takes time and initiative. Delivering value to students means staying up to date on all aspects of your business and industry trends.

That kind of commitment didn't faze Chan, who approached Humber College 11 years ago. Today he spends up to six hours a week in the classroom and another three on marking and preparing his lectures. Chan squeezes those hours in whenever he can. On the days he teaches, for example, Chan also drives to his U.S. warehouse to drop off and pick up products. He typically spends the two-hour wait to clear customs at both sides of the border reading and preparing lectures for the evening's class.

While teaching will never make Chan rich, it offers him other rewards. Chan has successfully recruited talented students to his firm and finds valuable contacts among his pupils and fellow teachers. One of his students, for example, introduced him to a distributor who exports Pulse Scientific's products to Africa.

Still, Chan values the learning environment the most. "These students come from very diverse backgrounds, both in terms of ethnic background and work area or education," he says. "And the industries they work in are very wide. So I always learn from them. I think I'm making a contribution to society, and to help these people gives me satisfaction."

That win-win drew Vivian Manasc to teaching, too. A partner in Edmonton-based Manasc Isaac Architects and an adjunct professor at the University of Calgary, Manasc began teaching architectural practice 10 years ago. In addition to teaching a week-long course, Manasc organizes and teaches professional development courses on sustainable architecture. "When I present a course, I have to collect and synthesize ideas and present them, and then deal with the questions," says Manasc. "I find that I learn a lot from the kind of questions people are asking."

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Manasc, who typically spends up to 100 hours a year in the classroom, says her teaching credentials have also earned her a solid reputation as an expert in sustainable architecture and boosted her firm's credibility. As a result, she says, Manasc Isaac has enjoyed more project opportunities. There are personal incentives for sharing her expertise, too. "Teaching challenges me to stay completely up to date, says Manasc. "I have to read and be as current as anybody in the field on a particular subject. You can't fall behind."

Ken Stuart is also hooked on the intellectual dialogue he gets from teaching. The co-founder and chief technology officer of EK3 Technologies Inc., a University of Western Ontario spinoff that produces hardware and software used in digital signs, teaches an entrepreneurship course to UWO engineering students.

Despite a schedule that sometimes includes 12-hour workdays, Stuart was keen on teaching. So when friend and fellow UWO graduate Joel Adams approached him with an opportunity to teach entrepreneurship, he jumped at the chance. They developed the curriculum by asking themselves: "What are the things we didn't know when we wanted to start a company?" Their course, Entrepreneurship and Technical Innovation, debuted in September 2002, with the pair sharing a weekly three-hour lecture and one-hour tutorial. Although it consumes as much as 13 hours each week, Stuart's enthusiasm for the course resonates in his voice: "We've brought some real experience to the class. Hopefully, some of them learn that [entrepreneurship] is what they want to do, and pursue it."

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