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Correction: This article about a business coaching conference misstated the location of Everything Summer, a company that guides families to summer camps and teen programs. The company is located in Westwood.

Speed coaching a conference favorite

By BETH FITZGERALD
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Jill Tipograph sat down and started asking questions, real fast.

"How should I value my time? Am I spending enough on marketing? How do I get a better handle on my finances?"

Five minutes later, a bell rang to end Tipograph's first ever "speed coaching" session. And what did she learn from financial management expert Beth Polish?

"I need to make sure I understand all the costs of my business," said Tipograph, whose Princeton company, Everything Summer, helps children and teenagers find summer camps and academic programs.

Speed coaching was among the hottest tickets yesterday at the Women's Leadership Exchange, a daylong conference at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers in midtown Manhattan. Participants queued up for five minutes of advice from seven coaches whose combined expertise spans marketing, sales, leadership, finance and law.

"I had a very specific question about sales — we sell to very large companies and I had a question about the sales cycle, and she really nailed it for me," said Veronica Fielding of Princeton, whose company, Digital Brand Expression, is a search-engine-marketing firm. Fielding's five-minute tête-à-tête was with Colleen Stanley, a business development and training specialist.

"She really listened, and that was the key," Fielding said.

Andrea March co-founded the Women's Leadership Exchange five years ago with Leslie Grossman, and since then they've sponsored more than 20 networking conferences around the country. At least 700 women were expected at yesterday's event, which combined speed coaching with workshops and speakers.

"Our mission is to create more women leaders through the entrepreneurial world," March said.

The keynote speaker was Carly Fiorina, the former chief executive of Hewlett-Packard whose book "Tough Choices" is the story of her rise from law-school-dropout to the executive ranks of AT&T, Lucent Technologies and HP. In 2005 Fiorina was fired by HP, which is now facing a criminal investigation for the way it conducted an investigation into leaks by board members to media.

Fiorina said her mission when she arrived at HP in 1999 was to bring change to a corporate icon that was lagging its industry.

"Change is always resisted because people don't want to lose power; people with power are afraid of losing what they know," she said. "That is why change takes leadership, energy and courage."