THE FEMALE EDGE

A collection of personal and business stories from female entrepreneurs who were inspired by the Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship.

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A non-for-profit, collection of personal and business stories from female entrepreneurs who were inspired by the Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship.

WHY DID WE DO THIS?

We are female entrepreneurs whose voices have been heard and championed through the Alison Rose Review.

Check it out here… https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-alison-rose-review-of-female-entrepreneurship

We wanted to support this report, to extend its reach to female entrepreneurs and along the way, share our own experiences and challenges, as well as give advice, guidance and insight to others in business.

This project is pure collaboration, born of one person's idea and the willingness and openness of others to answer a call to connect, write and honestly share their journey. The result is thirteen incredible and inspiring stories from a variety of sectors, a variety of women, a wide geographical reach and each with a unique story of what it means to be a female entrepreneur. Enjoy and please connect with each writer, if you want to continue the conversation.

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TURNING WEAKNESSES INTO STRENGTHS.

Written by Lisa Lavis

We all get to where we are going in different ways and make our own mistakes, but sometimes, wouldn't our younger selves like to have done it differently? I'm a firm believer that, in today's fast paced technological and often complex working environment, we need to pass on as much of our hard-won experience as we can, to get the best out of the great talents of today.

I lacked confidence as a child, I'd be happier keeping quiet, content in not knowing the answer to save myself the embarrassment of putting my hand up to ask.

I masked this lack of confidence by being funny and making people laugh. I managed to collect a clutch of GCSEs, albeit with a re-take of math; my toughest subject. To this day, percentages and fractions still haunt me!

I emerged from sixth form college with a BTEC in Business, having coasted my way through the course, always flying under the radar, never pushing myself. In my mind, I wasn't bright enough to excel.

Still suffering from what had become a significant lack of self-esteem, I did go on to study an HND in Business. (A standard joke at the time was that HND translated to 'Have No Degree' – it was a nice, supportive environment in the late 80s / early 90s). However, a degree is what, deep down, I really craved and Kingston University, a renowned, award-winning business school, is where my ambition lay. All I needed was at least six distinctions in my HND to get in. I remember I wrote in my diary, 'six distinctions, work hard!' and put this on every page. I didn't show anyone, I just read it to myself every day … and, secretly, worked my socks off.

The reading of this simple message every day paid off, and in the end, I obtained seven or eight distinctions and off to Kingston University I went, to study a BA in Business Administration. My confidence should have soared at this stage (none of my fellow associates achieved this many distinctions), but sadly, my confidence was still lacking. The mind is a delicate thing. Hindsight tells me I really needed help at this stage to understand my confidence issues, but I was young and unaware of what I was going through.

I found University life hard. I didn't feel I fitted in. My peers appeared more articulate, more cultured. My sense of humour, which normally carried me through tricky times, wasn't firing well either. These new university guys were clever and serious, and the work was tough. I stuck at it, blagged it a lot, got extremely nervous during presentations and constantly suffered from the nagging doubt that I shouldn't be there. Surely, someone would find out soon that I was just Lisa Lavis, who could make fun of herself but couldn't handle, or wasn't intelligent enough, to manage real business and get a degree.

To the amazement of my peers (I remember them saying they were shocked – how very rude!) and after many late nights of working, I achieved a 2:1 honour degree. Result!

Achieving the much targeted for, 2:1 should have given me the boost I needed to push for greater things. Alas, while my friends and university peers went on to get management trainee positions, for large corporates in London and further afield, I didn't apply. I wasn't cool or clever enough.

I chose a marketing / account executive role in Southampton for a small PR agency. I was safe. No one would see my weaknesses or lack of confidence here. At the time, I was earning two to three times less than my friends and thought that was probably right. They were the high achieving kids. I was doing it the correct way, staying in my lane.

However, something inside me, perhaps my inner drive, was telling me that I had more to offer and maybe I too could do the 'London thing'. From the comfort and security of Southampton, London looked amazing; rewarding, full of exciting people all having fun, going to wild parties and building brilliant careers. I wanted a slice of that as well … so I thought.

Corporate London

My CV was professionally critiqued and improved. I pushed my skills and marketed myself for the first time. It felt odd, but I went along with it. And it paid off too because little me, afraid to put her hand up in class, only went and got a job as National Marketing Manager for Deloitte, the global financial, advisory consultancy at its Head Office in Fleet Street. I'd made it!

So, to London I moved; to Brixton in fact – but my, what a culture shock. I remember being anxious and scared of the enormity, the isolation of this new big city. Despite now living in this trendy place 'London', the place where my friends were, I was so out of my comfort zone; I felt lonely and quickly felt quite low.

In those unenlightened days, it was not the thing to tell anyone you felt depressed or anxious of course. Everyone was superwoman/man.

Articulating the impact that London and Deloitte had on my mental health is not easy, even now. It was corporate, it was ruthless, women were bitchy and back-stabbing, men were aloof and cold. It was a harsh environment. When my line manager left, I was given three national sectors to manage – utilities, rail and construction – taking on a two-job role. I always appeared confident and by now, was an expert at masking my insecurities. I didn't ask for help, they assumed I could do it and left me alone. Surely, they could see I was struggling?! No one checked. I am quite sure that today, people would notice the signs.

I have strong core values and I didn't want to let anyone down, so I battled on. Project reviews with partners at 7am were cancelled – they'd forget it was in the diary and had more pressing issues – other meetings were corporate, often brutally unfriendly and unsupportive. One2ones and mentors were not in place and I don't remember many people smiling or laughing. All-nighters were common.

As bizarre as it sounds, the stress and fear, of going into work every day in London was very real for me. The whole working environment was different then to what it is today, there was no concept of mindfulness and no obvious understanding of how stress can affect one's work. It just wasn't recognised and certainly never talked about.

It was while I was in a windowless, hideous and stressful meeting, that I vowed to myself, that one day, I would run my own business and create a secure workplace; somewhere to thrive, learn, grow and enjoy.

At 26, I was sinking under the pressure, I developed insomnia, IBS and Agoraphobia – the legacies of which, linger on today. I resigned, suffering from exhaustion and what was probably depression, although this was neither recognised nor readily talked about back then. I spent one or two very low years, finally finding the inner strength to rebuild myself.

I emerged fighting…

I took a new job as a Marketing Manager for a mid-sized national engineering firm and was intrinsic in the growth and eventual sale of the business for 15 times earnings. It was while at this job, I made the brave decision to pursue what I yearned to do, and to start my own marketing and creative business, Glow.

Winning Times

Roll on over 19 years later and I have just been awarded Woman Business Owner of the year! And Glow, after 19 years with me at the helm, has also just hit its biggest sales target ever. Achieving this wonderful, humbled accolade and growing the business has by no means been easy. We had to navigate the 2008/9 recession, stop taking salaries and I personally had to find the grit and resilience to keep on going, to review the strategy, change direction and build a strong platform for growth. My insecurities and lack of confidence never strayed far from my mindset and at times, the battle to simple push through to the next day, was near crippling. But the rewards, the project wins, the laughs (there were and are many) kept me striving for more, for better times.

There was a key turning point for me, just before my 40th birthday. It was a significant age as I questioned what it was all about, the point of the hard work, the low and fluctuating salary, what was it really all for? I knew I loved what I did and took huge reward in growing our small team, but I also recognised there was something missing to ensure my passion for work and life, was retained.

To help me define and meet new goals, both personal and work related, I researched and started to work with – now nearly in our 10th year – a brilliant life & executive coach. At the time of taking this decision, life coaches were not the norm and it certainly wasn't an every-day business conversation. I am SO pleased to say this has now changed.

Over the last 9 years, my coach has helped me navigate another recession, caring for a terminally ill parent, bereavement, redundancies, create new plans and most importantly,

keep match fit. For sure, I still get muscle strains and need to take time out, I waver and need re-aligning. I push my body's mental and physical limits and I get things wrong. But I'm more confident and happier than ever, in the knowledge that I understand what this all means. A mantra I often use is 'a good day, minute, week always follows a bad; but a bad doesn't necessarily follow a good. The underlying meaning being that the 'ying and yang' of business and life is a constant, there will be great times and it will get very tough, but knowing that, being kind to yourself, and allowing some self-compassion will get you through.

This mantra, my learnings, understanding my weaknesses and working with my coach, has enabled me to grow a strong team at Glow and I am sure, will continue to enable our growth and development in the future. Team Glow are just brilliant, and I am incredibly proud of them and to be the Managing Director. They work relentlessly hard, never complain and always support each other. They produce creative masterpieces every day and make me laugh. As a strong collective we have monthly one2ones, six monthly reviews and regular breakfast updates. We all practice mindfulness (however that manifests for each); some of us use life / business coaches, others do yoga in the office and I push personal life and work as just 'life'. We all also understand the power of emotional intelligence and recognise our limited paradigms. This has a huge impact on all of us as we support each other through tough and exciting projects, both at work and home.

The next generation

I get immense pleasure in teaching and building confidence for the next generation, and this has been a key driver for Glow in creating a new nurturing strategy. Our aim is to have design placement students, continually, every year, and to support young and determined talent. It's so rewarding working with young and passionate designers, giving them skills for life, and watching them grow within the creative industry.

Through our nurturing strategy I want to impart my wisdom, my business and commercial know how, my teams' knowledge, and to provide young, creative talent a fantastic platform to learn and grow, to build confidence and to become the very best they can. To be instrumental in helping create great careers, which we will all benefit from … and to help make sure my experience as a young graduate, lacking in confidence and self-esteem, isn't repeated.

Today, I've got a powerful set of life and work tools to draw from, I work with and learn from incredible people, and you know what, I'm pretty confident in what I do now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Lavis, The Glow Studio

I'm an award-winning (Women Business Owner of the Year award 2019), business owner, experienced SME director and board member. I combine strong, hands-on leadership skills – particularly in nurturing, well-being and flexibility in the workplace - with strategic marketing and business strategy acumen. I have innate business skills and can quickly identify weak spots and opportunities, especially within leadership teams. I have sat on a board of 12, to grow and sell a national engineering firm (for 15 times earnings), worked for a global professional services firm, Deloitte, in London and have set up and grown a thriving design and creative agency in Hampshire, that I still own and manage to this day.

I enjoy spending time with loved ones, belly laughs, great food, visiting Fowey, cycling, Pilates and watching the six nations (ideally in a pub with a roaring fire).

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WHY IS NETWORKING IMPORTANT WHEN YOU ARE SELF-EMPLOYED OR RUNNING YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

Written by Jane Cooke

Funnily enough the first thing I missed when I became self-employed in 1991 was the 'Christmas Do' – or more to the point, I felt I was missing out - 'everyone else' seemed to have one planned & I didn't!

It boiled down to not having colleagues. I kept in touch with close friends from work but I missed the office banter, the office joker [mostly!], the swapped 'how was your weekend?' conversations in the ladies, the hurried coffee break and catch up, the lunch time charge up and down the High Street and the 'can I just ask?'

I really loved my work and I felt blessed to be able to earn a living on my own terms, but, and it was a big but, I was lonely spending all day, every day without adult company.

So, for myself, the main reason for networking then, and now, is to catch up with 'colleagues' - and to gain, along the way, many 'work friends' too! Meeting and mixing with like-minded people.

Not everyone you knew before going self-employed 'gets' you and your choice to go it alone or understands what being self-employed is like – how could they? They've never done it before.

Self-employment for me has been two-fold - the most amazing rollercoaster ride – riding high on freedom, controlling my own diary, working with those of my own choosing and doing what I loved, my way.

The lows of the roller coaster, however, came in the form of loneliness and overwhelm and, despite huge and continued support from my husband, having to be the Jack of All Trades felt all too much at times, especially in the beginning - who knew you had to actually SELL your services yourself?!

It's well documented that YOU become akin to the people you spend the most time with! Well, I've found it to be true that, when I mix with enthusiastic, positive people who are 'going places' and making a difference then, guess what, I feed off them and feel enthusiastic and positive myself. I still find this to be true to this day. It's uplifting, fun and infectious to be surrounded with like-minded others!

Learning:
Find yourself a great networking group and this will include speakers on relevant topics and mini workshops imparting nuggets of information which will help drive your business forward & help you manage all you need to manage as a sole trader.

I was lucky enough to find such a group and it was invaluable – a mix of business and personal development which suited me perfectly. I truly believe we need to develop alongside our businesses to support the inevitable challenges along the way. I always remember this line from way back:

'If you're looking for the deepest self-development programme on the planet, set up your own business!'

I still find there is invaluable knowledge to be found from watching & listening to others who've walked the path I'm currently on; learning from their growth, their insights and their wisdom is a constant fascination.

Support in Group and Online:
These days we are blessed [or cursed, depending on your viewpoint] with Social Media so, in addition to feeling supported at face to face networking meetings we have the opportunity to follow this up with the inevitable Facebook group or similar.

These online communities are usually open to questions and sometimes promotion of our businesses. It's been my experience that, when a question or concern is raised or voiced, the support and suggestions can be so helpful and shared with such generosity – a bonus to community at its finest.

Reciprocal Business Opportunities
Reciprocal business, as I understand it, is essentially passing business to business by heartfelt recommendation, without pressure or payment.

An example, as someone who has worked with women and how to dress with confidence, it felt o' so natural that I recommended my clients to my gorgeous and talented hairdresser, who in turn recommended my services to her other clients. I also worked this way with a make-up artist & beauty therapist.

This arrangement operated for years - because it worked:

- There was no direct competition – I was never going to cut someone's hair or apply their make-up – thankfully!
- I had personal experience of them and their services, so I was able to recommend with conviction. And vice versa.
- I knew my clients would be treated as I treated my own clients – with total respect and integrity.
- It worked BOTH ways – a one sided relationship of any kind rarely works!

Joint Venture Opportunity
It also happened that I met various others whilst networking, who offered products & services that I felt my clients might like to see or hear about. I would team up with clothes retailers,

jewellery designers, shoe retailers and similar for a one-off event – interesting and FUN for all concerned and my clients!

These fellow networkers were not chosen purely for their products or services. They were business owners whom I knew well through networking, over a period of time, knew us to have similar values and outlook, had a real rapport with them and, most importantly, I had built trust in them and vice versa.

Introductions to Potential Clients

You never know who knows who! It's amazing that I've met so many people at networking groups and events who appeared not want or need my services, yet it turned out they have wives, sisters, children, friends who do – not necessarily there & then, but at some point in the future; they had my business card to pass on to those concerned.

I believe when we get to know, like & trust those 'in the room' we feel able to recommend them and their services when we hear of someone needing them – with honesty and integrity. And vice versa. What goes around, comes around.

An Opportunity to be Visible

Those of us who already network know the importance of getting out there and be seen! To be visible. The more people who get to know YOU and what you do, the more likely they are to mention you and what you do to others. Consistency is so important and often overlooked – others need to see you attend networking regularly to build up confidence and trust in you.

In today's world, with the Yellow Pages shrinking and shrinking, I believe for the majority of the self-employed that networking and social media (online networking if you will) are key to gaining clients if practised consistently.

Such visibility and 'networking' needn't be limited to physical business networking groups or social media groups. Personally, I have used face to face focus groups, Facebook groups, Facebook communities and membership sites for both potential and existing CLIENTS. They've been exciting places and spaces which have formed the basis of trust, fostered credibility and led to a regular stream of clients.

Speaker / Presenter Opportunities

I know only too well, from my early days of networking, that presenting can be a nerve-racking experience to start with – however, the more we do it, the easier it becomes – to a point where it actually becomes second nature and even enjoyable.

Speaking and/or presenting has been an opportunity for me to share some of my knowledge and experience with others, as they have shared with me. I believe that showing our expertise, enthusiasm and passion for what we do can bring recommendations and business to our door; the ultimate visibility for those who dare to try it. Practice makes perfectly imperfect!

Promoting your Latest Venture/Event

I have found the majority of networking events offer the chance to share forthcoming events, workshops etc at some point in the meeting – either as part of a 'round the room' sharing of businesses or by leaving leaflets on a side table. Others need to know about us to buy from us!

Share Successes and Ask for Help?

It can feel overwhelming with so many skills needed to get started in business/ go self-employed. I always take the approach that if I'm struggling with something, chances are someone else in the room is too - or has done so in the past. Collective thoughts and ideas can work wonders and I've often seen those in need supported in many & varied ways – personally as well as business wise, but we do need to ask for help!!

It can be so beneficial and uplifting to share our own, and to hear the success stories of others. I believe it's good to celebrate our achievements and serves to show others what can and is possible! A wonderful dose of inspiration and motivation works for me!

Friendships

In time, as a direct result of networking regularly and consistently with my kind of networking group, I have found that some acquaintances have turned 'colleagues' and some 'colleagues' have become friends. So, you see, it took time but, thanks to networking, I did get my work Christmas Do in the end!

Networking Groups exist because NETWORKING works.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jane Cooke, Dress Rehearsal

I wear many hats, all of which centre around life, lifestyle, confidence & happiness for women. With more than a decade's experience as a Colour Consultant and Stylist behind me, it's been a natural progression to teach and mentor new and aspiring stylists and to become a life coach.

I have become a serial gatherer of women:

- *SHINE - a life and lifestyle community for women - self-discovery, inspiration and fun!*
- *FREE RANGE WOMEN - a community of self-employed women offering business growth, learning, support & networking*
- *WORKSHOPS - all based around life, lifestyle, confidence and happiness.*

I believe we are here to be the best version of ourselves and to do more of what we love every day. In other words, be HAPPY!

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WHY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IS ESSENTIAL IN THE WORKPLACE

Written by Jo Lockwood

As a woman I am hyper aware of the need to feel included, to feel a sense of belonging purpose and voice not only in the home, society but also in the workplace. I listen to the stories of those who have experienced micro-aggressions, being talked over, having their ideas passed off by someone else, denied opportunities that were quite clearly within their capability and experience.

I listen to those who hold the power that say; "it's about merit, the best person should get the job", and yes I agree with that sentiment completely – but who decides the weighting, the important attributes and the skills required for that merit? Does that person think diversely, think about different people and their variety of lived experience that will enrich the workplace culture?

Most businesses have customers, shareholders or someone to answer to. Businesses have started to realise that they need to reflect their customer base, the people they serve. We are now full conscious of the environmental imperatives of sustainability and climate change. The need to think differently in a global marketplace, this is how post-conventional businesses will survive – they need to think ahead 10 to 20 years in order not to become irrelevant. Think based 10 or 20 years – where was Amazon, Spotify, Netflix, Uber, or even Apple. We were still looking to Kodak, Blockbuster, HMV and Nokia to deliver our technology and entertainment. The internet, the globalisation of media is here. Disruptors are still entering the market on a daily basis – we watch the rise of Uber, JustEat, On-Line Banking newcomers, Insurance is being brokered differently, Tax is now digital. The workforce in 2030 will be a different landscape. 80% of the roles by then haven't yet been invented, 80% of the workforce will find the jobs they do being phased out or replaced. AI, agile working, flexibility and the environment are the future.

Companies are now putting more focus on Inclusive Leadership; they are understanding that over promoted technicians do not by default have the toolset of EQ (emotional intelligence) to balance out their IQ (Intelligence Quotient). We now realise the ability to show vulnerability, to have empathy and to be an open communicator are skills valuable to the modern workplace. Leaders need to rise to the challenge of motivating and rewarding disparate teams, spread geographically over multiple time zones. The challenge is how do we ensure that they have the necessary tools in their skill set to do this.
More emphasis will be put on the artisans who create, those who value add, not those who push paper or deal with process – AI will handle that. Employees of the future will be gig workers and have a portfolio of careers. We are seeing this today with Gen-Zs and Gen-Alphas building YouTube and online channels and monetising their millions of followers.
It is clear therefore that the workplace is due for continual and sustained disruption, the monoculture and "traditional ways" need to make place for new ways of thinking, working and connecting.

Women are ideally placed to fit in to this modern world, we are often more abundant in these core skills than our male counterparts. It is therefore incumbent on those in power and those that hold the privilege to recognise that the traditional value and merit of this monoculture no longer hold true. The meritocracy needs to be expanded to include soft skills and inclusion at its heart.

Whilst we are at it, let's think intersectionally. We can expand to all women, black, brown, of faith and belief and even celebrate their sexual and gender diversity. We have already seen organisations such as the BBC, embracing women of greater generations than before after the push back from certain presenters feeling that they were prematurely retired earlier than their male counterparts.
It is now commonplace to see presenters and physical disabilities, those who are pregnant and those of all skin colours and faiths. We see children's programmes delivered by a wide range of diverse individuals show our young people that its ok to be yourself in this modern world.

There have been numerous cases, too numerous, of people showing signs of poor mental health, turning to drink, becoming depressed and even resorting to taking their own lives. We are under constant pressure to be "always on", we seek validation through social media "likes", is it any wonder many of us now feel "FOMO" or are held back by an increasing sense of Imposter Syndrome. How does the world of the future address these new challenges?

Whose problem is it? Society or Business? I believe both need to step up to the plate. Business can't abdicate responsibility completely for societies problems. After all people spend almost a third of their lives at work, and this ratio is changing in the wrong direction in our ever-connected world.

If we can enrich our people in the business world, invest in our people, teach everyone to be a great leader of both themselves and others that will start to have real impact. I am a great believer in that leadership starts with self, it starts self-belief, self-love and of course, having a value and voice.

The other area I believe that businesses need to invest in is our future. Our future as in our children, our children's children and beyond. We hear so often that we don't have enough women in STEM subjects, we can't find enough women aspiring into certain careers.
This, in my opinion, is most definitely something business can help with. They can reach out into communities, sponsor initiatives that promote female engagement and empowerment. Ensure that the media has more representation of strong female role models that create an aspirational pathway. We should invest in antenatal and "pre-parent" classes to train future parents on how to create their own family culture of gender equality and equity of beliefs and expectations. Ensure that in all walks of society women, people of colour, people of diverse sexual and gender identity are represented. Build a culture where it becomes socially unacceptable for minority groups to be put down or demonised by the media and online. We need to call it out, stand together as women and take control of building a better society for all – after all, that's what feminism is, isn't it? – amplifying those who don't have a voice, nurturing and giving support and help where needed.

Let's go back to the workplace – let's think about what we can do there. First and foremost, we need to be our own allies, support, amplify and promote each other. Ensure that our voices are heard, ensure that we are not talked over and ignored. I am, however, a great believer that inclusion is holistic – we need to involve those who hold the power and privilege in these conversations, yes, I mean "the men".

When we cast our minds back over one hundred years – Men "allowed women the vote". I know how crass that sounds today, but the reality of the time was such that men had all the power, women were seen as weaker not only in strength but also in brain power and intelligence – how could we trust important decisions to women who are emotional and unworldly. We still suffer the legacy in society today. Despite the advances of neuroscience, we still talk about male brain/female brain", Myers-Briggs Profiling, Introverts/Extroverts, and Left Brain/Right Brain to categorise logical thinkers or the creative, like these are some kind of absolutes or binary boxes to put people in, yet we know these theories and ways of describing ourselves have been debunked for decades but we still talk about them as if they hold more truth than horoscopes.

We need to bring men into the conversation, we do however need to understand the fragility associated with having privilege and power challenged. Like it or not we will need to sell ourselves and prove ourselves worth at every opportunity. Fortunately, businesses are now starting to realise the superpowers and difference of thinking women are bringing to the workplace. By working together, being patient, we can get "men to allow us to succeed". Forward looking organisations are setting gender equality targets, at least 30% of senior leadership and board members must be diverse. Investment companies are now publicly stating they will not act for organisations that do not demonstrate diversity at board level.

We are seeing standards such as BS7005 being produced in conjunction with the Human Capital Framework so we can start to evaluate the performance of organisational diversity initiatives and call out those who are just paying lip service.
Diversity targets are not the answer or the solution but can be a start – organisations need to leverage not only diversity but also ensure they are inclusive and instil a sense of belonging into their people. Post Conventional organisations are realising it is also about their Vision and Values, what they as an organisation stand for, the Employer Value Experience (EVP) and trying to ensure it is aligned to their actual employee experience.
If organisations are not measuring their people, their background and their demographics are meaningless, if you don't have data or measurements it cannot be tracked, if it cannot be quantified and evaluated then it simply won't happen. It will be everyone's issue and yet no one's.

Inclusion does not start and end with women, it is about everyone – without thinking intersectionally about those who are oppressed through the various interlocking systems of oppression we are being exclusionary ourselves. Amplification of voices is needed to ensure everyone is heard. Companies know that they will be more successful, profitable and will be able to attract and retain the best people, yet we still need business cases to justify initiatives and training to remove biases from processes and open opportunities for all.
As I implied earlier, diversity isn't just a people function, it crosses throughout the entire business, design, procurement, services, manufacturing and to sales and marketing. We need

to represent our customers, speak in their language, been as “for them” and reflective of their dreams and aspirations. Through design we can ensure products or systems work for everyone, from the able-bodied, through those who are not and even those who are left-handed. If diverse voices are not heard, then it won’t take long for opportunities to be missed or to lose relevance in the market.

Does this sound like you? Or is your organisation actively focusing on people, all people and creating that culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging and where their voice is heard and matters?

If not, then maybe it is time to find somewhere else to work that is people focused!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jo Lockwood, See Change Happen

Joanne is a leading authority on Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging. She specialises in promoting transgender awareness and support to businesses and organisations throughout the UK, Europe and elsewhere. As an International Keynote Conference speaker, Joanne delivers workshops, seminars, and engages with organisations to develop policy & best practises to be more inclusive for all people. Challenging Biases and helping them to develop a Vision and Strategy for Conscious Inclusion. She is an Advisory Friend of The Institute of Equality & Diversity Professionals, Member of The Rotary Club, Toastmasters International, The Professional Speaking Association, and she sits as an Expert by Experience member for Southampton University. As a Fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, she believes passionately that “people are people” and, no matter who they are, deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Joanne was a contributor and featured in a Channel 4 (UK) documentary called “The Making of Me”, broadcast in February 2019. This documentary was filmed over a 3-year period and detailed her own personal gender transition and its impact on those around her. Joanne lives by the mantra of “Smile, Engage and Educate” in order to promote awareness and understanding to overcome people’s fear of getting it wrong, because the world isn’t only black and white!

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BEING BRAND YOU

Written by Annelies James

I didn't really know what personal branding was until a couple of years ago, but when I took the plunge and became self-employed after years of wishing meetings away and counting the breaks between holidays, I suddenly realised that I was, in fact, a personal brand.

I think personal branding is an important topic, specifically for entrepreneurs because it is all about trust, and trust is probably the biggest buying motivator there is.

So, let me tell you a little more about my journey…

I knew I wanted to be self-employed for about five years before taking leap. I worked for a few organisations before it happened, one where I felt far too comfortable and one where I never really felt comfortable at all. I used to talk to colleagues and friends about this troubling, reoccurring feeling of being "bigger than it all." Walking down corridors, catching up with staff, sending emails, organising events, it all became too easy and eventually I felt like I was playing a version of myself; a much smaller and tamed version of me. I made a change and took another role at another organisation and in the process increased my salary by £12,000. That felt amazing, but the feeling followed me. I felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland; I had stumbled into a house and grew so large I could bust out of the walls and windows. Sitting around in meetings I remember calculating the salary around the table, £500,000 of staff talking about teaspoons! There had to be more than this?

Eventually the scales tipped and the incongruence I felt inside myself was unbearable, I was getting depressed and I felt the professional mask was slipping. For mindfulness, I started to practice daily yoga and it was in one practice, when stood in Warrior 2, with a focus on my mind's eye that I had a vision - a film quality, high-definition vision that replayed over and over. I was walking into my managers office, handing in my notice and walking out. Just those three scenes, over and over again, like it was happening. Like it had happened.

The next day it DID happen.

I had no savings and I had just resigned from the most well-paid job I had ever had… Oh and I was due to get married in two months. What a terrible decision right?

NOPE.

It was astounding, the work just flooded in. I was doing all sorts and being stretched in all different directions from videography to social media management, business development strategy, marketing planning. You name it, I was helping people with it. But where did this work all come from? If I think back, it was probably mainly through social media and referrals, and it just snowballed. But after a successful wedding came the cracks, the business was insanely busy, the wedding had exhausted me, and I suffered what the doctor called an "acute anxiety episode."

I took a much-needed breather and during this time, I recognised a few things:

1. I had been able to pay myself for months – YEY!
2. The people who were using my services were very "me," (we had similar outlooks, similar working styles and personalities).
3. People were totally flexible in terms of workload, delivery and payment because they knew, liked and trusted me.
4. It didn't seem to matter what service I offered; people just wanted to work with me.
5. People kept referring me to others, even though I didn't ask them to.
6. I would rock up to any networking in a 30-mile radius and people would say: "Hey Annelies, you don't know me, but I have seen you online. I really want a catch up with you."

I realised, *purely by accident,* I had become a personal brand, or at least somehow haphazardly stumbled into using the techniques of personal branding. So, I did some pivoting and I refined the business to start offering personal brand mentoring to others and kept some other services I really enjoyed such as videography and hosting events.

Here are some things I accidently did before I realised all of this. In fact, before I even became self-employed:

1. I had a really good and clear work ethic and everyone who asked me to do things knew it would be completed on deadline and to a high standard. It became a bit of a joke for the Senior Management Team to coin the term "Ask Annelies." This is something I later adopted as a title for a video series when I was self-employed.

2. I would always communicate in a personable way, (regardless of hierarchy) and always professionally. I kept the more personal stories and my inner thoughts and feelings to a smaller group of trusted people.

3. I shared regularly on social media, particularly LinkedIn, about what I was doing, events, updates, motivational quotes and learning. Some of this content was actually inspired by difficultly I was facing, i.e. another manager in the business was a bit of a handful and I would channel my frustration into motivational content for others. I always remember sharing the quote "you can't beat someone who never quits," and writing a piece about determination which got great traction. This is something I still do to this day; when someone does something super annoying, I turn it into positive content; they say you write the advice you want to hear, right?

4. I had a certain aesthetic with the quotes and content I shared, and the purpose was always clear of WHY I was sharing it and it was always of benefit to others.

5. I engaged others online, liked, shared and commented. I also took the time in real life to remember small things about people, the more personal aspects of their life and I listened to what they needed.

What was already emerging were some of the core components of personal branding.

Values – the type of content and the way I communicated all echoed my core values. Values I had never even sat back and considered, but now can say confidently are, Giving, Optimism, Informality, Collaboration and Creativity amongst others.

Benefit – in real life and online, I was of benefit to others. I solved problems. I was a trusted hand. I gave people some learning or a viewpoint that they could edit, adapt and use in their own lives.

Communication – I communicated. I put myself on the hook to communicate regularly. I stood up, stood out and didn't shy away. Even difficult conversations can be had with love and respect.

Consistency – I was, inadvertently, mega consistent. I shared content online almost daily. People knew what to expect. In real life, I always delivered regardless of the time-pressure and other deadlines. I was trusted and I delivered every single time.

I had escaped and launched myself into self-employment and the work I had already done, the leg work I had already put in, was paying off big time. I started to help others and I noticed quite quickly the feedback was always the same:

- I don't know why I am doing social media; it seems so pointless.
- My business is way off track, and I don't feel like I am even doing something I like anymore.
- I am excited to start my business, but I really don't even know who I am (outside of being a mum, wife, daughter etc).
- The clients I seem to attract are awful.

The list goes on.

Let's Talk about Brand YOU

Personal branding is a great tool to refine everything you do and is a way to consistently and authentically BE VERY YOU. I always say to people: "I do the simplest thing; I help you to be you." And this is why personal branding is good for entrepreneurs – and specifically female entrepreneurs – because there is so much pressure, so much expectation, so many roles to play. It is difficult to cut through, stand up and demand some attention, and be firm in being ourselves, just for ourselves. I would argue that is it essential to just "be", and I believe personal branding is as much about self-love and acceptance as it is for the connection to others. In the wise words of Ru Paul Charles, "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell are you going to love somebody else?" OK, a bit of a stretch but you get the idea.

Let's get to it, with the hard questions:

1. Who are you?
2. What do you stand for?
3. What do you stand against?
4. If you could sum up your values in five words, what would they be?
5. Does your business align to these five words? I hate to say, but if they don't there is going to be some dissatisfaction along your entrepreneurial journey.
6. How do you actually showcase these five words on a day-to-day basis? If you struggle to showcase one of your values, then guess what - it probably isn't actually a value. You must be honest with yourself during this process.
7. If you asked people around you, in business or life, what five words would they use to describe you?

These questions help you unpick your values and start the journey to implementing personal branding techniques. What we really want to do is to leverage your values and personality to increase engagement and promote yourself, so you become more memorable and more meaningful to others. Essentially, we want to hardwire YOU into people's emotional and psychological space while creating positive association. And you can only do this by being very much you, which is why the day-to-day question is important. You actually have to be what you say you are, consistently. Have you ever had it when you have met someone and just felt a little unsure about them? Something just felt a bit off. Humans are like bloodhounds for the inauthenticity. We can sense if someone is being phoney, so it is important when you start your brand it is 100% you – not a version you think people want.

A good way to understand a personal brand is by thinking about Oprah Winfrey or Richard Branson. I say these names and you will immediately conjure up ideas about who they are and what they stand for. For example, when I run workshops and I ask people about Richard Branson, the room lights up, everyone has an opinion from how he started this business to his entrepreneurial spark, his business acumen, altruism, risk-taking business decisions, you name it. People really get into it.

The follow up question I ask is, "Have you ever met him?"

Unsurprisingly no one ever has, and it begs the question, where do these ideas come from? Many can be traced back to conversations, news articles and social media; but what is interesting is that we have a collective opinion. Personal branding creates not only a perception of someone in your own heart and mind, but also in multiple others, and it is agreed upon. A collective opinion is much stronger than an individual for a number of reasons, including trust and perceived value. It also comes with the added benefit of becoming self-perpetuating as people share, reinforce and advocate for your brand.

The values part is the MOST essential, only after this foundation can you start to work through how you communication these values through the type of content you share, the platforms you share it through, the tone, colours, images, language, videos you use etc. We want to tap

into the emotional and psychological brain – feelings, thoughts and actions. The American Nobel Laureate scientist Dr Herbert Simon discussed the impact of external stimuli on our emotional bias and how this translates into actionable feelings. We act on two circles of influence; one inner and one outer. The subconscious (inner) moving and informing the conscious (outer). Simply put, we "feel" first. Then we "do". We want people to know, like and trust us because then they connect, follow and buy. Please remember though, is this not some mysterious or Machiavellian action. It is just you being YOU, and essentially you being very human. We leverage our values to showcase our humanity on a wider platform, which naturally encourages connection.

Once we have our values pinned down and a broader understanding of how we want to communicate, we must then consider the benefit we offer to others. A common misconception of personal branding (probably because of the Kardashians) is that you have to be self-obsessed to do it, this couldn't be further from the truth. You need to make others FEEL something, which basically translates into you being useful to them.

Question: How does what you stand for help others?

A simple example of this is the value of Giving. My value of Giving is what brought you this co-authored book… ta dah! But I also run a "business give-back channel" called *Colleagues Getting Coffee*, where I interview business leaders and share it socially. My value is Giving, but I translate this into something tangible and useful for others. My social content shares useful tips, tricks and advice, I am seen to give my time in mentoring and giving free talks and workshops. I live and breathe the value on a daily basis.

So how do your values stack up in this department? If you are Logical, how do you translate this into useful content? Maybe you decode complex information or processes for people to make them easier for them to understand, follow or implement. If you are Tenacious, perhaps you share stories of overcoming adversity that people can learn from. If Beauty is a value, perhaps everything you put out into the world inspires people because of its composition, layout and meaning etc.

It takes some time, because we are so obsessed with the cold hard shiny facts or "features" in marketing (car advertising, the Air Con keeps us chilled, rear wheel drive means we can drive off-road) that is difficult to get into the headspace of benefits. Benefits are the squidgy human stuff, how we really *feel* (car advertising, the rev of the engine makes me feel powerful, I feel cooler than my neighbour because my car is newer). The feeling is what motivates us. How do you tap into that?

Once we have a grip on our values, the communication and the benefits, then we need to get *really* consistent. Consistency is the engine behind your personal brand. Consistency leads to belief, acts as social proof and builds trust.

So, if we consider the client concerns, I listed above.

- "I don't know why I am doing social media; it seems so pointless."

You have five values to focus your social media content around, which breaks up the monotony for you but also should inspire you because they are your *values.*

- "My business is way off track, and I don't feel like I am even doing something I like anymore."

Probably because you let your business run away with you, based on other people's demands or expectations – just like I did at the start. But once you know what you stand for, what you love and can bring everything into that frame it should leave you with a more satisfying business based on what really makes you tick. It should also provide you with more confidence and conviction.

- "I am excited to start my business, but I really don't even know who I am (outside of being a mum, wife, daughter etc)."

Dedicating time to you, to understanding you, what you stand for, who you are outside of all other demands, means you can truly express yourself and take back some ownership.

- "The clients I seem to attract are awful."

If personal branding is good for anything, it is good for this. People will start to feel like they know you, as such they will be turned on or off depending on if you are their type of person. It is actually a great tool for weeding out clients who are totally opposite from you, don't align to your values and don't get it. You will start to attract like-minded people who are like you. What a WIN!

This is literally the tip of the iceberg when it comes to personal branding, each section I have described could be a chapter on its own, and there is rafts of information I could share about fonts, colours, storytelling, shapes, language and much more.

But let me leave you with this, according to Harvard professor Gerald Zaltman, a huge 95% of purchasing decisions are subconscious (*inc.com*). 95% that is HUGE! It really means that we make decisions based on our gut more often than we care to admit – we trust brands and people for reasons we cannot really discern. Wouldn't being very Brand YOU be a good option to tap into some of this 95%? Wouldn't it also perhaps lead you to feel more aligned to your true self, feel more motivated in your business and perhaps even *do more business* because of it? I can tell you from my experience, the answer is a hard YES.

But it is scary to be you, to do the work and to put yourself out there. You have to have a good internal locus of influence and not be dissuaded by others and likewise not let your ego run wild. For me, the positives have far outweighed the negatives and I have been able to experience things I never imagined, like hosting public sporting events, being invited to launch parties to interview international CEOs, free sailing experiences and attending awards nights. It has also lead to me working with the coolest most relaxed clients you could imagine who give me creative freedom, acceptance and that all important revenue to keep my dream alive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Annelies James, Expertly Personal and Annelies James Consultancy

Annelies James is a passionate personal branding expert who helps companies and individuals to harness the power of being personal and more importantly, human. Adopting personal brand techniques people can define themselves, be seen and build connection and this leads to greater trust and more opportunity in life and business.

Annelies is an event host, hosting large scale sporting events, awards evenings and business panel shows, as well as helping business creating their own YouTube talk show style content to increase their brand reach and exposure.

Annelies is also a creative videographer and has worked with clients such as Brymor Construction, Southampton Airport, Business South and Barton Willmore to name a few. She supports companies large and small to create candid video that increases authentic brand connection and emotional engagement.

Annelies is happily married to a total tech genius and the proud mum of two cats. She loves adventure, world travel and putting her big girl pants on to challenge herself with new projects and activities like shark diving and flying.

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MOTHERHOOD AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Written by Beth Bluck

Building a brand is hard work at the best of times but when you have children (particularly very young children) to look after it can seem almost impossible. Maternity leave is something I had to sacrifice with my second child in order to build my career and let me tell you, it is not easy. I get asked all the time how I do it all and the simple answer is... I just do. It's exhausting and stressful and I have broken down in tears many times but when you have a dream that you're determined to make happen you don't give up. Slow down when you need to but never stop. Keep pushing forward and making progress even if it is at snail speed.

You may be thinking 'why would she not just wait until she could put her child into nursery?' or 'why would I want to work during my maternity leave?' I asked myself the same questions many times and I always remind myself of the reason I work so hard every day. It's for my children. I want to have a career that allows me to stay at home with them, pick them up from school every day and fit my schedule around their needs so that I have more time and freedom to help them learn, grow, play and generally enjoy their company while they are still young. It's unlikely that I would be able to do that while working for somebody else, I've never been a fan of the 9-5 grind anyway.

Support

The main thing that has helped me through the early stages of my entrepreneurial journey is the support I received, particularly from my partner who has been amazing. Talk to family and friends and ask if anybody could babysit even just for a couple of hours a week so that you can have time to focus on work or give yourself a well-deserved rest, whichever is more essential at that time. For the sake of your mental wellbeing it is important to have at least one person you can turn to when you feel like throwing in the towel (it happens to the best of us) who can give you the confidence boost that you need. This could be your best friend, your mum or even a stranger from an online support group. The support I have received from other female entrepreneurs has been overwhelming, I am in several Facebook groups that are full of women supporting other women so don't be afraid to reach out for help when you hit a wall. Together we thrive.

Planning

Juggling motherhood while being self-employed is HARD but by creating a daily routine you can realistically plan out which tasks you are going to do that week. When I first started, I would set myself ambitious weekly goals that proved to be impossible to achieve which left me feeling deflated and disappointed in myself. So, I sat back and evaluated what my normal day to day life consisted of and was able to see exactly how much 'free time' I had to work. Unsurprisingly, the majority of my day was spent looking after the kids but there were snippets of time every day where my youngest was napping and my eldest was at nursery. This is the time when I would focus on my work, anything else I managed to do outside of that time was a bonus.

All Work and No Play Makes Mummy Crazy

When you're self-employed it can be really hard to set yourself boundaries. If you don't give yourself time to mentally re-charge you will burn yourself out. *Burnout* is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress and is not going to do you any favours so be kind to yourself. It may be frustrating and difficult to stop working in your child-free time but it's essential for your mental wellbeing. Every evening after I have put my children to bed I use that time to relax and unwind from the stresses of the day, I also use this time to check my diary so that I don't forget any important deadlines or dates that is coming up.

The Power of Social Media and Influencer Marketing

It's no surprise that influencer marketing is becoming an increasingly popular and more successful form of advertisement for brands big and small. As an influencer myself I have watched closely as the world of influencer marketing has evolved over the past couple of years. According to a survey conducted by Big Commerce 17% of companies are spending over half of their marketing budget on influencers in 2020 and this number is rising every year. Why I hear you ask? Because people trust Influencer's opinions, particularly women. A huge 86% of women use social media influencers for purchasing advice according to a survey done by the Digital Marketing Institute.

Harnessing the Power of Social Media

Thanks to social media, you can now market yourself/your brand to the whole world and build a following of loyal customers/supporters. Social media allows anyone with a dream to start building their brand from the comfort of their own home for free. Obviously, you will need to invest money into your product if you are planning on selling things but the marketing side of it can be completely free, at least in the early stages anyway. By using social media effectively, you can tap into a ready-made audience, if you're willing to put in the work that is.

How Can Influencer Marketing Work for You?

Influencer marketing is the best way to market your brand to your target audience with little effort required on your part. Whether you are a store, service or public figure, using influencer marketing for your brand will help to increase sales/brand awareness more than a conventional ad will. Influencer marketing is particularly helpful for small businesses that have little to no marketing budget by using 'micro-influencers'.

What Are Micro-Influencers and Why Are They Best?

Micro-influencers are social media influencers with a following of between 2000 and 50,000. Most of the time the bigger the following the smaller the engagement rate, making micro-influencers the most effective for marketing. Some micro-influencers would be happy to promote your product just for the gifted product if they genuinely like your brand. As a micro-influencer myself, I like to support small brands and often wave my usual fee.

However, by accepting just gifted products, the influencer would be doing you a favour so it's important to show your appreciation and to build a good working relationship with that influencer. Not only will they be providing you with free advertisement for your brand, but they will also be giving you free photography of your product. Make sure you always ask the influencers permission before using the image they created with your product and always give that influencer credit in the caption and by tagging them. You should only share the image into your other social media channels, for any other platform such as your brand's website or for commercial ads you have to buy the content rights off that influencer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Beth Bluck, Being Beth

A parenting and lifestyle blogger, Instagram influencer, content creator and freelance writer. As a young mum to two, Beth has a unique perspective on motherhood and shares the struggles and victories she has faced raising her children and actively challenges the stigma attached to young mums. Beth speaks out about her experiences to support others and raises awareness of the social, mental and financial struggles that come with becoming a young mum.

Beth became self-employed after growing a social media following whilst documenting the early years of her children's lives. She then progressed onto blogging on her own website and focused on her writing while continuing to work with brands big and small, creating engaging and creative content for them.

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FUNDING YOUR START-UP

Written by Alexis Marz

Funding your start-up can be a challenge – and it's one that I faced, too.

When we first set up MMP, where we help companies maximise their innovation, I was one of three co-founders… the only woman… and the youngest. After many discussions about how we were going to fund the business, we all decided we didn't want to give up any of our ownership or control. That meant raising equity wasn't for us. Instead, we worked to fund the company out of our savings as much as possible.

After about six months of spending and not seeing any returns, the nightly dinner of beans on toast was getting old. On top of that, a fellow co-founder kept bragging about how he added all the value and I was just along for the ride. I asked him for some examples, and he said he was the one with the financial connections and would get us a business loan.
He said I didn't know anyone, and I wouldn't be able to do it. Well, I've never liked being told that I can't do something. The next day, I started researching business-friendly UK banks and phoning them about loans.

After several meetings and an avalanche of paperwork, success! We got a £100k loan – from one of the banks I'd phoned. Eight years later, the business is still going strong. And I'm still one of the directors at MMP… the "I add all the value" co-founder isn't.
I share this story in the hope it'll inspire you to take more risks and pick up the phone yourself. It's amazing what you can accomplish when you put your mind to it. As Henry Ford said, "whether you think you can, or you think you can't – you're right".
The UK is a great place to start a business. It has a thriving ecosystem of incentives and grants, and a very active fundraising community.

How you want to fund your business depends on your current circumstances, as well as your plans and ambitions. Do you already have money to bootstrap a start-up with? Are you okay with giving up equity in exchange for services, support, or cold hard cash? Would you qualify for grants or funding?
Unless you already have the money to do it yourself, funding your start-up is going to be time consuming. You need to research what's likely to work best for you and your business plans.

All avenues of funding have positives and negatives to consider. There's no single magical solution for everyone. You'll also need to seek expert legal advice, to make sure you're protected against financial and personal risks.
I've written this brief overview of the most common funding options as a guide.

Equity vs. Debt Funding

One of the key decisions you'll need to make early on: are you prepared to give up equity in your business to receive funding?

You may not want to, and it's reassuring to know there are other options. If you can find another way to fund your business, e.g. using your savings, taking out a loan or applying for a grant, then you could hang on to all the equity.
Talking to other founders who've done something similar is an excellent first step. Find out how they funded their start-up, what they learned, and what they'd suggest or avoid. They'll be able to give you valuable insights.

Equity
If you do decide to take the business equity route, then you'll need to prove the business opportunity in detail. Do you have a product or service? Have you already sold it? Can you demonstrate that the market and customer need/desire exist? The more you can show, the higher your current position will be valued.
In the UK, after initial investor capital the typical next stops for funding are the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS)[1] and the Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme (SEIS)[2]. These schemes are designed to help companies raise money and are equally attractive to investors thanks to generous tax breaks on their contributions.
A company can raise up to £150,000 under the SEIS. Of that, only around 25% of an investor's stake is at risk. The EIS is primarily for further funding rounds, allowing companies to raise up to £5m each year (up to £12m over the company's lifetime). Tax breaks for investors are lower with EIS, so more of their capital is at risk.

Crowdfunding
Crowdfunding can be a quick, simple and effective way to raise money. It's also an opportunity to get your idea out there and test it on your target audience, before you commit too much time or capital.
There are many different crowdfunding platforms in the UK, each with their own focus. Some platforms are tailored for certain types of products and industry sectors, or have different funding models (donations, other investments or loans, etc.).

Accelerators
There are many business accelerators, designed to help speed up your start-up's growth. Each accelerator's different, but they usually provide advice, business connections and networking opportunities, and perks (such as desk space or advertising). As with every other option, you'll need to do your homework to see if an accelerator would benefit your business (and if so, which one).
Accelerators often support specific types of businesses, and/or have strict eligibility rules. Applications can be very competitive, in both the number of businesses trying to get in and the entry requirements. Some will ask for business equity, some won't. Either way, an accelerator creates the opportunity to surround yourself with like-minded individuals and develop key business skills.

[1] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/venture-capital-schemes-apply-for-the-enterprise-investment-scheme
[2] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/venture-capital-schemes-apply-to-use-the-seed-enterprise-investment-scheme

Debt and Other Types of Funding

Bank Loans

Bank loans are the ideal solution for some SMEs and start-ups. They won't take a slice of your equity, but most banks ask for a personal guarantee on the loan instead. This makes you personally liable for repayments and can put your savings, stock or property at risk, so proceed with caution.

Bank loans can sometimes be difficult for start-ups to get, depending on the type of business, but there are ways around that. The Government introduced the Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG)[3] in 2009, which has spurred banks to loan to a wider range of small companies. Our initial loan was backed by EFG (note that we still had to provide a personal guarantee to secure it). You can find a list of banks that participate in the EFG online – it's been extended until at least 2021.

Grants

The UK has numerous grant providers, and the biggest one is Innovate (at the time of writing). Innovate[4] supports research into – you guessed it – innovative ideas. You'll need the experience or credibility to be able to deliver on your project idea, but you don't have to be an established business to apply for Innovate loans. The grants will only provide a proportion of the funding to carry out the project, however, so you've got to show how you'll finance the rest.

It's also worth looking at what's available in your area. Some councils, like Adur and Worthing Councils[5], provide grants to help local companies get started. There are also specialist grant providers to contact if you're developing a social enterprise or an eco-focused business.

Tax Breaks/Credits

Once you're set up, there are several tax breaks you could become eligible for. There are UK tax breaks for companies in research and development, video game development, animations, film, and several more.

And when you're making money, you can potentially claim tax breaks on sales of patented products (the Patent Box). Plus, if you can't wait for HMRC to pay it out then it could be possible to get a loan against these payments.

R&D Tax Credits

These can give companies investing in eligible research up to 33% cashback. The research needs to meet the tax definitions to qualify. In short, you need to be seeking to achieve a technological advance, overcoming a technological uncertainty in the process.

Costs need to fit into one of the eligible 'cost buckets': staffing costs, consumables, software, Externally Provided Workers, subcontracting, and independent research. Each category has its own rules and requirements, so you'll need to do your homework. If you've already received a grant from somewhere else, that can further impact the amount you can claim.

[3] https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/supporting-business-loans-enterprise-finance-guarantee/
[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/innovate-uk
[5] https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/businesses/support-and-funding/grants-and-funding/

Further information on R&D Tax Credits can be found on the .gov website[6], or through providers such as MMP[7]. In fact, we can give you more details and advice on everything covered here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexis Marz, MMP

Alexis is passionate about helping innovators achieve their goals. As co-founder and director of award winning MMP, she helps companies to maximise their innovative potential by combining specialist knowledge of IP, grants and technology tax reliefs with practical experience in engineering and scientific disciplines.

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[6] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/corporation-tax-research-and-development-rd-relief
[7] http://www.mmp-tax.co.uk/

HOW IMPORTANT IS NETWORKING?

Written by Sally Thompson

Whenever my friend, Chris Buckley, used to introduce me, he said, "this is Sally, she collects people."

I don't think it is something I set out to do but I enjoy learning about everyone I meet and one of my mantras is that 'every conversation leads to an opportunity'.

It's not always easy, of course, to 'just network'[8]. Even now, it is tempting to try and seek out those I already know at an event or gathering of any kind. But that's ok because usually someone you know, will introduce you to someone you don't know already and that's how it all starts.

Here are a couple of stories I'd like to share with you. About networking.

After nearly ten years in the brewing industry, with a backdrop of corporate hospitality, sporting events, conferences and well, yes, beer, I found myself at the start of the millennium, in 2000, 'accidentally' involved in setting up a manufacturing company in the marine sector on the Isle of Wight, where I lived. The new business came about after FBM Marine shipyard in Cowes was relocating to Rosyth, in Scotland and some work in progress on a fast ferry destined for Hong King still needed completing.

We then managed to win a significant sub-contract opportunity with Sunseeker, which meant all year-round production and the business suddenly escalated to needing a new factory, over 30 more staff and all sorts of 'expertise'.

Small businesses need to know, and do, everything. At Courage, the corporate organisation where I had worked previously, there were dedicated departments for sales, marketing, product development, distribution, IT, procurement, finance, technical services, and brewing!

I suddenly needed to learn all about manufacturing, composites, the marine sector and much more. Where were all those departments and specialists when you needed them, in a start-up business?

So without too much thought or planning, I set off, enthusiastically, to visit all the marine companies I could locate which were based in Cowes and across the Isle of Wight. I asked the bemused owners (or anyone I could find who would listen), if they wanted to 'set up a virtual shipyard?' I'm sure they thought I was crazy. Anyway, I managed to persuade lots of cynical

[8] ***Noun networking***
the action or process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts "the skills of networking, bargaining and negotiation"

Verb networking
Interact with others to exchange information and develop professional or social contacts "it's so important to network when starting new business."

'Sea Dogs', master mariners, stakeholders, suppliers and other curious onlookers to come along to a presentation – We were going to set up a cluster and they could be a part of it if they wanted to.

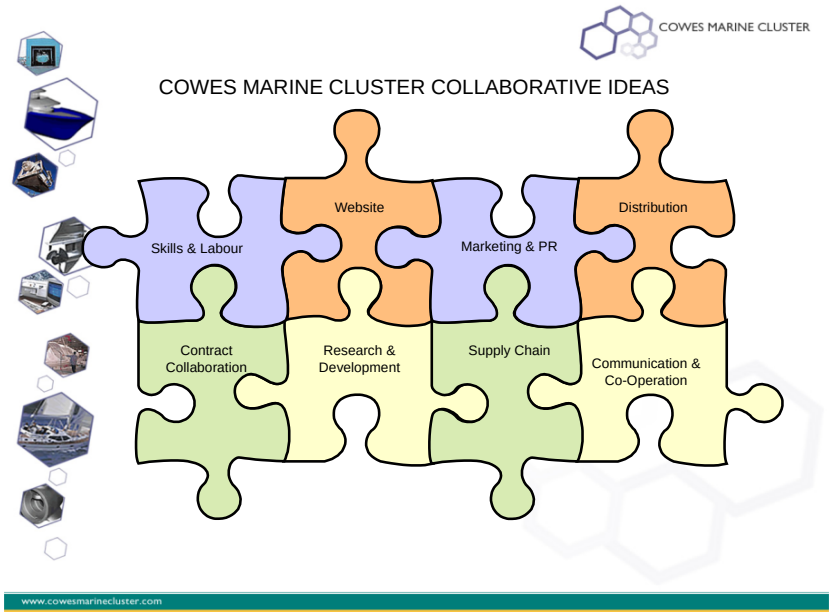
My thinking was, that it would be better to collaborate and co-operate as a sector in a defined locality to overcome barriers, solve problems; share knowledge and expertise; work together on contracts, bids and tenders to win more business and save costs; than try to ride (or sail) the historical peaks and troughs of the marine industry. Contracts come and go and what do you do in between? You need to retain talent and the skills you have in your team because there's always a shortage. Bills still need to be paid. Business must go on…

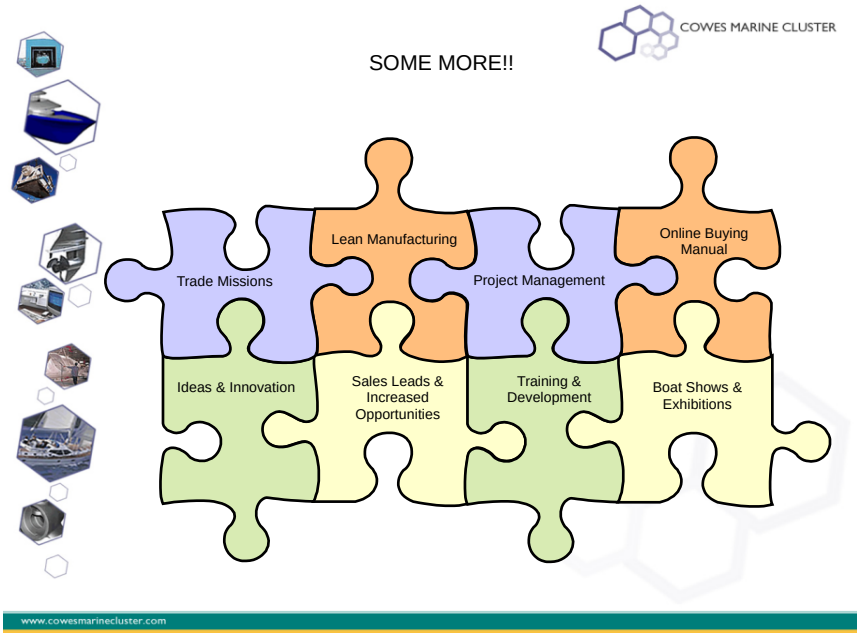
2.

I didn't stop and think that I was now 'networking', but a strong network did evolve and bond very quickly from joining up all these unexpected new connections. The Cowes Marine Cluster was established and able to secure funding for three years from the then South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) and through being introduced to Marine South East. This was because we banded together as an industry, with more than 100 companies quickly engaged, recognising that costs could be saved, efficiencies could be made, problems could be solved, and business could be won. Together.

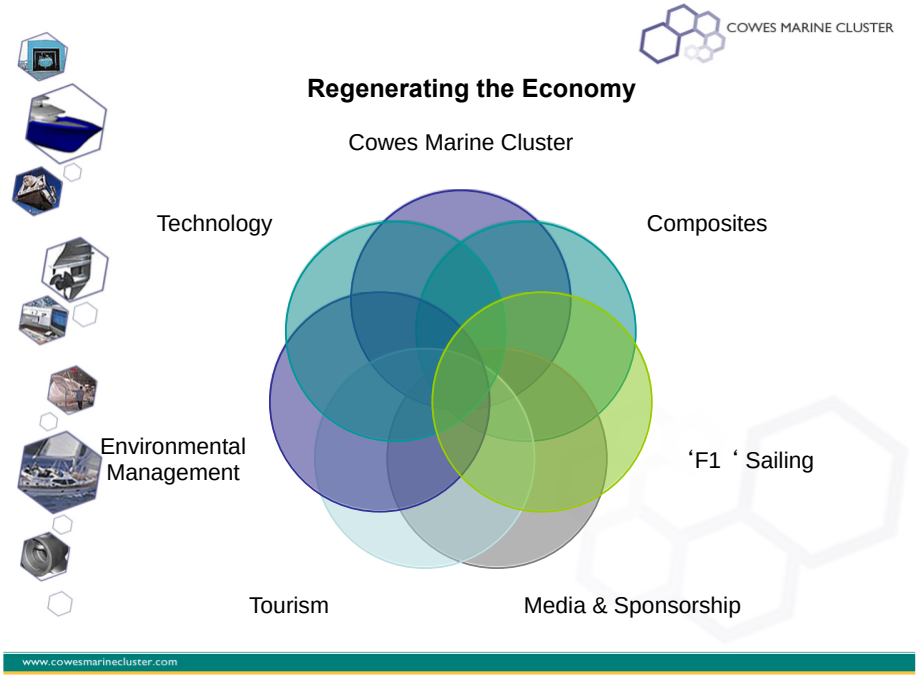
Collective promotion of a world-class maritime hub based in the home of global sailing. Additional contracts, worth more than £1.5m, were won through this new marine network within the funding period. (Even though boat building is centuries old on the Island – it just needed a bit of glue to stick some of the modern-day components together!)

You could call it 'horizontal supply chain development', or 'co-opetition' for any doubters or naysayers. Co-operation and competition all rolled up – to drive business growth; increase trade, jobs and investment. Collaboration equals sustainability and success. Playing to strengths. Sum of the parts and all that … the orchestra just needed a conductor.





I like jigsaw puzzles and joining things up. And, facilitating new connections, spotting opportunities, building bridges. Making introductions. Planting seeds. Growing the economy.



3.

I remember having meetings at Red Funnel's Head office in Southampton. I asked them why they couldn't build the next Red Jet Fast Catamarans, from their home, in Cowes, on the Island? We had the collective skills, a lean manufacturing ethos, the knowledge and know-how. The network! The Isle of Wight was crying out for more investment in jobs and economic growth. It made sense to me anyway. (They were building the Red Jets in Tasmania at the time and importing them from there.)

I think they laughed and said it would never happen. UK manufacturing? – Not likely!

However, I am delighted to say that there are now Fast Cats being built in Cowes! They have export orders across the World. How fantastic! It takes a while for a forest to grow. But it can, from an acorn or two. And Networking.

Then there was Southampton.
Because of the network that I had knitted together on the Isle of Wight and south coast, I was fortunate to have met and mingled with hundreds of interesting people from all walks of life, in the marine sector and beyond. People get to know you; of you and about you - just by engaging with others, getting involved, networking at events and through collaborating in shared projects and experiences.

Nothing stays the same though and as they say, one door closes and another one opens …

One of my associates in the Cowes Marine Cluster told me about a vacancy for a CEO at Business Southampton and gave me a copy of the job ad, which unbeknown to me had featured in the Sunday Times. I mulled over the role and thought it sounded pretty challenging. There was a requirement to "unite the city" and put Southampton on the map. Not sure what that really meant at the time, but it sounded like lots of potential networking to me!

I applied. Tentatively.

My thinking was that I had managed to bring together the marine sector on the Isle of Wight so that businesses could more easily work with other businesses to do more business. Activating a dormant cluster perhaps, where at times it had been like turning dinosaurs into dynamos, but also establishing more of an interactive network for the benefit of all involved and for the economy of the Island.

Surely it couldn't be so hard in Southampton…

I think the role had been difficult to fill. (Probably most would-be applicants were far better educated and informed about what lay ahead and had politely declined!)
Anyway, they took me on.

The in-box was about a mile and a half high, and included requests to; Set up a new not-for-profit company and board; Employ a couple of staff; Put a plan together; Promote the city; Get the private and public sectors to work together; Attract more investment; Create more jobs and growth; Traffic is a problem; There's a lot to explore with the cruise industry; and Oh, we need to attract more talent and we'd like some more events…

Plus, btw, there was a £250k budget by way of a public grant to get things going. Great I thought, until I realised this was over a three-year period – not per year! Hey ho.

It is a long story. Quite exciting really, but there's too much to tell you about here. With a focus on why networking is so important; here are some of the key elements of the tale.

Initially, to be honest, I didn't know quite where to start.

Hmm.

So, I just started networking, from March 2006.

Making appointments with leaders from the council, the port, the airport and universities, then appointments with the football club, law firms, accountants, business owners, company HQ's in Southampton, stakeholders, MPs, taxi-drivers and, basically, anyone with any influence I could get to see.

The initial appointments were easy as there had a been a steering group with some of the business leaders thinking about what to do with a place like Southampton for a long time. So, there was my first core group to ask about whom they knew and who they could introduce me to with an email, or phone call, or invitation. Our inaugural board was chaired by former law firm partner, Malcolm Le Bas, who provided great ballast and a steady rudder in some politically choppy waters at times. I learned a lot from him.

I spent the first six months meeting people in Southampton, asking questions and listening. Listening, as I now understand, is a vital part of networking.

I learned about their priorities, their challenges, their aspirations and their frustrations; and about the barriers and obstacles to business, the untapped potential and opportunities waiting to happen.

Golly. How to make sense of it all and sort things out?

By now, I was creating my own network of connections in Southampton. It was a good start. Collecting business cards. Making real life connections.

After researching how to "bring cities together", we came up with a kind of draft hybrid model and; after brainstorming with my, by now business chums, at Carswell Gould marketing agency, the "City Champion" title emerged.

We decided to have an official launch event at St Marys' Stadium, the home of Southampton Football team. It took place in January 2007… just before the global economic crash hit!

15 companies, which had helped Business Southampton 'in kind' with time on the steering group and board, or who had provided, for example, office space, marketing, PR, website, advocacy, professional services; or who had already donated some cash; were recognised publicly and awarded a 'Founder City Champion' plaque at our launch event. It was a reverse psychology decision or something that I thought might work. It did… Many other business leaders from companies and organisations in Southampton declared that they, too, wanted to become a City Champion. Hurrah!

We were delighted to welcome them, with an annual contribution of £3k please, to support all our aims and aspirations. (With a budget now! – Yay!)

Our primary goal for the City Champion programme was to drive economic prosperity to support social well-being. Together.

The City Champion network grew to include over 250 companies and organisations with up to 80 events per year! Collectively the network of 'Champions' employed over 100,000 staff and turned over more than £4bn per year. Business Southampton evolved across three counties to become Business South. I had initially planned to be there for a three-year project and stayed 11 years until 2017. It was like being part of an amazingly diverse, energetic and wonderful family. I loved it! (Mostly!)
We evolved as an organisation, responding to the needs of businesses and all the opportunities we kept spotting - through so much networking!

Business South became sustainable outside public funding, despite the recession.

An independent business led model, supported by Champions, from the private and public sectors, education and third sector; engaged through collaboration, to unite a city, a place, a region – to collectively influence and deliver positive economic and social outcomes.

The reason Business South became so successful and known for its extensive network, is that it was and remains, a 'win win' for everyone involved. **Not for profit, politically neutral, working for the greater economic good of a place.** Champions could engage with each other through the network, via action groups, programmes and projects, communications, workshops, events and conferences. Listening to what was needed enabled the enthusiastic, committed team at Business South to create and facilitate all of these activities and benefits, focusing on whoever needed connecting and whatever needed solving, promoting or doing! Overcoming obstacles, realising potential. Through collaborating. Networking.

So, I guess, creating purposeful networks is my passion. Building communities be it by sector, industry, cluster or place. Establishing a network where the sum of the parts is greater than the whole. I enjoy listening to people, spotting opportunities, making the connections to get things done. Making magic happen! You can too.

Business South examples:

1) A Masterplan had been talked about for decades in Southampton. It had been a political football and kicked into touch far too often. Through the City Champion network, we engaged with many companies from the construction / property development sector. They told us that the city was stagnating and that it was near on impossible to secure investment for regeneration and new development, as there was no vision or masterplan for the city. West Quay (shopping mall) had taken 24 years from concept to completion.

Southampton, as the regional business centre on the South coast was not punching its weight!
So, we held a Chatham House workshop and brought together private and public sector Champions to debate some of the issues around City planning and promotion. It was unanimous that the private sector leaders around the table needed a 'blueprint' for Southampton. A Masterplan.

It was good timing. Our colleagues in the public sector were open to new ideas.
But, back then, we still had to overcome some Political hurdles as it had been decided time and again, that a Masterplan wasn't needed and would be too expensive to commission.
So, through the Champion programme, the 'business case' was made, along with the 'evidence base', supported by, critically, the 'collective influence' of our network of City Champions, to persuade the Leader of the Council to finally agree to a Masterplan for Southampton.

The Private and public sectors then worked together collaboratively, as part of the network of City Champions, to launch the Masterplan, which attracted over £3bn of investment to the city and over 20,000 new jobs. Southampton is unrecognizable as the city I started working in in 2006. The next phase has recently been launched. Southampton is definitely on the map! Demonstrating the power of networking!

(I also believe that a '**Champion' programme is urgently needed across the UK** to help unite communities through establishing such cohesive networks in a 'place', which then enables cross-sector connectivity in driving positive economic and social outcomes in cities, towns and for rural areas too. Maybe a Champion programme model could sit as a business engagement arm for the Local Enterprise Partnerships? Happy to 'network' and chat more about this!)

2) Southampton is the biggest homeport for cruises in northern Europe. There had been a council report, which noted several missing economic opportunities for the city and various logistical challenges, but which hadn't been addressed.
So, through the City Champion programme, which had the support of the local authority, we connected key companies in the supply chain to overcome obstacles such as solving the coach parking in the city for passengers, working with the taxi firms and councils to overcome issues, improving signage (to help reduce city congestion), connecting partners to collectively promote overnight stays and visitor attractions.
These solutions came about through our engaging companies, as 'Champions' and facilitating the networking between them, as they had not got together previously to explore opportunities, realise potential and overcome barriers - as there had been no mechanism, or entity to facilitate such targeted collaboration.

The best example to demonstrate again the power of such networking in the cruise sector, is the annual Food Produce South show, which evolved after inviting some local small and medium companies, in 2007, onto P & O's Oriana, hosted by Carnival UK, to

hear about how they could potentially supply their products onboard the cruise liners and ships.
As a result of this introduction, a new food and produce event was established, led by Business South on behalf of Champions, delivered by Partner, Shirley Pinn of Destination Southampton.

The event has grown year on year, as more and more companies from the South register to exhibit their products and provide delicious tasters to delegates. The event attracts sponsors, buyers and procurement teams from large companies and corporates. There is even TV coverage.
This example of 'networking' again demonstrates its importance as there is now cheese, chocolate, ice cream and trout (to name but a few local delicacies), all being served in the signature restaurants on the cruise ships, which sail from Southampton! Helping our SME's to grow. Increasing investment and employment opportunities.

Do contact my lovely friend and former colleague, Leigh-Sara Timberlake, the new Group CEO at Business South, to find out how to get involved and attend a networking event! www.businesssouth.org

I am currently involved in developing a new network within the Higher Education community to support 'Universal Design Learning' – www.notetakingexpress.com
- After taking my networking ethos into the digital age with a new AI 'Find Engine', which I commissioned through Launch International, so you can find who and what you don't know, to do more business across the globe. That is another story! www.launchinternational.co.uk

There are countless examples of how networking has enabled new connections to be made, which have resulted in great opportunities, contracts, partnerships, ventures, jobs and friendships! Look out for events in your area and go along. You never know what you might learn, or who you might meet, or be introduced to…

Networking is not just about having a jolly time out of the usual routine – it can be great fun, but also a critical part of your toolkit for personal and business development.
Good luck!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Thompson, Note Taking Express & Launch International.

Founder CEO of Business South and a former Ambassador of the Manufacturing Advisory Service, Sally Thompson is an award winning, businesswoman, innovator and entrepreneur. A visionary connector, she has been creating clusters and networks over the last 20 years and has worked across all sectors. She is an experienced leader in stakeholder and business engagement and has a sales, marketing and business development background.

Sally, more recently, has pioneered the application of combined new technologies with AI, through her ideas around connecting global business and supply chains to create a unique 'Find Engine', which has significant potential. She is passionate about enabling SME's to survive and thrive! Sally is married to a farmer and has 2 daughters, 1 grandson and 3 stepsons. She is based in Hampshire and on the Isle of Wight, where she grew up.

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BATTLING PEOPLE'S EXPECTATIONS

Written by Caroline Macdonald

One of the challenges of being a female founder is that you're constantly battling people's expectations of you.

Some of those expectations underestimate you. Some believe you're not serious about your business just because of your gender. They expect your time to be completely overrun by other things, so you cannot dedicate enough time to the business. At the very worst end of the spectrum, the assumption is that you cannot hold your own in a boardroom - or that you are just looking for a distraction and you're not committed to seeing the business grow.

But sometimes the assumptions are wrong in a different way: they overestimate you. I have certainly experienced some of the more bizarre overestimations and I've seen many others in my dealings with professional women over the years. I've seen the assumption that a businesswoman is bankrolled by a partner, or that they have unlimited funds from elsewhere - and that it doesn't matter if the business doesn't succeed.

So many business books talk about turning weaknesses into strengths, and it is true that there are qualities you want to grow if you want to succeed in business - but for some reason, many of the 'weaknesses' identified in woman professionals are just facts or false assumptions.

None of these assumptions are helpful.

Whatever assumptions are made, they are always weaknesses. It's a particular frustration of mine that no one assumes you graduated top of your class and landed investment out of the gate. They instead assume that because you are a woman, you have qualities, experiences, or factors in your life that make you a liability.

It can be something as small as interrupting you in an important meeting because they assume you don't understand the question, or purposefully organising meetings on days when you've said you're not available. I know Managing Directors who have been mistaken for the tea lady at the beginning of a big investment meeting. I know Associate Directors who have been asked where the Associate Director is - and have been disbelieved when they have said it is themselves.

But while the individual quirks of a woman can be considered weaknesses by others, I am living proof that these are strengths.

A Snippet of My Story

I'm twenty-four, newly arrived in London, with a degree I loved under my belt. After a long story (and that's a tale for another day) I secured the management role at a wine bar, and

within a year I turned it around from loss to profit. It became clear to me immediately that I wanted to make a difference through my entrepreneurial skills.

Years later, I am the partner in a comms firm, and it became clear that I wanted to do things differently. My own agency was born, and I've managed it ever since - with a growing team, and a growing list of global clients.

What I find interesting is that as my own business has grown, I've had fewer negative experiences with assumptions about 'my' weaknesses, but I've started seeing them far more often around me. Other professional women in other environments are not treated with the same respect that I enjoy.

Every Day is a Rebellion

I believe that every single day is an active rebellion against those who make the wrong assumptions about me and other women like me.

I don't know what you have experienced; you may be oblivious to those assumptions, or so self-conscious that you think they are probably holding you back.

Here's how you can take the assumptions that others make about you and transform them into strengths.

Assumption: You care too much.
Strength: You're right, I care a huge amount.
It's what makes me a dedicated boss; someone who cares about my reputation, my brand's reputation, about the happiness of my clients, my employees, the impact we are all having on the planet...without that care, I honestly don't think anyone stays in business long.
Use this yourself: if someone criticises you for caring too much about something, turn it back on them. Ask just how much you should care and see if they can quantify it for themselves.

Assumption: Women obsess about the smallest things.
Strength: Yup. That's how I spot trends.
No business can survive if it's not going to pivot and continuously do better, offer more, challenge expectations. By focusing closely on everything that could affect my business and that of my clients, I can spot opportunities for us all to grow.
Use this yourself: identify what skills you have that are considered 'womanly' and see how you can use them for your own advantage. Practice them, dedicate time to them, and you'll see business benefits before too long.

Assumption: Women are so emotional.
Strength: I agree. Rapport is everything.
Most people don't buy from businesses. They buy from emotions, based on a sense of personal connection with a brand or individual leading that brand. As long as the statistics and metrics support me, I will use my emotional intelligence to build rapport with my team and my clients.
Use this yourself: track your emotional temperature every few hours during the working week for a whole week. Do you feel very passionate more in the mornings? More clinical after you've eaten? More overwhelmed when your email inbox gets over a certain limit? Use this self-information to better structure your day and interact with people.

Assumption: Women get so distracted by family.
Strength: Often. Watch and learn how I solve that.
It's impossible to deny that women are - in the majority of cases - the primary caregivers. OggaDoon's company intern is my dog Bonnie and most days, I do the school run for my three children. That's forced me to learn how to be efficient and productive wherever I am, whether that's at the side of a hockey pitch or on a conference call in the back of the car.
Use this yourself: productivity and efficiency aren't just something you 'have'. Learn to say 'no' to the things you really don't need to do, or shouldn't be doing useful, to ensure you dedicate your time to the areas that really need you.

Assumption: She's just a woman…
Strength: Sure, underestimate me. That just puts me ahead of you.
I won't do anything I can to get ahead - I purposefully run an ethical marketing company. But if you want to underestimate me then please, go ahead. I am your competitor and I will use that for my own advantage.
Use this yourself: hopefully you won't be in many situations that need this, but occasionally you'll surprise someone for just being outstanding.

The death of the 'mompreneur'

In my twenty plus years of operating at the top level of business, I've learned that female entrepreneurs are much like male entrepreneurs - in fact, I hate the term 'mompreneur' because there is no 'dadpreneur' equivalent.

We are equally brave in our decisions, sometimes wrong about them, dedicated to our tasks and our vision, self-absorbed to the point of confusion to those around us, sometimes successful in our endeavours and sometimes a failure.

The difference is people's expectations of me, as a woman. As long as they continue to make wrong assumptions about me, I'll be one step ahead of them - and now you will be, too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caroline Macdonald, CEO and founder of OggaDoon, the guerrilla comms business.

After turning around a wine bar from loss to profit in less than a year at the age of twenty-five, Caroline knew she wanted to make a difference through her entrepreneurial skills. After being a partner in a comms firm, Caroline recognised two things: she wanted to do comms differently.

OggaDoon was born: an ethical guerrilla comms business dedicated to working with brands with passion and purpose. Caroline has built the business internationally with a team all doing what they love.

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THE ART OF NOT LIVING A "WHAT IF" LIFE

Written by Carly Thompsett

I left school at 15 with some GCSE's but being dyslexic I was told I probably wouldn't amount to much anyway so why bother. I got a job and I started at College for 3 years, which I did both full-time. I did hair and beauty for the first year and art and design for the last two. I wanted to become a fashion designer that was my calling in life, my room was always piled high with art books and designs, I was always making things and I just never knew what to do with them. I did all this while I became a manager at my job.

I continued working for a total of 6 years, but I started to lose interest; so, left to change my career. From that moment on I never really stuck to a job, I bounced around every 6 months to a new job.

I eventually became a mobile carer for the elderly, which I did kind of enjoy because I was always on the move and not stuck in the same place. I then lost my grandad and felt I needed to live my life, so I quit my job, packed my things and I moved up here to Cardiff in 2013. This was one of the most painful things I had to deal with and it really shock me up; I felt lost but I also look back at this time as an inspirational moment in my life as I started my life again and set up a successful business – I can't even explain how I did this and thinking back now scares me how I just upped and left.

I met one of my friends soon after moving here and we did talk about my business ideas, but I didn't know where or how to go about it, we had completely different businesses so he could only help me so far. So, I carried on with my day job, until one day I woke up and really wanted to pursue my dream. I bit the bullet and quit my job, I thought if I won't do it now I won't ever do it, so googled 'how to start a business', and one of the first results that popped up was The Princes Trust, so I called in and explained I wanted to start a business and asked if they could help me.

They explained they had a course called the Enterprise programme that I could go on and that'll get me started. So, I accepted, what did I have to lose?

I wasn't expecting much from the course but was pleasantly taken a back and surprised at how much information I didn't know I needed to know to run a business; and the depth of the course was amazing. I came out with a new lease of life and excitement for my new journey. I worked with them to do my business plan and had weekly meet ups to go through all my information to make sure I had everything I needed before I went to launch group - I passed – which is like dragons' den and so scary. My adventure began and Anaphase Clothing was born.

I was given a mentor for 2 years to help me all the way with any problems and advice and I have networked a lot doing their courses. For the few years, The Princes Trust Cymru have held a pop-up shop in St David's 2 (shopping centre) on Mother's Day weekend, which I have attended for 4 years and speaking to people that have been through the same journey really helped me.

My business was slow to start off with which did dishearten me a little, especially as I thought I'd be a millionaire by the first month. But I wasn't ready to give up – so I got a full-time job to help with the costs and kept my business going on the side; it has picked up a lot and has been a bumpy ride, but I still see potential in myself.
The trust were always there for me for whatever I needed – willing to put me in contact with other mentors who would help me if mine couldn't.

In 2017, I changed the business name to Anaphase Store as I wasn't just selling clothing now, so it made sense to have store to cover the ranges I have. I have developed an online following on my social media accounts, I have my website that gets a lot of attention, I am verified on Facebook, The Tomorrow store that is run by The Prince's Trust also stocked my items on their online platform – I was given a free shop on eBay to help with my sales, I was invited to eBay's head office in London to attend a day on how to have the best postings; eBay then featured me on their home page on a day they raise money for the Princes Trust to share why they help the charity.

I was a young ambassador for The Princes Trust, so I would attend events and do speeches on how the trust has helped me; I am now a volunteer and business mentor. I was also contacted by my local council to join a programme that attends schools around the city to give inspirational stories to help children realise there is a life outside of school and anyone can do anything they put their mind too. I get a lot of questions from the children about how I got so far inn life and I am always honest and say I wasn't always passionate about living life to the fullest but now I had that burst of life I would never left it go. Anaphase has taken me to Paris and Rome to sell in shops and a trip planned for New York in December for the same.

Along the way I have met Paul Mercer, he used to play for Portsmouth Football team, which my dad is a huge fan of, I asked him for an autograph which he was okay about until the whole room saw, rushed over and formed a line. He was stuck there for about 30 minutes, not sure if I left as his friend, also Dan Bigger and Kelly Hoppen. Kelly loved my 'Don't touch my hair' sweatshirts and posted it on her Instagram along with Giovanna Fletcher who posted one of my candles on her Instagram story and Fearne Cotton with a t-shirt, which in turn sent a lot of people my way.

I have done an interview on BBC radio wales along with Radio Cardiff, Heat, Kiss, Kerrang, Planet Rock and Magic. I met prince Charles who laughed at my 'don't touch my hair' jumper and told me he loves eBay, at the same event I met Luke Evans, who was really nice and was tweeting about some ambassadors during the morning. My business has also been shortlisted for 21 different business awards, we've won 7 of them, 3 in one day, an award being the enterprise award with the Princes trust awards – we became a multi award winning business all in one day. I was also invited by Buckingham Palace to attend Prince Charles 70th Birthday Celebrations, I have been listed as one of the 35 under 35 top business woman in wales 2018 and 2019, I have been mentioned in 63 new papers and magazines articles through my journey and its lovely to hear that people still find me just as inspiring, I now also have 2 paid staff members, 3 interns and 8 reps around the country working for Anaphase Store - I feel extremely lucky to have achieved what I have in such a small time.

Around my business, in my spare time I have studied the English legal system; including employment law to help me understand my rights and my employees' rights to make my business work smoother. I also studied digital marketing for business to up my game and make sure I take full advantage on the sites that would work for my business.

The message I give to everyone or if I am asked for a quote, it is – don't live a what if life – don't live with regrets, always say yes to any opportunity given to you as you never know how it will impact you, don't watch or try to compete with people as everyone has a different journey, live and own your journey and make your life/business you own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carly Thompsett, Anaphase Store

Carly has been an entrepreneur for 4 years when she started her business Anaphase Store in 2015, Carly struggled through her educational years with being dyslexic and dyspraxic, but she has broken those barriers down to live out her dreams. Since receiving help from the Princes trust in early 2015, Carly has become a successful business mentor and ambassador to give back and help other people who may have the same struggles and give them confidence to blossom. Anaphase Store is Online and based in Cardiff. They stock their own designs and slogans printed onto Clothing ranging from new-born to 5XL; including friends themed designs, Homeware where they make their own candles and bath bombs in lots of wonderful scents, Cosmetics, Accessories, make up brushes and Holiday items for the upcoming Seasons.

Anaphase has won 7 business awards and has been shortlisted for 21 others. We have 8 reps around the country selling items on behalf of our business, 2 paid staff members and 3 interns.

Carly has met Prince Charles along with many celebrity ambassadors; she has even personally been invited to Buckingham Palace - Carly's business.

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THE MINDSET-BASED BARRIERS THAT HOLD FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS BACK

Written by Adrienne Saunders

In this chapter I will explore the top two mindset-based barriers that hold female entrepreneurs back from setting up their own businesses, according to the Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship:

1. Higher risk-awareness than men
2. Perceived lack of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge

The 7 strategies I will share in this chapter will:

- help you bring awareness to the skills you need to focus your self-development efforts on in order to become a successful female entrepreneur

- help you draw your own personal entrepreneurial action plan to address your skills development needs

Why am I interested in this topic?
I've been supporting women through female business confidence programmes throughout my whole career. Then the 'female entrepreneur mindset' was brought to my attention a couple of years ago by a friend who was thinking about setting up her own business.

I met Tamara and we chatted about her plans over a cup of coffee.

She was excited and nervous all at the same time.

After years of working for a big corporate firm and then having been on maternity leave with her first child, she was finally making the jump and had decided to set up her own business.

"How super exciting!" - I said.
"Do you think?" - she replied hesitantly.
"But what if …" and then followed a barrage of hesitation;
"Am I crazy to do this?"
"It's too big a financial risk!"
"What if it's too stressful?"
"I wouldn't want it to interfere with caring for my daughter."
"I can't manage a business, I'm just not very good at these things."
"What if it fails?"

Here we were chatting about a great new opportunity that she has been dreaming up for years, and yet her thoughts were filled with fear and self-doubt.

According to the "Alison Rose Review of Female Entrepreneurship"[9] my friend is not alone: one in six women believe they lack the necessary skills and knowledge to start a business.

After my conversation with Tamara, I got interested in the female entrepreneur mindset and since then have supported many women in setting up successful businesses by addressing the barriers that hold them back through skills development training and self-development tools. Which, according to the review is exactly what women are looking for: fifty percent said that more accessible training programmes would contribute to their businesses' success.

I am very happy to do my bit to boost female entrepreneurship by sharing the top tips around self-development that I shared with my friend on the day she confided in me about wanting to set up her own business.

Let's now Explore the two biggest mindset-based barriers in more depth

1. Higher risk-awareness than men

"Women are significantly more likely to cite fear of failure or fear of doing it alone as a primary reason for not starting a business. Clearly not all women lack self-belief, but we were struck by the number of female entrepreneurs we met who commented that they only had the confidence to set up their business because other people – friends, partners, parents or colleagues – urged them to do it. These women were more likely to attribute their subsequent success to other people, rather than to their own capabilities."

Many studies show that women are more risk averse than men, especially when it comes to starting a new business venture, investing or simply putting themselves into unfamiliar and new situations.

The Alison Rose review also states that men are more willing to take a chance and learn as they go, in the same way that research shows men are willing to apply for jobs if they meet 60% of the qualifications stated, while women believe they need 100%.

The review highlights a need to help women entrepreneurs build greater confidence in the skills they have and provide targeted support to help them develop the skills they feel they need.

Here's my top two strategies to help you assess your risk awareness levels and give you the framework you need to define your own risk awareness action plan.

[9] *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-alison-rose-review-of-female-entrepreneurship*

Risk Awareness - Strategies

STRATEGY 1: Risk taking can be measured.
During my time as gymnast, training for the 1998 Aerobic Gymnastics World Championships time was spent not only in physical but also in mental preparation.

The goal was set. As a team we were pursuing a gold medal and knew that getting there would involve highs and lows, but we agreed to work through these.

In case of challenges, we would re-evaluate, analyse, strategise, consult with our trainer, support one another and persevere.

As in sport, business practice and discipline are both required to be 'mastered' in order to achieve your entrepreneurial goals.

You will have failures, setbacks and sometimes you may even feel like quitting, but you will not succeed unless you are willing to experience, take risks, learn from and work through these highs and lows. And in the meantime, make sure you enjoy and celebrate the successes!

The following exercise will help you understand and evaluate your relationship to risk taking.

The table already contains two generic examples to help you think of what feels like a risk for you.

Work through the table in the following way:

1. Think about what constitutes risk for you and capture them in the first column.
2. Evaluate what level of risk that represents for you (on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being not risky at all, 10 being highly risky).
3. Now think about how willing you would be to take that risk?
4. What would it feel like to achieve your goal?
5. If it's a total disaster, what's the worst that could happen?

Once you've completed the questionnaire, you'll have crystal clear awareness of what constitutes risk for you, which is the starting point for our next strategy.

What constitutes risk for you?	What level of risk do you think this is (on a scale of 1-10)	How willing are you to take this level of risk? very /moderately / not willing / not at all	What would it feel like to achieve your goal?	If it's a total disaster, what's the worst that could happen?
example 1: Investing all your personal savings into your business.	9	not willing	You could make a living out of running your own successful business and build up your reserves again.	You would lose all the money invested and would have to go back into full time employment.
example 2: Return a phone call or email to someone who is irritated with you.	4	moderately	You will have assertively dealt with the conflict.	You might make things worse and never speak to the person again.

STRATEGY 2: Risk taking can be practiced.
How can you become more effective at judging which risks have a better chance of succeeding?

Just like in the sporting example above… practice! Start by taking risks that you consider low level (use the table above to help you) and start to get used to the shaky feeling of risk taking.

By doing small slightly uncomfortable actions of risk, you will learn to understand that the feelings of fear and anticipation are very close to the same feeling.

And who knows, by the end of this exercise you might even start to enjoy it!

2. Perceived lack of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge

"In our survey of the general population, we found that women are consistently less likely than men to believe they have developed necessary entrepreneurial skills in the course of their professional or personal life."

When asked about which skills and knowledge areas they have had experience with in their professional or personal life, the women interviewed within the framework of the Alison Rose review gave these two soft skills the lowest score:

Marketing (practical skill) Leadership (interpersonal skill)

In the next part of this chapter, I will share simple, but very powerful strategies which will allow you to ascertain your current levels of entrepreneurial skills and to build an action plan to address your own development skills.

Marketing Skills - Strategies
You will need marketing skills to ensure that you can create enough customers who will buy the products and services that you sell. Different marketing techniques to increase the visibility of your company will require different skills from your side.

STRATEGY 3: Research, free online courses and networks.
There are so many different tools, resources and opportunities available for you to grow your business: I recommend you start by researching local entrepreneurship growth hubs, online courses and entrepreneurial networks.

Leadership skills development - strategies
Entrepreneurs require all sorts of skills to get their businesses off the ground – resilience, imagination, drive and a strong work ethic, just to name but a few. Yet as your business expands, the skillset required will also begin to shift; you'll need to become a great leader, capable of inspiring yourself, potentially a group of employees and keep pushing your business forward.

The following tried and tested strategies will help you assess and boost your leadership skills.

STRATEGY 4: Build a support network.
Surround yourself with people you trust and advisors who inspire you, provide mentorship and will be a much-needed sounding board. These networks can be formed around people, entrepreneurs you already know or a bit more formal, such as organised networking groups. There's a variety to choose from! Most of them offer the opportunity to go along for one or two taster visits - check out as many of them as possible and make an informed choice about which one you feel would get you the best return on investment.

STRATEGY 5: Delegate when the time is right
When you start out on your own, you get used to doing everything by yourself. As your business grows it can be difficult to delegate tasks to an assistant or your first employee for example.

Be aware, not willing to let go at the right time can hold you and your business back from expanding.

STRATEGY 6: Become the leader you aspire to be

Good leaders can paint a picture of what the future holds, inspiring themselves and others around them to achieve the business's potential. There are really two skills here: first, leaders need to have the time (see my strategy 5 above about delegation!) and imagination to plan strategically for the future, setting ambitious targets for growth; second, they need to be able to communicate that vision and provide the inspiration that gets everyone going.

STRATEGY 7: Entrepreneurial skills toolbox

Do you know what entrepreneurial skills you need to focus on to build your successful business?

Go through the list of entrepreneurial skills below.

1. Assess your skills in each of the entrepreneurial areas.
2. Which skills did you give yourself a high mark on? Congratulations! These are your areas of strength.
3. Which skills did you give yourself a low mark on?
4. Ask yourself what it would take to make that score a ten? The answers you give will constitute your own, personal risk-awareness action plan.

Personal characteristics	Details	How good am I doing with this skill on a scale of 1 to 10?	What would it take to make this a 10?
Optimism	Are you an optimistic and open-minded thinker? Do you believe that success is possible? That the world will be better thanks to your efforts? Do you thrive on collective effort?		
Vision	Can you create a compelling vision of the future, and then inspire other people to engage with that vision?		
Initiative	How good are you at problem solving and improvement projects?		
Desire for Control	Do you enjoy being in charge and making decisions?		
Drive and Persistence	Are you self-motivated and energetic?		
Risk awareness	Are you able to take risks, and make decisions when facts are uncertain?		
Resilience	Are you resilient, so that you can pick yourself up when things don't go as planned?		
Interpersonal skills			
Leadership and Motivation	As a successful entrepreneur, you'll have to depend on others to get beyond a very early stage in your business. Are you willing to inspire others around you and to delegate?		

Communication skills	Are you competent with all types of communication? You need to be able to communicate well to sell your vision of the future to investors, potential clients, team members, and more.		
Listening	Are you a good listener? Your ability to listen can make or break you as an entrepreneur.		
Personal Relations	Are you emotionally intelligent (EI)? The higher your EI, the easier it will be for you to work with others.		
Negotiations	Are you a good negotiator? Not only do you need to negotiate keen prices, you also need to be able to resolve differences between people in a positive, mutually beneficial way.		
Ethics	Do you deal with people based on respect, integrity, fairness, and truthfulness?		
Critical and Creative Thinking skills			
Creative thinking	Are you able to see situations from a variety of perspectives and come up with original ideas?		
Problem solving	How good are you at coming up with sound solutions to the problems you're facing?		
Recognising opportunities	Do you recognise opportunities when they present themselves? Can you spot a trend?		
Practical skills			
Goal setting	Do you regularly set goals, create a plan to achieve them, and then carry out that plan?		
Planning and organising	Do you have the talents, skills, and abilities necessary to achieve your goals? Can you coordinate people to achieve these efficiently and effectively?		
Decision making	How good are you at making decisions?		
Specific knowledge	You need knowledge in several areas when starting or running a business. How well do you know the market you are aiming at?		
Adapted from www.mindtools.com			

Conclusion
Remember the cafe in London where this conversation all started?

I listened to my friend voicing her fear:
“What if I fail?”

And I simply responded:
“But imagine … what if you succeed?”

Tamara is now a successful business owner. There have been ups and downs along the way, but when I ask her now if she would do anything differently, she just shakes her head and laughs - she loves her business and the success, freedom and independence it has brought her.

You can succeed without some of these entrepreneurial skills, however, the more you're missing, the more likely you are to fail. Similarly, the harder you work to build your skills, the more successful you're likely to be. Success starts by tapping into what you’re good at and understanding where you need to focus your attention and self-development efforts.

In this chapter we have explored the two main mindset-based barriers that stop women from starting up their own business and looked into how you may be able to lift those barriers though awareness and self-development.

So, there’s only one question to ask yourself now: is running a business for you?

As you read through this chapter, you may have felt that you're ready to take the plunge into your own venture. Alternatively, you might have decided to wait and further develop your skills. Whatever your choice, make sure that it feels right. Good luck!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrienne Saunders, Yes You Can Training Founder. Master Trainer, Transformational Business Coach
A professional, articulate and driven corporate trainer with over 10 years of experience in building highly effective teams for a wide range of small, medium and multinational companies such as General Electric (Engineering), Promod (Retail Fashion), Gold’s Gym (Leisure) & Sweaty Betty (Luxury Sports Retail).
I’ve graduated from the Master Trainer Institute in Geneva and worked delivering training to organisations across a diverse range of industries including Deloitte, Bank of England, Countryside Properties, Leica Geosystems and Tusker.
My background is in team gymnastics, having personally achieved World and European Championship medals. Reaching that level requires resilient teamwork, crystal clear communication, with a constant evaluation of performance and reflection on how to improve. These sporting skills have driven my success in business which I now get to share with professionals inspiring them to reach their full potential. I have been mentoring for over 10 years, specialising in supporting women in building up and strengthening their business confidence in order to achieve their career goals.

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10 THINGS I'VE LEARNT IN MY 20s

Written by Nisha Haq

Having begun my entrepreneurial journey at 22 and coming up to my 5th year of business, it's safe to say it's been a crazy and wonderful journey full of many highs and lows. With no prior experience of being self-employed, I dove in and learnt along the way. These are the top 10 things I've learnt in my 20s.

Find your passion. The majority of your time will be spent working, you might as well do something you're mighty passionate about! Others will feel this energy and will naturally be drawn to you. Entrepreneurship is a labour of love so creating a business that makes you happy and makes money is the sweet spot. I knew that photography is what I had to do in my life, share that joy with others. It's such a buzz having clients and collaborators feel the same way about my passion as I do. It's the ultimate fulfillment.

Know your 'why'. It's all very well having a goal to make lots of money, but people will see through that, especially if you're a service-based business. Take time to reconnect with yourself, dig deep and find what your values are. Growing up I'd get all excited when I'd see my father take out his old Canon 35mm camera and take snaps of me, I'd show my cheesiest grin. Having those memories of pure joy, that sense of togetherness and how the camera symbolised happiness especially in the family unit, I knew photography was my calling. It was only until I experienced photographing weddings did I realise I always had this in me and that I wanted to make as many people have that feeling of pure joy too. Have a good hard think of discovering what your true 'why' is, it'll open your eyes to greater things.

Don't be afraid to express your individuality. Yes, it's easier to conform and stick to what everyone else is doing but you'll never know your full potential and you won't truly feel yourself if you're copying someone else. It's scary to stick out and do your own thing but if you do a simple Google search of 'iconic people' (think Beyoncé, Michelle Obama, Oprah, Malala Yousafzai, Frida Kahlo, Serena Williams, Meryl Streep, J.K. Rowling, Simone Biles to name a few), you'll see they've all created their own paths and success in their own fields and it didn't come from being the same as everyone else. There's only one of you and your people will love you for who you are. If they don't, they're not your people and don't deserve your awesomeness!

Be brave. Be bold – you won't know until you try. Women are often perceived as being risk adverse. We may have been taught from a young age that to be a good girl, our best asset is to look pretty or to be polite and that can have harmful effects later into adulthood. I believe a woman's greatest asset is her intelligence. There's so much more in life than mediocre experiences, carve a new path for yourself and try something new if what you have isn't doing it for you. I knew being employed in a corporate job, 9-5 at a desk just wasn't for me and

hindered my ambitions and creativity. Taking the plunge to be my own boss was the best decision I've made and feel more confident in myself knowing I have that inner strength. I knew I'd regret it if I didn't at least try.

People will put you down but it's their insecurities projecting on you, not yours. This is a lesson I've only starting to realise in the past few years and to get comfortable with. I know a lot of my female friends struggle with insecurities (I know I do on a constant basis!) and when people say negative things towards you, it's often because they're envious of you or just lack the imagination to see it happen. Learn to take that as a compliment because deep down they know you're doing something great and wish they had the strength that you have. When I first had the idea of setting up my photography business, there were a lot of negative people around me. Not by the fact that they wanted to see me fail necessarily, but they just didn't think a brown Asian girl could create and run a successful business. I think this was partly because the media doesn't show many people who look like me doing what I do. So I suppose from their point of view they thought to be successful I had to be a white, middle-aged man to run a photography business, because that's all they had seen and they just hadn't experienced being self-employed. It's that fear of the unknown that crept in and felt they needed to box me in with what was the 'normal' way to do things. Just remember to keep you head up high, your self-worth comes from within, not others.

It's okay to have bad days and lose your way a little. We're not perfect. The pressure to be perfect is crippling especially the high standards society puts on us and in turn we put on ourselves. I know all too well that it's a common occurrence that I aim for perfect but it's just an idealised notion in my head and it doesn't really exist. Teaching myself to say I am good enough and the work I'm creating is good enough is a hard long journey but such a positive and comforting thought. When running your own business, you carry that weight on your shoulders so reminding yourself it's okay to have bad days and lose your way a little, as long as you know you have the strength to pick yourself back up again you'll get there. Success doesn't come overnight, and you'll tumble at times and that's okay. I believe perseverance is an entrepreneur's greatest strength. We're all learning and growing and that's just a part of the journey. It'll be a boring if a story didn't have any ups and downs, the same goes for our own personal journey.

Exercise your right to say no. If you identify as a people pleaser like me, you know all too well that putting yourself first is a challenge and knowing when and *how* to say no can be difficult. I think for women especially, we don't want to let people down, turn away opportunities or even just appear to be impolite. There are so many reasons why we say yes though deep down we want to say no or not take on too much on our plates. Being an entrepreneur is taking on so many roles in itself from being your own marketer, bookkeeper, salesperson, service provider, admin assistant and many more whilst being a CEO too, it's no wonder we can often head into burnout! Although saying no may be counter intuitive to your personal and business growth, it's knowing what times to say yes and no to. I often see it as when I've said no to something it was because it didn't feel it was a great opportunity and wouldn't want to waste precious time or energy on something that wasn't great for me. I know another

opportunity will come along (or I can create one for myself!) and now I'll have the capacity to say yes and not feel guilty about it because I'm doing what's right for me and my business.

Find your people and be comfortable with asking for help. As a one-woman business, there are times when you can feel alone and not knowing whether there's a shoulder to lean on. Finding a community of people who get you, your struggles and can help you grow not just as a business but also as a person is so important. It can be your friends or family or looking outwards to an online community or networking group where you share similar values. Once you've found your people, don't be afraid to ask for help. I think as women we often feel we either have to be fiercely independent or reliant on someone but somehow can't be both. I used to be rubbish at asking people for help as I'd worry, I'd bother them. This came from a lack of self-belief that I'm not equal to them, therefore I shouldn't be asking these people for help as they wouldn't want to help someone who is beneath them. And practicing some self-love I realised that I do have a lot to offer and to give. Your people want you to succeed and to grow and to encourage you to be your best self, and vice versa, you want that for them, it's all reciprocal. So, when you ask them for help, they feel honoured to help you because you are asking them for their wisdom and advice, which makes them feel good. I'm starting to realise that people want to help you. When people ask me for help, I'm really quick to support them. Finding that group of people who have your back helps you with your self-belief because you are not all by yourself all of the time.

Express gratitude to those who've helped you. Although you see the phrase 'self-made woman' a lot of the times, no one can truly do things on their own and it's the support and love from your people that help you grow a successful business. It goes a long way when a simple act of gratitude is expressed to people, whether to individuals or organisations that have helped you in your journey and it doesn't go unnoticed. Especially in a community of freelancers and fellow small businesses, it may be a natural instinct to think everyone is our competition, but you soon realise much more can be gained when you support those around you. I've received so much business from fellow photographers and business owners and equally given back too. An entrepreneur's lifestyle shouldn't be taken for granted and expressing gratitude is one of the best ways to not only boost your happiness but shows your respect for your people and including them in your success.

Be kind to yourself. You are good enough. You're a badass woman. The notion of being good enough can be triggering for a number of women, I know it is for me often worrying about it or letting imposter syndrome creep in time to time. That's okay to have these thoughts but as long as we learn to be kinder to ourselves and practice more daily self-love, eventually the negativity will dimmer down. Things like journaling, taking more time out in the day for ourselves (bubble baths and more reading is on my list this year) and celebrating the little wins, not just the big ones but the everyday little triumphs can help with the path on being good to ourselves. I've found its often linked with lack of self-confidence and there are days you feel you want to give up, then you receive the best feedback from a client and realise how much of a badass beautiful woman you are.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nisha Haq, Nisha Haq Photography

Nisha Haq specialises in providing wedding, commercial & lifestyle photography in the South UK. After graduating in BA (Hons) Photography in 2014, she set up her business a year later. Nisha has been awarded IPSE UK Young Freelancer of the Year 2017 and is one of the youngest to receive an Honorary Degree from Solent University. Nisha is passionate about encouraging enterprise, in particular young females in the creative industries and has gone on to deliver numerous talks on entrepreneurship at various universities and events. Nisha believes that with commitment and passion anyone can be their own boss!

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THE BARRIERS THAT HOLD WOMEN BACK

Written by Louise Hockaday

This is an interesting subject and when I first said I would write something I imagined I would do lots of research on barriers for women in the workplace or in business. Research, facts, figures and statistics are my thing and gathering all the information and evidence is my usual approach!

However, after much thought, I thought it would be best to base this article on my own experience with a few observations that I have drawn from my work from others.

There are two things that I am exploring here. The 'barriers' and the concept of being 'held back'.

I have pulled some themes from research and then added my own story to help with context.

What Kind of Barriers?

I'm all about clarifying the questions - What to write about?

Barriers can cover so much! What kind of barriers? ... and barriers to what? A place on the top table? Being successful in business? A happy life?

And what kind of holding back? It's all a matter of perspective and where you stand in time. I will come back to this question at the end.

Both interesting questions that I am sure each of us would have a different answer for and each version of ourselves at the various stages of our lives might have a different answer again.

My perspective has definitely changed over the years. In my early days, I would have said that success was all about making my way to the top of a business and being in charge. I thought that climbing the ranks would be a bit like crossing off jobs on my to-do list. One by one - slow and steady 'career by numbers'. Regardless the top of something was always my aim. I had something to prove!

As I got older and had a family, success was all about having a rewarding job, that paid the mortgage and meant I could balance family life. My focus changed and the barriers I faced when I was young were very different from the barriers I faced as I got older.

I have narrowed it down to three main barriers that I encountered …Whether it held me back is another thing entirely!

Barrier Number 1 - The Gender Thing

I guess it has to be talked about. I remember having the conversation about my aspirations when I first started in work and telling my female boss at the time that I wanted to go all the way to the top! The direction was clear to me and there was nothing that was going to stand in my way. I remember her laughing and know I was very naïve.

What I began to notice as I started to look around the organisation was that there were not many women in the higher grades. I started out in Personnel (HR in today's speak), probably one of the only areas of the organisation where women did have a senior role. There was a dramatic stopping point across the rest of the business and the few female execs in existence were a bit like rock stars to me. Proof that the higher echelons were not out of reach.

The opportunities and attitudes regarding women in senior roles were not great. Rumours and myths about how they had got the role were not nice. This is when I first realised that people's judgement on women in business was very different from men. This is something that stayed with me and created a psychological barrier of its own.

There wasn't much going on to equalise the workplace or encourage women through the ranks and no conversations about the gender pay gap. Diversity training wasn't high up on anyone's to-do list.

Attitudes in the workplace regarding roles for women and their progression were very different, you were more likely to be encouraged into the typing pool than asked to try something in one of the STEM areas. Over the years I saw a great number of clever, hardworking female managers bypassed for promotion or placed into roles where they effectively became a PA to their male counterparts.

There was blatant discrimination throughout my career and I'm sure I only saw a fraction of what went on underground. The one that sticks with me was when a senior manager told me that they couldn't have more than two women in their management team because they are too emotional!

In most of the places that I worked. I never felt more excluded then when the conversations were centred around sport and the golf game that had taken place over the weekend or the game of squash that had happened at lunch or a wonderful pub meet up on a Friday after work.

It was very unlikely that I was going to play golf, play tennis or go for a drink in the pub with the guys in the office when I had two children to get home to. Not a huge problem if you work in an organisation where the number of women matches the number of men but in most cases and in most meetings that I went to I was the only woman or there may have only been two of us.

I did observe some exceptions regarding qualifications. If someone had an MA, MSc or a PHD then this couldn't be argued with. Being highly qualified got respect and I quickly cottoned

on that I needed to have some letters after my name if I wanted to get anywhere and feel respected. This came later.

I think I was lucky to start out in an organisation that was quite forward-thinking and that really embraced change. their attitude toward women in business was changing.

Whilst there were probably barriers, I don't think this stopped me or held me back a great deal in the early day days. I travelled to get promotions and my approach was to just work harder and longer than everyone else. Come in at 7 am (with an hour's journey beforehand), go home after everyone else. Carry on at home. No working time regulations back then! Time and energy were something that I had going for me. I managed to jump three grades in four years, which was good going but time and energy were never going to be a good long-term plan for my progression or health.

Barrier No 2 - My Neurodiverse Brain

I've spent a lot of my career feeling as though I was a bit different. I couldn't understand why I was good at some things and not at others. I was embarrassed about my skills and confused. I was quite clever at some things, but it used to take me a while to get other (important) things right. This led to an overall feeling of **stupidity and embarrassment from a very early age**. I could do complex algebra but couldn't remember my times' tables. I was great at project managing but really struggled with writing the project plans. I could do them and do them well, but it took me foreeeeever!

Negative thoughts would often pervade, and I was like a cat on a hot tin roof before or after meetings when I had to write minutes or present something. I was not a great 'in the moment' thinker or talker. I had a few (public) meltdowns over the years and lots of thoughts that if I can't do that, then all of me must be rubbish. I have learnt to find strategies to help me – mind maps and visuals to help with memory.

Research shows that women with neurodiversity are good at camouflaging their differences which results in fewer women being diagnosed with neurodiversity.

My current role as a neurodiversity coach in the workplace tells me that my difficulty with working memory, organisation, time management and concentration strongly indicate that my brain doesn't work in an atypical way. My talents are multi-tasking, problem-solving, hyper focus and bringing complex things together so they make sense. I'm also pretty good with people - but that takes a lot of energy from me. Rules, structure, kindness and equality are really important to me so if these are absent my head can go to weird places. What I definitely know now is that I am not stupid, I just think differently and might to do things in a different way to get the same results as others!

I think is something that had held me back and that a diagnosis earlier on would definitely have helped me to show myself more self-compassion over the years. It would have stopped me trying to compare myself to others and end up feeling that I constantly fell short. This had

a huge impact on my self-esteem and was probably why I felt like an imposter a lot of the time. Things would generally go wrong when a change was occurring. Being aware of this now helps me to manage change and let myself off the hook.

Things are very different nowadays with more people and women generally getting a diagnosis of neurodiversity. There is less stigma attached to different brain thinking and more legal protection around discrimination. What I know now is that there are some really good opportunities to access support, coaching, mentoring and assistive technologies in the workplace funded through the Government's Access to Work Scheme.

... And there is much more that could be done! I totally love the philosophy of Dr Nancy Doyle, CEO of Genius Within CIC who is a proponent of systemic inclusion - inside out thinking where more work environments, practices and processes are flexible and designed with everyone's differences in mind and an approach where everyone can get the adjustments they need to help them work at their best.

Barrier 3 - Family Responsibilities

An article in Forbes stated that **'women's domestic responsibilities tend to exceed men's' and that 'taking breaks from employment is generally higher in women'**. This can result in implications such as lost income, impeded career growth, depreciation of skills, difficulty in re-establishing one's career. **Women will also take higher leaves of absence and will generally seek flexible jobs and part-time jobs.**

I can relate to the impact that family responsibilities have had on my career and me generally. It changed my life goals and focus in life. I definitely felt that having both a career and a family was an impossibility. Time and energy were no longer available and these were what helped me stand out from the crowd. I had to shift my focus from getting to the top to just getting into work!

Returning to work after having my children was the most disorientating experience. My confidence was very low.

There were no 'keeping touch days' back then, which I think are a great idea! I would have jumped at the chance to have coaching as a parent returning to work. I returned to work part-time after my first son was born and was in a different role. I ended up taking work home and finishing it on the days I wasn't working. I didn't want to be seen as not pulling my weight.

The same happened but got worse when I had my second son. The biggest challenge for me during these years was really about getting to work on time and trying to keep up with what was happening - my head wasn't really thinking about my career.

Not having shared parental leave meant that my husband could only support when he had the leave and we needed to save that for holidays. Nowadays parental leave can be shared between both partners.

Working part-time was also a challenge for me. I was only in the office for three days which was hard. I missed meetings on the days I wasn't in and I felt that people's attitudes to me had changed now I was a part-timer (I think a lot of this was probably in my own head). On the flip side, I felt lucky that I had a company that was able to accommodate part-time working as I knew that this wasn't the case with other organisations I had heard about. If FOMO was a term back then, it would have accurately described how I felt.

My second son threw up extra challenges when he was born with special needs. Childcare was especially challenging to organise. We had a variety of nursery arrangements including one where he was picked up by taxi from one nursery, taken to a specialist nursery for a couple of hours and then returned to his mainstream nursery.

Flexibility has been crucially important for me and my family. One really small thing that became a big barrier for me was when my son's special school didn't start until 9.30 in the morning, this meant that I couldn't get into work until 10 am. It took a lot of energy to make the special arrangements with work at that time to change my hours so this change in time could be accommodated. HR and my manager were good, but the operations of the organisation and my role were not conducive to someone coming in later. Project meetings usually began at 8 am.

I can sympathise with anyone in a caring role trying to juggle work and can see that flexibility will become even more important in the workplace as our population ages and we might see more people caring for elderly parents or relatives as well as younger people caring for their children.

This was the beginning of the end of my corporate career. I was getting up at 5 am and doing a couple of hours work before getting the kids ready, getting them to school and then going into work. Then I would work on beyond my 6 pm finish to catch up and get everything done. I couldn't be seen to be failing and if I wanted to progress, I needed to show I could do the work. My mental health was affected. I wanted to prove that I was good enough and didn’t feel I could share this with anyone for fear of being stigmatised. Five years on, I know now that the workplace can be very supportive and there are protections out there if you have a mental health condition.

I left the business when my youngest son left school and started college. There was a five-month gap between him leaving school and starting college. Childcare for a 15-year-old with special needs isn't widely available so I left the business with a plan of retraining in a career that had more flexible and could enable me to work from home.

Barrier Four - Starting my Own Business and a Fear of Failure

An article in the Telegraph shares new research from insurer AXA stating **that 63pc of men start their business straight out of a full-time job compared with just 38pc of women, who are often working part-time or coming out of a career break.** This puts them at a major disadvantage.

I took a career break after finishing work - enough time to support my son to transition to college, take up a part-time role and retrain as a coach. I waited two years to set up the business and then another two years after starting the business to get out there and network with others.
The Rose review tells us that being part of local business networks can help entrepreneurs to grow their businesses and share best practice, but the Review found that ***women are less likely to be a member of a business network or to know an entrepreneur.***
My confidence was really low, and I had a perception of networking that just isn't true. A good friend of mine talks about finding your tribe and she encouraged me out with her. I now belong to some fantastic networking groups. The networks are a great source of encouragement and support.

Working for myself has been hard work, but it gives me the flexibility I need to ensure I have a good life.

So, what do I think holds me back?

In my head, my barriers are like walls. I can't see through or walkthrough. My bricks consist of made-up rules, introjected beliefs, fixed patterns of behaviour, my inner critic, and unregulated, unmanaged emotions that are really uncomfortable and very difficult to deal with. Namely fear of failure, rejection, resentment and good old shame. I have some very fixed values about what is right and wrong and often don't recognise and look after my own needs.

In my work (coaching and counselling), I often hear people say that they repeat and replay patterns of behaviour. My training has taught me that these are defences that they have developed to keep themselves safe a time when they didn't have the resources to do anything differently. We create schemas or maps based on snapshots from our past to fortune tell what will happen in the future.

I think this is very efficient for living life, but it turns out that the truth is never quite what it seems. Our expectations of what is good or good enough are based on a fantasy that our minds create, and one person's version of reality will always be very different from another's.

In conclusion, whilst I think there genuinely are some tangible barriers that hold women back, I think the major contributor is the psychological barriers they create for themselves.

Society needs to work on breaking down these tangible barriers, but I also think that women need some good tools to help them knock through their psychological barriers. For me, ways to help them grow and maintain confidence, learn how to become emotionally intelligent and resilient, combined with some good tools for assertiveness is essential.

This should start at an early age and be part of the national curriculum at school – for all children! We don't know what we don't know.

For women in business or running our own businesses, I think finding a support network is essential and key in helping and supporting women to share their experiences, problems and

what helps to help them move forward. Sharing information about what support is available to help with some of the unspoken things would also help! I'm talking the M words here – Mental Health, Menstruation and Menopause! We need to help each other create a few doors and windows to help us walk through these brick walls.

All in all, I think I did alright in getting to where I wanted to be but if I knew then what I know now I think it would have had an easier, more enjoyable ride!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louise Hockaday, Scruffy Duck Solutions

Louise Hockaday is a qualified coach and runs her own coaching business Scruffy Duck Solutions Ltd.
Prior to becoming a coach, Louise worked in a number of large corporate organisations delivering complex marketing, communications and change management projects. She has a Master's Degree in Marketing.
Louise started training in Clean Language in 2015 and has a keen interest in the application and use of creative approaches to help people grow and become their best selves.
Louise's coaching approach is particularly good at helping people to develop personal metaphors that help them to understand what it's like when they are working and being at their best. This then helps them to find tailored approaches in overcoming their challenges in a way that works for their unique and individual needs.
She is currently in training to become a Humanistic Gestalt Counsellor and volunteers for a couple of local charities to deliver counselling support. She is also an Associate Coach for a Community Interest Company that provides coaching for individuals with neurodiversity in the workplace.

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EIGHT STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Written by Nikki Tapley

Through my own life and business experience, collaboration has proven to be the most effective way to achieve goals. So, as someone whose goal is to help people to grow their businesses so that they achieve their personal goals, this is my favourite topic.
My business is completely dedicated to helping people through facilitating growth, and none of this would be possible without collaborating with others. I called my company Collaborative Enterprises and my main project: "Collabor8 – People in Business", such is my passion in this area.
So, in this chapter we'll briefly unpick what collaboration is before I share with you my eight steps that will help you to "Collabor8" effectively.

What is collaboration?

Quite simply, the dictionary definition is simple: to collaborate is "to work together". The Cambridge English Dictionary online elaborates, that it is "the situation of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing." Another word often used in place of 'collaboration' is 'partnership'.

Collaboration is a part of everyday life when you think about it. Throughout their education, children are taught how to work in groups to put together projects and collective pieces of work. At University, many assignments are designed to encourage a team effort to achieve mutual outcomes through group work in at some stage in every degree programme. In the world of work, employees work co-operatively with their colleagues to deliver projects and individuals may also seek the help of co-workers to complete their own tasks where needed. Business leaders work with others within their organisation and with other businesses to achieve their goals.

Collaboration as a business owner or entrepreneur is particularly important, especially if you don't have a team around you, because you definitely won't have the skills, knowledge, experience and contacts in every single aspect of the business you're building.
The sooner we recognise our need for help, the more likely we are to get that help, and thus make solid business decisions that lead to success.

So, here are my steps to successful collaboration…

Step One - Be open-minded

Collaboration opportunities tend to occur where you least expect them, but we have to put ourselves out there.
This requires some time and energy, but perhaps most importantly it requires us to be open-minded…you never know who someone knows, what their agenda is, or their background unless you get to know them.
For introverts it can be especially challenging to get out and meet new people, and when your diary is busy, it can be tempting to avoid meeting up with individuals unless you have a clear

agenda. But the reality is, collaborative relationships are built on “know, like and trust”, and it takes time to get to really know someone. Giving your time to meet up with people, with no expectations, can be a really enjoyable way to spend an hour or so. And if they’re not your kind of person, that’s ok, keep it short and move on! But if they are your kind of person, you just never know where that relationship might lead.

So, don’t be too quick to judge someone. Initial appearances can be deceiving, and many people miss out on building really fruitful relationships because they don’t take the time to bother to get to know the person standing next to them.

Step Two – Don’t be a Spammy Annie or a Pushy Pete

When building relationships with people, avoid looking for opportunities to sell your products or services to them, as this is a surefire way to miss out on collaboration opportunities!
We’ve all met people who it’s clear only want to tell us about themselves to try and convince us to buy whatever it is they’re trying to sell. And let’s be honest, we can’t wait to get away from them. People like to be asked questions and to talk about themselves, so look to ask lots of questions and focus on finding connection, rather than looking for prospects.

Instead, focus on how you can help them. Ask them how you can help…maybe they’d benefit from an introduction to someone in your network? Maybe you could share something you know that will help them to move forward with a challenge? Maybe you have a skill you could offer in kindness, just because you want to?

Find out their problems. And if you think you can help through your professional offering, then great, but if not, you could refer them to someone you know who can. Or perhaps, they might have a contact that could benefit you. Or a project coming up that they may want your help with to collaborate on. Building relationships is where the seeds of collaboration are planted.

Step Three – Keep in contact

Relationships take time and energy to build. So, make sure to nurture the relationships that you’ve started. I don’t know about you, but as a busy wife, mum and businesswoman with multiple projects on the go at any given time, I find it hard to keep track of people sometimes! With social media platforms, email, texts, phone calls, meetings… there are new conversations happening with new people for most of us on a daily basis and it is almost impossible to keep up without some sort of system to help you remember who you need to speak to about what, and when.

I recommend using a CRM system as early in your business as possible (unfortunately, nobody gave me this advice and I am now having to transfer thousands of contacts into a system before I can actually use it effectively) to avoid losing track of contacts. And make sure to set tasks to keep in contact regularly. Asking how someone is, just because, is a lovely way to show people that you’re interested in them, and not just after something! So make sure you stay in touch between meetings, projects etc. to nurture those relationships.

The benefit of this is that as your relationships are lovingly cared-for, opportunities will present themselves to you that wouldn't have otherwise. And likewise, you'll know who to contact when an opportunity arises at your end, to collaborate with them.

Step Four – Serve others first

When you look to help others before looking to gain something for yourself, this is really where great things happen. Often the people you can help are not the same people as the people who you need help from. For some reason this is a difficult one for many of us to get our heads around, but I can tell you from experience that when you do, it's really the start of an incredible journey.

If we are looking to form collaborations, it's good to start by looking for ways to help others as a priority. Helping someone shouldn't come with strings attached. Because when we place conditions on doing something to help another person, that's not kindness. Kindness means helping another person unconditionally, as one human to another. Not "I'll do this for you, so that you'll do that for me when I ask you". It's more a matter of "I want to help you because I can."

But you can't do this unless you have the right mindset. To be able to collaborate successfully requires us to leave fear, anxiety, and a scarcity mindset behind, and instead shift into an abundance mindset…trusting that we will always find a solution to any problem, and our network will help us because we are always helping everyone else.

What goes around comes around, I've certainly found this to be true. When you look to serve others first, you are ready to collaborate. Until then, you will struggle. So, shift your focus to putting out positivity and helping others, and enjoy watching what happens.

Step Five - Honesty and integrity

In order to collaborate with another person, we need to build a relationship in which both parties are satisfied that they can trust one another. If we cannot be trusted to do what we say we will, then other people will not want to work with us.

So, it's really important to make sure you deliver when you say you will and demonstrate that you can be trusted with bigger collaborative projects in future. Dishonesty is a deal-breaker and shows a lack of integrity. So be honest, and if you can't share openly, make sure not to mislead people.

Equally, you need to be sure that you can trust your collaborators! Putting your trust in someone and sharing sensitive information with them or risking your reputation by aligning with them, is not something to do without careful consideration. Trust your gut, it tends to be right. Do your due diligence, and always protect yourself to ensure your business doesn't suffer if a collaboration goes wrong.

My advice would tend to be – start by trusting people with small details, small projects, and if they demonstrate their integrity, you can start exploring bigger things. Occasionally I have

been known to take a huge chance on someone, and it has sometimes cost me dearly, but I knew the risk I was taking. I suppose my advice is, don't be blind to the risks, weigh them up, and if it's worth trying, then it's sometimes worth throwing caution to the wind.
I like to trust people unless I have a reason specifically not to! It's a nicer way to live. And it has served me well in collaborations. I also try my best to deliver what I say I will, and if for any reason I can't, I'll always make sure my communication lines remain open with collaborators so they know exactly what's going on and reassure them that they can continue to trust me, even if things aren't going according to plan.

Step Six – Seek connection
Look to meet lots of new people and make connections with them. Look for people who are like you. Go to networking events, training workshops, parties, get out there on social media. Find your like-minded fellow people in business. The more people you meet, the more people you'll find to collaborate with.

But you aren't just looking for anyone. You're looking for YOUR kind of people, who you can connect with at a base level and who share your ideals, values, maybe even have similar goals. There will always be plenty of people who aren't your kind of people, and that's OK. You don't have to like and get along with everyone. You shouldn't try to – there are lots of people out there who won't like you either! Accepting this is liberating and requires a level of emotional resilience and maturity.

In the Collabor8 community, I look to encourage people to connect because I know that when they do, great things can come of it. But it's unrealistic to expect someone to be there for you when you've never spoken to them before until you need something. Build connections every day in your day to day, so that you can be there to help others – even if that's just lending a listening ear, giving a compliment or sending them a referral, and it's far more likely that you'll have people around you who can help you when you need their support too.

Step Seven – Be consistent and authentic
Unfortunately, many of us learn as we grow up that it's better to hide behind various masks, to avoid being vulnerable and to ensure we fit in with the tribe we have found ourselves in. However, setting down the mask and being your authentic self is hugely liberating and you're far more likely to find kindred spirits when you reveal your true self. Leading with vulnerability in business is a sought-after characteristic because people who know themselves and are willing to be open, tend to have more integrity in general.

You can't "fake" vulnerability. Vulnerability isn't necessarily what might immediately spring to mind. It's not about having to be overtly emotional. Vulnerability is about taking risks. It's about honesty. Sharing things that might not be easy to share. It's about exposing yourself to potential criticism because you believe that it's the right thing to do, even when it isn't easy.
I recommend reading Brené Brown's "Dare to Lead" if you are in business and find it difficult to be yourself. The problem with using different masks to hide your true self, is that people can tell you're hiding, but what they can't see is the real you behind the mask. Because you're

not showing them. All they'll know is that you're not who you seem, and the fact that you're trying to hide your true self means they can't build a trust-based relationship with you.
So, make sure that you are true to yourself as you build relationships. Don't be a chameleon. Be consistently, wonderfully you, and you'll find that you find your "tribe" who get you. Honest.

Step Eight – be sure of your identity and have a clear sense of purpose
If you are looking to collaborate with others but you don't know yourself, then how can others get to know you?

Your identity is who you are. You can only succeed in your goals if those goals are absolutely aligned with our sense of purpose. I do lots of work around this, but it starts with knowing your values and what's important to you. You won't succeed trying to live out a life where the goals you're aiming for are someone else's goals. And this will stop you being able to collaborate effectively with others, because you'll be a bit all over the place!

Know yourself, love yourself, and then you are in a great position to get to know and love others. Love is a fluffy word, but I like to refer to kindness instead. Know and be kind to yourself, and then you can support and be kind to others. And guess what… the people you need in your corner will be kind to you too!

Collaborations are much easier when you know who you are, what you're doing, and why. Knowing yourself, being yourself and believing in yourself are all key to being able to build healthy relationships, which is what enables you to collaborate with others. Helping people find their sense of purpose and identity has been one of the most rewarding parts of my 1:1 work, although these days I don't work with many people 1:1 as Collabor8 is my big focus, but I love it because it's where I get to see people experiencing the most significant breakthroughs both in their general state but also in the way it transforms businesses.

Concluding Thoughts
I hope you've found this chapter enlightening and maybe a little challenging. May I urge you to build lots of relationships in order to really see growth in your business. Collaborations can help you to achieve your goals and also enable you to help others achieve theirs – so everyone wins. I can't imagine anything much more beneficial than that! If you'd like to know more about Collabor8 and how we can support you as a person in business, please do visit our website.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nikki Tapley, Collabor8

Nikki Tapley is a servant-hearted, entrepreneurial business leader and investor who is passionate about supporting others to live a fulfilled life.

Nikki is the Founder of Collabor8 – People in Business, a non-profit organisation that exists to help business owners to grow themselves and their businesses, as well as supporting a small number of business owners directly 1:1.

Her goals are to bring kindness into the world of business and alleviate social poverty in this arena, and she is also passionate about supporting and empowering individuals who feel called to start a business (especially those like her who are parents) to take the plunge and help them to provide for their families, leave a legacy and do some good in the world. Especially where this involves helping end poverty through supporting entrepreneurship. Nikki is married with two daughters and lives in Hampshire UK, where she loves spending time by the sea.

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You can join Collabor8 for free as a business owner or find out more here…

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THANKS FOR READING

Thirteen entrepreneurial women and thirteen totally different experiences. We hope this has given you some food for thought, helped you battle your own imposter and given you some new information or new learning that you can edit and apply to your own life and business. Not all women in business are the same, the views, stories and businesses expressed in this collaboration project belong solely to each contributor and it is important to recognise that everybody's journey is different. That is why I would encourage you to GET SOCIAL with each contributor that you feel a synergy with, we are (excuse the pun) an open book and would welcome further discussion and conversation around our topics.

I personally, would like to say a **MASSIVE** thank you to each of these female entrepreneurs who gave their time and energy to this project. Many of them battling themselves and time to get something in to meet the deadline. I am always astounded by people's willingness to share and showcase their vulnerability; there is huge strength in that! Without likeminded people, without collaborators and without people who are willing to share and offer inspiration, we would live in a very boring world. So, from the bottom of my heart I want to tell our contributors: "You are bloody awesome!"

As a reader, if you enjoyed this then please do share with others. Please spread the word, we want to help and support as many female entrepreneurs as possible with this project and follow in the footsteps of Alison Rose.

To be involved in future projects like this, or to give feedback then drop me a line, admin@anneliesjames.uk. 💜