

A school for entrepreneurs

Founder of Surpass Claire O'Callaghan looks set to strengthen the entrepreneurial spirit of the recently established Europa Academy.

Claire O'Callaghan, the successful entrepreneur behind Surpass Business Consulting, has teamed up with *The Apprentice* star Bill Cullen in one of his latest ventures, Europa Academy. Established in 2005, the academy is about to launch some new diploma courses in the new year that O'Callaghan has been integral in setting up.

Along with her work as an associate trainer with the Irish Management Institute (IMI), O'Callaghan, a qualified business psychologist, set up Surpass last year after running her own IT business for 13 years. She will bring this experience, plus her Degree in Management and Masters in Behavioural Psychology, to setting up the new courses.

O'Callaghan recently signed a year's contract with Bill Cullen to work as a development director on new diploma courses starting up in the Europa Academy.

Based in Dublin, Europa Academy is run by entrepreneurs, for entrepreneurs. It is a third level training academy, specifically designed to promote the development of professionals in a wide cross section of industries, with particular emphasis on the motor industry.

"We are at the end of a development phase where we are building this business," says O'Callaghan. "We put together a range of diploma courses and 68 short courses. I am the programme director on all the diplomas and in addition will be lecturing on some modules in strategy, organisational psychology and emotional intelligence."

O'Callaghan attributes her deal with Cullen to her recent enterprise award. At the Network Ireland Business Women of the Year Awards in Portlaoise, O'Callaghan won the Entrepreneur of the Year trophy in the New Business category.

After she sold her business last year, O'Callaghan set up Surpass. Along with Bill Cullen, Surpass's client list includes the Dublin City and Fingal County enterprise boards, the Law Society of Ireland, IMI, eircom, Bord Na Móna, Bord Gáis, HSE and Deloitte & Touche.

O'Callaghan trained in psychometrics (she is one of a handful of people in Ireland who provide accreditation on the EQ-i tool) and now trains people to be accredited in



Claire O'Callaghan, founder of Surpass and development director at Europa Academy

emotional intelligence in Carton House, Maynooth, Co Kildare. She also offers strategic advice consultancy to companies and SMEs.

"Psychologists and business coaches go on my two-day course and they become accredited in the tools so they can then administer it themselves while in business. So if a particular coach is working with clients, they will put them through the emotional intelligence assessment. Because they are now accredited, they are able to give constructive feedback," she says

"At Surpass, our goal is to equip people with the knowledge, skills and tools to become better leaders and performers in the workplace and I'm thoroughly enjoying that challenge," she adds.

Claire O'Callaghan says that her success is largely down to her failures: "I made many mistakes in the IT business and I've learned so much from every failure.

"People make a lot of mistakes in business, especially if they are not watching what's coming behind them. Businesses should always try to be

different to the competition and be unique. They need to be innovative and capable to change tack very quickly. A term I love, when training entrepreneurs, is 'constructive destruction' where you have to destroy something even when it's working."

She attributes this constructive destruction down to the ability to see the bigger picture. "Even if something is working, you need to see the bigger picture, like in a game of chess, you should be able to see three moves ahead. If you can see the bigger picture somewhere else, you might have to get something that's working and shut it down. That's a hard thing to do," she explains.

With this latest venture with the Europa Academy, O'Callaghan's plan is to train senior managers and CEOs as full-time students on the new courses, which commence in January 2009.

"At the moment, Ireland doesn't have an entrepreneurial academy, and that's what Bill Cullen and I are promoting. There are some fantastic colleges in Ireland, but they are not entrepreneurial academies lead by entrepreneurs. Europa Academy fills this gap in the third level educational market," she says. "Cullen and I are both very excited about it. He is the great attraction on our courses - his fame and success on TV3's *The Apprentice* has heightened his popularity as a strong business leader and entrepreneur. He will top and tail all our executive courses.

"Our participants will get a chance to learn from people who have worked in the industry and learned from their own mistakes. Our associates are all entrepreneurs who have set up their own businesses and are all educated to MBA/MSc level and above. They know how tough it is out there - and they don't have a guaranteed income coming in every month, which makes them very sharp," she adds.

O'Callaghan's own objectives include completing a PhD in Strategy, while growing her own business and her work with Bill Cullen. She says: "My plan over the next couple of years is to get more associates on board at Surpass, and to grow my business as well as Bill Cullen's academy. ■