



Female business leaders rise to the challenge

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

took place on Tuesday, March 8 this year. It was the ideal opportunity to celebrate the achievements of females, raise awareness against bias and take action for equality.

From a corporate perspective, it was also a chance to showcase the best female talent in industry, high-achievers who are heading up successful businesses and driving their growth.

In the borough of Wandsworth, there are many shining examples of women who are doing just that. In the last two years, the trading environment has been challenging to say the least due to COVID-19, yet dozens of females have shown the resilience and fortitude to navigate their businesses through the pandemic.

Liz Marsh most certainly falls into this category. Liz, who heads up Elizabeth Marsh Floral Design in New Covent Garden Market, has enjoyed a successful career after helping to run a small flower shop off Baker Street. From here, she joined Kenneth Turner, the father of floral design and self-confessed number one floral "decorator", who counted leading socialites and businesses in London as his customers during the boom years of the late 1980s.

Liz began working alongside Mary Portas as the last independent artist to design and install the window displays for Harvey Nichols; Le Caprice and the Ivy were regular weekly customers. She travelled the world arranging flowers for events such as the Cartier Million Horse Race in Dublin to socialite weddings in the US and Europe.

Liz says: "I established the business in 1992 almost by accident. The first thing I did when launching the business was to start a family! It was a challenge but I muddled through. When the kids were young, I scaled back my work for ten years because I wanted to see them grow up. When they started secondary school, I still had this business and I was in a position to push on and grow it.

"I sought help from a business coach in 2008 and the following year I started developing the business in earnest. The recession helped in one sense because business levels dipped and this gave me more time to grow the company in a more sustainable, controlled way.

"In 2017 our annual turnover reached £500,000 but we hit a ceiling. In the next three years we overhauled all of the



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Liz Marsh

systems and streamlined business processes. The COVID lockdowns were frustrating but now we’re ready to scale up by taking on bigger order and larger-scale projects.”

Liz manages ten staff within the business, including four florists, and says she leads her team in a collegiate, collaborative style.

“If there are more females in senior business roles, hopefully female values – collaboration, sustainability and an accent on personal development – will be accepted,” she says. “In 2016 I started aligning the business with my own personal values, which are based on



Emma Hammett

the concept of sustainability. We’ve started doing floral artistry installations that showcase the beauty of nature and the importance of looking after it. This has helped us to win work and allowed us to raise our profile. Companies want to work with us as they want to be associated with a sustainable brand like ours.

“In my career I’ve encountered lots of challenges being a woman. Early on I didn’t have any role models; most people in senior positions were men. I encountered some sexism from males – I’ve even had to sack a few! Now, though, more women are taking up these positions and that’s great from an equality point of view.”

Another high-flier is **Emma Hammett**, a qualified nurse and first aid trainer who runs First Aid for Life.

Emma was recently named “Most Inspirational Trainer” in a national competition and her organisation was named Best Business in London by the Federation of Small Businesses. She trained and worked at St Thomas’ Hospital in the late 1980s and has since worked in both clinical and managerial capacities in many hospitals and across several specialist areas. These include: medicine at Hammersmith, Charing Cross and Queen Charlotte’s Hospitals; paediatrics, accident & emergency, acute admissions, medicine for the elderly and the Burns Unit at Queen Mary’s Roehampton. She has also been a community nurse in south west London and worked as a nurse at Wandsworth Prison.

Emma is also an ESOL teacher and is therefore ideal to teach first aid in a manner that’s easily understood, to nannies and au pairs from overseas.

All of this experience has enabled Emma to establish First Aid for Life – finally fulfilling her passion and dream of empowering people to gain the skills and confidence to help in a medical emergency. However, she was initially inspired much earlier when nursing, as she explains.

“I repeatedly saw the difference that prompt and appropriate first aid makes to someone’s prognosis,” she says. “My key motivation came when working in the burns unit, looking after a little boy so badly burnt that he needed

skin grafts. Had his mother known basic first aid skills, he might not have needed to be admitted to hospital. My sister and nephew both became paraplegics following accidents and it opened my eyes to the importance of accident prevention, management and support following an accident. It also highlighted an overwhelming need to empower more people with the skills and confidence to know how to help in those first vital seconds.”

Emma manages six staff and a team of 46 trainers around the country. Since starting the business in 2007 she has diversified significantly; the organisation now has several strings to its bow. First Aid for Life offers practical first aid courses to schoolchildren, charities, health practitioners and businesses, including management teams at fast food chain McDonald’s. Onlinefirstaid.com was established in 2016 to provide web-based courses, while Firstaidforpets.net offers first aid for dogs and cats.

In addition, Emma launched Stay Safe for Older People, a free information and resource website signposting older people and their family, friends and carers to a wealth of expert advice and support. The content on this site is continually updated to help older people stay safe, remain healthy and prevent avoidable hospital admissions resulting from accidents in the home environment.

Having enjoyed a successful career to date, Emma believes that women can show strong leadership by staying calm, being able to adapt, building relationships and recognising their strengths and limitations.

“Women can sometimes be overly cautious but if you can be more ballsy about embracing opportunities, there’s usually a way of making it work,” Emma says. “Now we can work remotely, women can juggle family needs with their careers. We are now truly able to work 100% effectively.

“There are many female solopreneurs but not enough women scale up their businesses. Women sometimes perceive barriers when they’re not there. They will only apply for a job if they can do 90% of it. Men apply if they can do 10%. I know that’s a generalisation but it’s often the case.”



Julia Pittman believes that the challenge of balancing work and home life sometimes deters women from applying for leadership roles.

Julia, who is a director and head of sales and marketing at Beaver Pest Control, says: "When in a high-level position you have to be very focused and dedicated. This becomes more difficult if you're trying to raise a family. I had four small children when I joined my first company so childcare was an issue. A support network is critical for your work and home life. I work in a male-dominated industry and it can be difficult – quite daunting, in fact – to disagree with a room full of men!"

"If people put excessive pressure on themselves, that creates a feeling of self-doubt; perhaps this is why some women don't go for the top jobs. I'd like to see more female mentors saying: you can do this. That would encourage more females to apply for senior roles."

Julia has been at Beaver Pest Control since 2014. The company provides a range of innovative pest control services including

general pest control, bird control and wildlife management to commercial customers in the construction, education, health and leisure, facilities management, food and retail sectors. Previously she worked her way up the ladder at a cleaning company, eventually becoming head of service then commercial manager and head of IT. In 2013 she left her career in the facilities industry to teach English in Cambodia for a year before joining Beaver the following year.

Julia says: "I've enjoyed my career but another challenging factor for me recently has been the menopause, which has left me with symptoms of anxiety and brain fog. The company has supported me really well but accepting that my work may sometimes not reach the high standards I set myself has been difficult. GPs need to do more to recognise the effects of the menopause."

It's true that having support from a variety of people can help women climb the career ladder. In recent years, both Richmond and Wandsworth Councils have been striving to provide extra support for female entrepreneurs in these two boroughs.

Susan Shaw, head of enterprise and business growth at Richmond and Wandsworth Councils, recognises the value of local female entrepreneurs.

She says: "What better way to celebrate their success than International Women's Day in March? This year is no exception, and we're delighted to be hosting an event in each borough."

"In Wandsworth, Women's Enterprise Day, which is now in its eighth year, is a celebration of female entrepreneurship and success in Wandsworth. The event, on March 24 at the Elm Grove Conference Centre in Roehampton, will feature a panel discussion, motivational talks, interactive group sessions and a networking lunch. The event will also see the launch of the Wandsworth Women



Susan Shaw

in Business Awards, which will celebrate founders in the Entrepreneur of the Year, Best Contribution to the Community and Rising Star categories. Winners and runners up in each category will receive four hours of one-to-one business coaching.

"Panellists will reveal their start-up stories and share their highs and lows, including how they navigated through the pandemic and the valuable lessons they learnt along the way."

"Guest speaker, Jacqueline Gold, CEO of Anne Summers and Knickerbox, is known for championing female entrepreneurs. She'll provide practical tips on how to reset and refresh your business and mindset so that you emerge stronger than before. She'll share her motivating story and discuss how setting yourself apart from the competition and knowing what you stand for plays a big part in succeeding in business."

Nominations for the Business Awards will open shortly and further details of the event can be found at: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/womens-enterprise-day-and-awards-presentation-tickets-256793705887>

Meanwhile, in Richmond, International Women's Day was celebrated on March 7 at Clarendon Hall in Twickenham. Designed to celebrate success, it was focused on how businesses have managed to pivot their business, particularly during the COVID crisis.

Susan says: "There was a great line up of keynote speakers and panellists who shared their tips, tools and techniques to keep your business relevant, viable and sustainable in any marketplace. Key speakers included Charlotte Morley of Little Loop Clothing Company, a recent winner of the Dragon's Den competition, who shared her experience in impressing the judges!"

"There was also an interactive workshop, a buffet lunch and plenty of networking opportunities to interactively share experiences with other business owners. Proceeds from ticket sales were donated to nominated charities."

Further details of the event can be found at: International Women's Day: The Secret to my Success Tickets, Mon 7 Mar 2022 at 10:00 | Eventbrite



Julia Pittman