

# Generation Next

## Catherine Hedgeman, Esq

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### Success Magazine: You went to Union College and then Albany Law. How did your experiences in education prepare you for success?

Catherine Hedgeman: At Union I pursued a B.A. in Political Science and then went on to Law School. Both of these degrees required me to develop strong analytical skills and emphasized strategic thinking and problem solving. I also spent a term abroad in England, the Netherlands and Hungary studying their national healthcare systems (which are socialized medical systems where healthcare is free to all citizens). When you travel abroad not only are you introduced to new people and ways of life, but it provides you the opportunity to build life skills such as becoming more resourceful and independent as you attempt to navigate through surroundings that are unfamiliar. In today's business world, these personal educational experiences are crucial to success.

### SM: What made you approach the Chamber to start a young professionals council? Why was this important to you?

CH: When I graduated from college everyone was taking off to other areas of the country. No one really ever considered staying in the Capital Region unless they were from here to begin with. In the early 1990's there wasn't much reason to stay here anyhow. Even I went to Washington D.C. for a year, before coming home to go to law school. While I was in D.C., I started taking notes on exactly what made it a cool place to live, work and play. When I made the decision to come back home and attend law school, I knew it was going to be extremely important to establish a conduit through which young professionals could network, socialize and invest in their community -if the Capital Region was to attract and retain young professionals.

### SM: What are the goals of GenNext?

CH: GenNEXT - a joint initiative of the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce and The Chamber of Schenectady County - is a young professionals council dedicated to promoting the region's economic vitality through the attraction and retention of young professionals and business leaders throughout Tech Valley. The council's various programs seek to groom the next generation of Tech Valley leaders, provide a forum for young professionals to expand their business and social networks, and serve as a sounding board for regional economic development issues.

### SM: What are the criteria for becoming a GenNEXT member?

CH: If a young professional's (40 and under) employer is a member of the Albany-Colonie Regional Chamber of Commerce or the Chamber of Schenectady County, they can sign up free of charge to be a member of GenNEXT.

### SM: What is the current enrollment in your program?

CH: About 600

### SM: What are some of the programs that you have in place within GenNEXT?

CH: Just recently GenNEXT was restructured into task forces to give members the opportunity to engage in the council, and to achieve tangible outcomes of that participation. Our "Live Work Play" task force will allow our members to participate in economic development activities that promote Tech Valley as a destination for young professionals to build a career, raise a family and enjoy the region's unique recreational activities. The "Tomorrow's Leaders Today" task force will engage our members

in activities designed to build their leadership skills and integrate them into the community. Under this task force lies the GenNEXT Executive Mentorship program where members are matched with seasoned executives in the business community, to be groomed as the area's future business and community leaders.

### SM: Who is your GenNEXT mentor, and what have you learned from the experience?

CH: I have participated in the GenNEXT Executive Mentorship program for the past four years and have been fortunate to have been mentored by top executives in the Capital Region including Nancy Carey Cassidy of Picotte Companies, Kevin O'Connor of Tech Valley Communications, Michael Orsino, Regional President of Key Bank, and Steve Egna from Teal, Becker & Chairmonte. The relationships formed with these business and community leaders are invaluable. They serve as sounding boards for ideas, to introduce you to new people and new experiences, and to share experiences and life lessons.

### SM: How will these programs contribute to the economic development of the region?

CH: The GenNEXT council, as well as many other community initiatives, serve to attract and retain young professionals by offering them opportunities to participate in their community and be groomed to be the next generation of business leaders. Research has shown that the more young people become engaged and invested in their community their loyalty and commitment to the community in which they live increases.

### SM: What have you learned about yourself through the process of starting GenNEXT?

CH: I have learned that there will be no limit to my success and nothing that I cannot accomplish if I just dream it. It has also taught me that a true leader is someone who has the ability to lead others to a place where they are empowered to lead themselves.

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**SM: Who has been your greatest support in starting this project?**

CH: My greatest support has been from other young professionals who continue to inspire me everyday with all the amazing things they are doing for this community. Especially young professionals and founding members, John R. Vero of Couch White, LLP, Christopher Brantigan of Pre-Paid Legal and Daryl Teal of Daryl Teal & Associates, financial advisors.

**SM: Silda Wall Spitzer recently created YLC (Young Leaders Congress) as part of the I LIVE NEW YORK initiative. You are a newly appointed member. What does this opportunity mean to you?**

CH: On January 29, 2008 New York's First Lady Silda Wall Spitzer announced the establishment of a Young Leaders Congress (YLC) comprised of 15 young professionals from upstate New York. In her remarks, the First Lady credited GenNEXT's success as the impetus for creating the I Live NY summit and the YLC. The creation of the YLC further validates the necessity of economic development initiatives designed to attract and retain young people in New York. I am honored and humbled that I was invited to be a member of the first ever statewide congress to address attraction and retention of young people.

**SM: Aside from your involvement in GenNEXT, and now YLC, you are an attorney. How do you make time for yourself?**

CH: I actually have to schedule personal time into my calendar every day. What I choose to do with the time varies, but usually involves time spent at the gym, reading books on history or politics, playing golf and community service projects. I also enjoy spending time with my two favorite little people, my nephew Sam and my niece Morgan.

**SM: Why was it important to you to start your own law firm?**

CH: I started my own law practice because being an entrepreneur appealed to me. Most people think of the word entrepreneur as a term

that describes a business owner. However, it is really a lifestyle you are choosing. You are choosing to balance work and personal time in a different way. You are not conforming to the traditional business model or business hour schedule. Creativity and creating wealth do not follow a schedule, they happen when they happen. Starting my own practice also gave me experience in running a business which was helpful to starting another corporate entity called "Stakeholders."

**SM: What is the mission of Stakeholders?**

CH: To cultivate an informed and active creative class dedicated to building diverse and sustainable communities throughout New York's Capital Region. We achieve this by promoting area resources and providing opportunities for personal and professional enrichment in order to retain and attract residents, workers, and visitors and foster regional pride.

**SM: You have accomplished a great deal at a young age. Do you see yourself as a role model for other young people in business?**

CH: Perhaps. A better word would be mentor. I have had some extraordinary mentors who have had a significant impact on my life and I plan to pay it forward.

**SM: You are a member of the St. Peter's Foundation Associate Board. What are the initiatives of this foundation?**

CH: The St. Peter's Associate Board was the brainchild of the St. Peter's Foundation Board and its executive director Peter Semenza. The Hospital Foundation Board wanted to recruit young people to become the next generation of champions for the mission of St. Peter's Hospital and to serve on the Foundation Board. Over the past three years the Associate Foundation Board has grown to nine members and has raised awareness about the mission of the hospital and has collectively raised over \$50,000 for hospital programs through the Associate Board's annual New Year's Eve fundraising event. We are also planning a spring event that will seek to educate local young professionals about the hospital's recent expansion and the modern delivery of healthcare services.

**SM: What characteristic do you attribute to your success?**

CH: There isn't just one. But I would credit most of my success to having the ability to envision the future and make the vision a reality.

**SM: What advice would you give to a young person just starting out in business?**

CH: Have Courage. Courage allows a successful person to fail and to learn powerful lessons from that failure, so that in the end, they really haven't failed at all. Success truly comes from overcoming the fear of failure.

**SM: What do you hope for the future of the Capital Region?**

CH: In the words of the Union College Alma Mater, "may it ring with thy children's chorus."

I certainly hope that the next generation will have a Capital Region where attraction and retention of young people will be less of an issue, and that it will be a preferred place to live, work, and play. I hope that my own children and grandchildren will proudly say "I LIVE IN ALBANY, NEW YORK."

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