

The academy dedicated to elevating female entrepreneurs

The number of female founders is on the rise, and many budding entrepreneurs are in need of support to take that next step for their startup. In a quest to remedy this, Ceylan Boyce founded Academy for Women Entrepreneurs to coach business-minded women and support them in reaching their full potential.

What is Academy for Women Entrepreneurs?

Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) is a business training, coaching and collaboration platform for women solopreneurs and micro-business owners. We offer accessible, applicable and affordable business training, ensuring all micro-business owners or solopreneurs have the skill set and knowledge to create a successful business that works for them and their lives.

To date, we have used a combination of social media, networking, word of mouth, partners and big sister organisations, as well as interviews like this one, to try to ensure that women entrepreneurs know who we are and can turn to us for support and guidance. With over 1,200 subscribers to our platform, it seems that approach is working well.

To be honest, our vision for the future of AWE is pretty big. I really want AWE to become an international excellence centre for women entrepreneurship. This might be ten years away, but we are doing everything we can to realise that vision.

How did you come up with the idea?

My background is in business strategy and marketing. When I decided to reshuffle my career, I studied coaching in Cambridge and then took the leap into working as a coach after my maternity leave.

The more I coached, the more I noticed an immense gap between the needs of female micro-business owners and solopreneurs and what was available to support them. Much of the content that existed was too theoretical, largely irrelevant, often impractical, and very expensive for these female business owners.

AWE was born with this in mind. I just asked myself, how can I bring a type of business coaching and training that makes sense for this 'under the radar' audience? I wanted to offer them something simple, applicable and affordable to help them transform their businesses into a life ally.

How does the platform today compare to that initial idea?

We are doing everything the 'lean startup way', so the platform today is at least ten steps away from our dream platform but the basics are covered, operating and proving successful.

We've taken a lot of time to create the content on the platform and our subscribers can easily find all the business enablers we have developed.

Additionally, we've got really well-utilised community channels that allow for and encourage collaboration among the members. This has proved a really vital and valued tool for many of our members.

As a result of COVID, we could no longer organise in-person events, which were a significant part of what we had planned for Academy for Women Entrepreneurs. Instead, we took everything – including our training and workshop events – online. Whilst we had planned to offer all this online in time to allow for accessibility to as many women entrepreneurs as possible, the pandemic has meant that move has come much sooner than we had planned.

How have you managed your business' growth?

My 'superpower' is strategy and strategic planning so, with my cofounder, we continuously plan. At least once a month, we catch up, re-group, plan and have

these important discussions about what needs to be done to grow.

We share the tasks and then we just power through. Don't get me wrong, the two of us have been producing the work of at least four people! It is hard, but we have also built an excellent support team whose skills and expertise we call upon when needed, and have sourced these from our own member base.

The most amazing part of it is our members really believe in the business having seen the benefit of it already and want us to realise our goals as much as we do!

In terms of investment, we raised a small amount of pre-seed capital via friends and family and a crowdfunding campaign organised by NatWest.

What has been a highlight in your career so far?

I've been lucky enough to have some great moments as part of my career, including with my previous company when I turned up to a massive international pitch with my freelance team and won business against multinational network companies, including some former employers.

However, Academy for Women Entrepreneurs is my real baby and it is with this business that I get the most satisfaction. My passion for the business and its impact was validated recently, when I was named as one of the UK's Top 10 Business Advisors by Enterprise Nation, acknowledging the work I had done with women-led businesses! Even though the award ceremony had to be virtual, I was still totally overwhelmed with the accolade.

Every single thing that I do for AWE is done with joy and fulfilment, and I have to say that it is the love of my life in terms of business and career experience.

What are your aspirations for Academy for Women Entrepreneurs for 2021?

Academy for Women Entrepreneurs is committed to making female entrepreneurship a real path for women's financial empowerment and we are here to help support them on their entrepreneurial journey. I have set the aim of helping 100 women to double their income in 2021! If I can do this, then my

aspiration for the year will have been achieved.

Ceylan's top tips for aspiring female founders are:

Your network is the most important asset for your business. Make sure you build a strong, diverse and expanded network from the start of your career, because that's where your first clients, followers and maybe even investors will come from.

Get on and do it. You can never prepare enough; the only real preparation for your next steps is to take your first.

Remember to look after yourself. You're no use to yourself or your business if you don't take care of you.

Ceylan Boyce is cofounder of Academy for Women Entrepreneurs.

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