

THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

A SPECIAL ONLINE FEATURE BROUGHT TO YOU BY L'OREAL CANADA

Science, beautiful science

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Being a mentor means knocking down girls' prejudices against science, and opening the doors to a beautiful career, says Virginie Tremblay, 31, a mechanical engineer at L'Oréal Canada's Montreal plant. Ms. Tremblay visits science camps for girls around Canada and shepherds girls on tours of the plant where she works as part of L'Oréal Canada's contribution to Actua, a national program aimed at fostering interest in careers in science, engineering and technology among boys and girls.

WHAT DO YOU GET OUT OF BEING A MENTOR?

It's the idea that more women will jump into that beautiful field that I'm working in. It's the opportunity to be able to open their doors.

WHY ARE THOSE DOORS CLOSED FOR SOME GIRLS, BEFORE THEY MEET FEMALE SCIENTISTS LIKE YOURSELF?

I've met some girls who say, "but I don't like math, how can I do this job?" There are other things than math. I'm not doing math on a day-to-day-basis. I actually never do math on a day-to-day basis. Rest assured there's a difference between what you see in school and what you see in life. I'm trying to open their doors so they don't close themselves in and say, "I don't like this so I can't do this."

HOW DO YOU GET THAT POINT ACROSS?

I say – When I was in school, these are the subjects that I liked, and these are the subjects I didn't like. I never liked chemistry and I never had great scores in chemistry but I'm still considered a scientist and I still work in the chemical plant. It doesn't stop you from pursuing a career in that field.

WHAT SPURRED YOUR INTEREST IN BECOMING A MECHANICAL ENGINEER?

It was my interest in math. In CEGEP [Quebec's two-year junior colleges], I sat down with my orientation co-ordinator and said I like math, I don't like chemistry, I like communications. This brought up the engineering field. I had no idea what it was. I jumped on board and visited Sherbrooke University and fell in love with the program and the campus.

WHAT DO THE GIRLS YOU MENTOR WANT TO KNOW ABOUT?

They ask a lot of questions about L'Oréal Canada. It's very interesting to see their perception

of our business. It's always focused on marketing. They don't see the whole processing side of it. That's the beauty of their coming to visit the plant. They see the complexity behind the cute packages or the nice commercials on TV. There are scientists behind that. They can relate to it. The visits that we've had, most of the girls are in the fifth, sixth grade. They all have the little make-up bags. They see the plastic molds for lipstick that they and their mothers are using. We bring it back down to everyday life – there's science all the time. It's a great source of discussion.

EVEN IF THEY DON'T PURSUE A CAREER IN SCIENCE, WHAT DO THE GIRLS GET OUT OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM?

It can lift the prejudices that people might have.

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