

# THE HBA Advantage

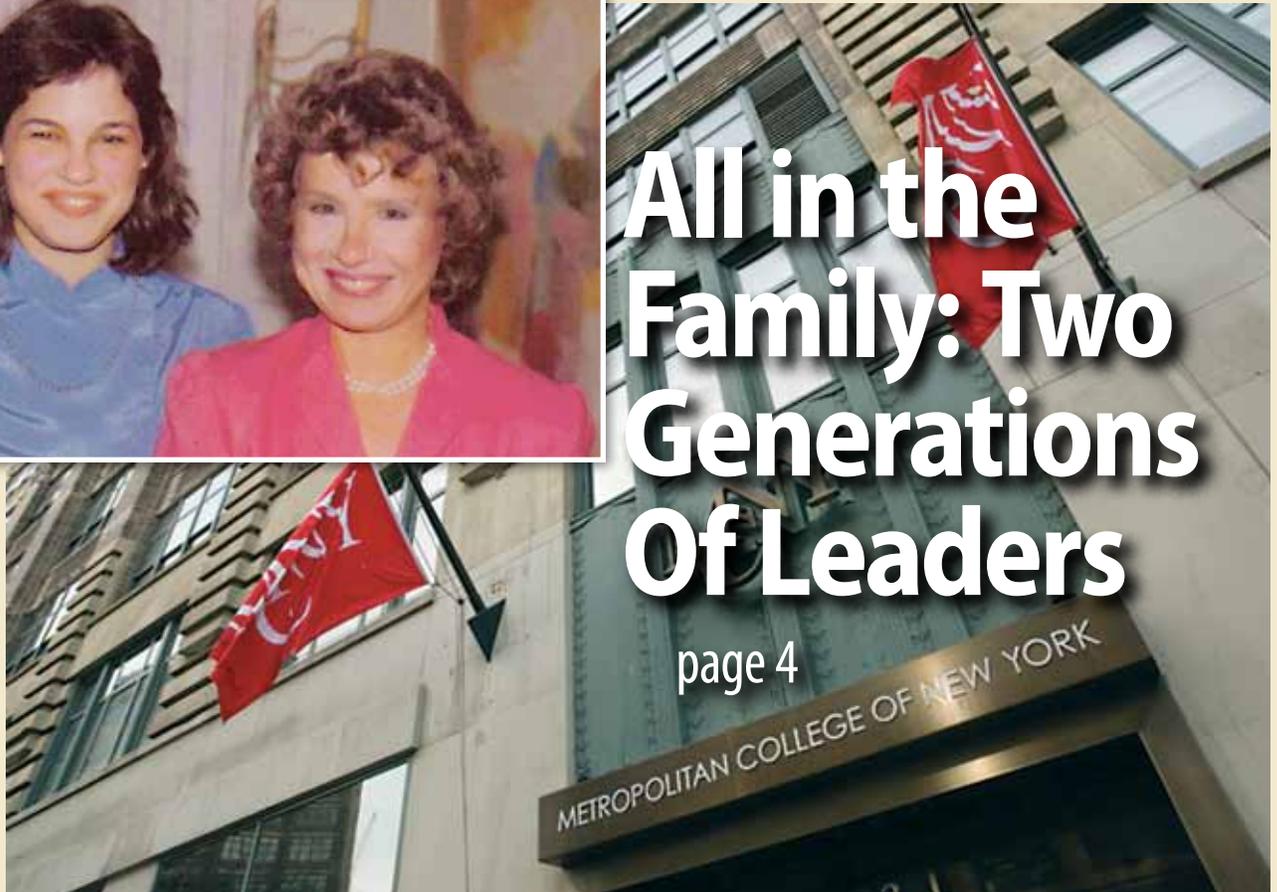
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## All in the Family: Two Generations Of Leaders

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Wendy Cohen and her mother, Audrey Cohen, founder of Metropolitan College of New York.

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# Two Generations of Women Leaders



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I've known Wendy Cohen for more than a decade—we have a mutual friend and see each other at annual holiday parties and social gatherings a few times each year—but I learned just this year that she is the daughter of the founder of Metropolitan College of New York and sits on the school's board of trustees.

What inspired this profile of Wendy and her mother, Audrey, is that so many of us are part of or will be part of multi-generation women leaders. The good news is that is no longer an anomaly.

Audrey Cohen is credited with being founder of the paraprofessional movement, which is the foundation of Metropolitan College of New York, a non-profit accredited college designed to enable highly motivated working adults to earn the degrees (associates to masters), which will help them improve their lives and their communities.

Founded in 1964, MCNY is launching a new program in 2011: a specialized bachelor of business administration in healthcare systems management. This innovative BBA combines an understanding of business operations with a particular emphasis on the management of technology and services in the health care industry. The curriculum includes the usual business coursework. To meet the future needs of the rapidly-evolving healthcare industry, students also will become knowledgeable about issues in both health information technology and health services management. And of course, they will graduate with the practical experience of addressing challenges in the real world through their Constructive Actions.

The following profiles of Wendy and Audrey were written by Wendy, because her mother passed away several years ago.

## ABOUT WENDY

### Please tell us a little about your personal and professional background.

After practicing law for a few years I transitioned into wealth planning marketing over 20 years ago. I work for Morgan Stanley Smith Barney as a vice president and di-



WENDY COHEN

rector of wealth advisory marketing where I help financial advisors create deeper relationships with their clients based on their interest in philanthropy and wealth planning. Personally: My husband, Robert, and I have two children, Alex (23) and Sarah (18).

### What is your role at the college? How long have you been in that role? Have you held other roles there?

I have been a member of the board of trustees for the last three years and I am the chair of the development committee. As the daughter of the founder, I feel I play an important role sharing her story and the story of the college.

### Did your role overlap that of the time your mother was at the college? If so, how did that impact your position/role?

My mother died in 1996 and I didn't join the board until later. However, growing up with a woman who founded a college that revolutionized education and mainly serves low income minority adults certainly inspired my interest in MCNY and impacted how I see the world.

### How did you develop your leadership skills?

Observing my mother was a large part of it, but I am also inspired by my father who is dedicated to social change and, at 82, is still active serving charitable organizations in western Massachusetts. He not only supported my mother and her

efforts with the college, he more than pitched in to raise my sister and me while having a successful career as a tax lawyer. My parents' actions showed me what it means to be a leader. I have developed those skills over the past several years, both through my work experience and through raising a family.

### Did you have a big break that opened up opportunities for you?

After working long hours in a law firm for three years, I knew I wanted to find a career that was challenging and financially rewarding, but gave me time to raise my family. I saw an ad in the *New York Times* for attorneys who were interested in marketing at a financial services corporation which was known for good hours. With an infant at home at the time, I said "that's for me." The job was a five minute walk from my house and allowed me to balance work with the rest of my life. I stayed in that job for 15 years and that position led to the one I have now at Morgan Stanley Smith Barney.

### What was your biggest hurdle and how did you overcome it?

At the beginning of my career, although opportunities were much more open for me than they were for my mother, there were still more opportunities for advancement available to men. If you wanted to leave in time to pick up your kids or you didn't want to miss soccer games by traveling, you gave up the possibility of a promotion. Now that my kids are older, I have been able to work longer hours and have gotten better at promoting myself, which is probably even more important than long hours in terms of getting ahead.

### Has it been difficult to be a second-generation leader at the College?

Quite the contrary. I am humbled to be a part of what my mother started almost 50 years ago. I often think about all the nights I watched her practicing a speech or packing for a trip in the name of what she believed in. Now I truly get it. I am thrilled and honored to be carrying on her vision. I hope my children will

be involved with the college some day. My daughter participated in Model UN in high school, just as my mother had many years before, so you never know.

### **How do you relent gracefully yet maintain your authority?**

I don't get hung up on being right. When you keep your eye on the bigger vision you can be more open to other perspectives so grace in the moment comes more easily.

### **Is there a support system you rely on?**

My family is my biggest supporter. My husband Robert, an attorney in private practice, has always encouraged me to be my best. My children bring me so much joy (even though my daughter used to say that I read her presentations on Roth IRAs instead of bedtime stories). I believe they both saw the benefits of a mom who works hard at her job, at sports, in her community and for her family. And my friends help keep life fun.

### **Was there a revelation along the way that changed how you look at things?**

Life is too short; my mother died very young at 64. She taught me that it was very important to do something you love and that has a positive impact. I was fortunate to have such an incredible legacy; I knew I had to do something with it.

### **What are the three leadership tips your mother passed along to you?**

Live with a sense of purpose.

Set goals and follow through. She always told my sister and me we could do anything we set our minds to do. She was all about empowering people to make a difference in their lives and the lives of others, and that started with us.

Treat everyone with respect.

### **What is your mantra?**

I can do it. Do it now. Stay positive. Seek opportunities to effect positive change.

### **Do you volunteer your time? If so, how do you determine which associations/charities will benefit**

All my work at the college is on a volun-

teer basis. There are so many great organizations and causes from which to choose, so it helps to have a vision, do your due diligence and then stay focused on the impact you are seeking. I support causes and organizations in which my friends and family are actively involved, including the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, the American Red Cross and the Catalog for Giving. I have also volunteered on several occasions as a mentor, both at the college and at work.

### **How do you balance your work, home and community lives?**

I have always felt I was a better mother because I worked outside the home. I also am lucky to have worked for firms that support charitable work. I got involved in



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the Women's Council at Smith Barney and co-chaired the philanthropy committee where we supported several non-profit organizations, including MCNY. I also do yoga, have run the NYC Marathon seven times, and have participated in over 50 triathlons. Setting athletic goals and achieving them with my husband and my friends keeps me happy and sane.

### **ABOUT AUDREY**

### **What led Audrey to establish the college?**

Audrey was driven by her vision of a better world. She was committed to the interconnected ideals of social justice, educational excellence and economic opportu-

nity. Her participation in the civil rights and women's movements in the 1950s and '60s led to her desire to support employment and educational opportunities for economically disadvantaged individuals, particularly women. The genesis of the college was The Women's Talent Corps, an education and training program developed by Audrey in the early 1960s. Its goal was to identify motivated low income women who had important community knowledge and experience, and to educate them for a new kind of position—paraprofessional positions which would enhance the roles of professionals.

Audrey Cohen was the founder of the paraprofessional movement. Paraprofessional positions would also be a new way for these women to move up to full professional roles. Most of these positions are common today—educational assistant, recreational and occupational therapy assistant, mental health workers, etc.—but in 1964 when the Women's Talent Corps was founded, the goal of human service paraprofessionals was a totally new idea.

My mother was convinced that the education and training needed to support these new positions had to combine theory with its application in professional settings within human service organizations. First, Audrey had to obtain funding for this initiative. Then she had to convince social service agencies to provide the critically important internships for students. She and a small, group of other pioneers forged the first partnership with the New York City Department of Employment. A group of dedicated women worked with Audrey to design the educational component of the program, while she negotiated with key social service agencies in the city to provide internship sites. This would enable the participating women to demonstrate through practice that they had applied what they learned in class to help achieve positive results in the real world. She was tenacious and it took time, but in January 1966, the components were in place and the program began with 39 women.

The program grew; men were admitted a few years later. However, without an official educational credential, it was

difficult to move towards full professional status. No existing college was willing to offer the type of education she knew was needed so Audrey turned her training program into a college. She led research to develop Purpose-Centered Education, a unique model of higher education that focuses rigorous academic study around achieving a complex and meaningful overarching purpose each semester. The College for Human Services was born, which became Audrey Cohen College, and in 2000, Metropolitan College of New York. My mother was the president of the college from the time of its founding until her death in 1996. The college was rooted in Audrey's conviction that education must empower individuals to take charge of their own lives and to make positive change in organizations and communities. That focus has not changed as the college has evolved to meet changing needs.

### **How did she develop her leadership skills?**

Audrey was bright, always curious and creative about how to make the world a better place. She often talked of her father's influence. She believed in learning by experience, by taking on challenges, by observing successful people and by seeking advice, whatever she had to do to achieve her goals. Audrey created her own leadership positions and persuaded others to join her.

She had an early formative experience at a high school youth congress in Washington, DC. Audrey wanted to propose an anti-war resolution and did research that included briefings from government officials. Through her diligence, she was able to persuade her fellow delegates to pass the resolution. The entire experience planted a seed about the importance of learning through action. The college calls this workplace effort a Constructive Action.

In the early 1960s, before creating the Women's Talent Corps, she founded Part-Time Research Associates, to engage and support women who wanted to raise families and continue their professional lives.

### **Were other women in your family leaders outside the home? If so, in what types of capacities?**

When Audrey began her work, there

were very few women in leadership roles in the workforce. She has served as an inspiration to me and to my sister, Dawn Cohen Margolin. Dawn created a program for one- and two-year olds and their parents that incorporates fun, exercise, learning to share and emotional support for their families. She has been running it for more than 27 years in Oakland, California and has taught over 1,500 families. She talks about our mother regularly with her adult students in order to inspire other women to believe in their own abilities to parent alongside being social change agents.

### **How does the college help develop leadership skills in women? What role did Audrey play in developing these programs?**

Audrey and her colleagues created Purpose Centered Education, which develops leaders by giving students the tools and experience they need in order to be effective at achieving change in the real world. We don't single out women, but approximately 70% of MCNY's students are women.

Students are challenged to think, to put initiatives into action, to assess their work and to always look for the knowledge needed to take effective action. This kind of education is empowering for everyone. Every semester, every student performs a Constructive Action in his or her workplace using skills and knowledge acquired in the classroom. The contributions that MCNY students and graduates have made clearly demonstrate the college's impact as an institution that fosters personal and professional development, promotes social justice, and encourages positive change in workplaces and communities. Graduates have been particularly active in the public and non-profit sector in fields such as mental health, developmental disabilities, teaching, daycare, substance abuse, criminal justice, business, and disaster management.

Audrey created a structure that acknowledges the real-world challenges faced by adult students, including accelerated programs (two years, eight months for BAs; convenient schedules including nights and Saturday classes, programs run year-round and allow for a semester off if necessary) and a broad range of undergraduate and masters programs.

### **Does the college provide mentoring programs for women? If so, please briefly describe them.**

Mentoring is built into the programs. One class every semester is devoted to mentoring students about their Constructive Actions relevant to the semester's key purpose, such as "Developing Professional Relationships" and "Effective Supervision." In addition, there are student services and special workshops where students can get targeted assistance in areas of difficulty. The college truly is student-centered.

### **If you were to encapsulate Audrey's career in 6 words, what would those be?**

Empowerment, purpose, vision, tenacity, service, action.

### **What career tips would Audrey offer other women? For the next generation of women leaders?**

My mother said: "The real test of learning is not in what we know, but what we can accomplish with what we know." So I think she would tell everyone to get a relevant education and use it to take action. Look for problems you want to help solve, then go to the people you want to help and ask them questions. My mother believed that people are the experts on their own situations and had to be respected partners in the improvement process, so ask questions of the people you want to help.

If the current solutions don't solve your issues, look for new solutions. My mother didn't start out to found a college. She wanted to help poor women get jobs. But when it became clear to her that they needed relevant purposeful education that was more than just job training, she created the institution that is now Metropolitan College of New York.

My mother would tell everyone to pursue their dreams; set goals and develop a strategic and creative step by step plan to achieve them; monitor and modify/expand that plan. In other words, do your own Constructive Action.

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