

# 22 female founders, VCs and leaders share their top tips for aspiring female entrepreneurs

The twists and turns that come with the quest to become a successful female entrepreneur can be unpredictable, confusing and immense hard work, but the potential fruits of such labour keeps the drive alive.

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To celebrate International Women's Day, we asked female founders, leaders and VCs to share their best advice for those looking to follow in their footsteps – advice from female entrepreneurs, for female entrepreneurs.

Sahar Hashemi OBE is cofounder of coffee chain *Coffee Republic*

“Don't let anyone tell you that you are too 'emotional' about your business. A founder's passion for their business is not flakey. It is, in fact, the biggest asset a business can have – a founder that sees the business through the eyes of a customer and truly loves the product. Don't let anyone patronise you by saying that it's time to hand things over to professionals. You know what's best for your business. Trust yourself. ”

Juliette Souliman is VC investor at research-led venture capital fund *MMC Ventures*

“It's never too early to speak to an investor. It is crucial to take the time to

build a strong relationship with your prospective investors, collecting early feedback to assess if you truly want them on your cap table and to give them the time to build conviction around your sector and you as an entrepreneur. Plus, being in a position where you don't need capital (just yet!) puts you in a much more comfortable and powerful position to start the relationship. "

Fiona Law is partner and patent attorney at IP law firm Potter Clarkson

"My advice would be to say yes to all interesting opportunities. Don't take too long to think about it or you'll find a reason not to do it. Women have a tendency to think they are not good enough or will be 'found out' as not knowing enough, so just say yes and jump at all interesting opportunities – and don't doubt yourself!"

Rebecca Rickwood is founder of Gement and a member of WeWork's Diverse Founders Programme in partnership with Foundervine

"As a young BAME female founder working in the construction industry, I've learnt a lot about confidence. Not only do you have to be confident in yourself and your business, you have to believe in your right to sit at the table.

"Your voice deserves to be heard, but no one will listen until you believe it yourself. If this doesn't come naturally, I find watching Ted Talks with successful entrepreneurs incredibly useful; hearing how they describe their journey and business mission is not only insightful, but demonstrates how you should be holding yourself so people take you seriously. It's something I practice every day, and I can see the improvement I am making."

Hulya Manton is founder and CEO of mum-to-mum marketplace app CircleHood

"Don't ever buy into the belief that you need to behave like a man to succeed. Instead, embrace all of the unique qualities of your personality and bring this into business with you. Emotions in business are a strength and not a weakness. Believe in yourself.

"I learnt this the hard way when I was in my first job. It was a very male environment, and I was the first woman to work in that department.

*"My boss essentially told me that if I wanted to do a man's job, I'd need to dress as a man.*

"I now know this is total rubbish, and I hope this advice will help any other female founder out there that is struggling with imposter syndrome."

Sheridan Ash MBE, technology and innovation and women in technology leader at PwC UK, and Tech She Can founder

"When I was young, I used to watch Wonder Woman on TV and thought 'Wow, she is so confident and is doing good in the world!' I aspired to be like her! And those two things have been a north star for me.

"Telling someone to be more confident doesn't really work. What worked for me was to fake it – I pretended to be confident, I put on an act. In essence, I was pretending to be the best version of myself. I still have days where I need an extra boost, so you will find me doing the Wonder Woman pose in loo! It works! Fake it until you become it."

Kaitlin Fritz is cofounder of immersive edtech startup Musemio

"Don't be afraid to share your idea confidently and passionately. You never know who is in the (Zoom or) room who may help take your business to the next level. Never underestimate the power of a mentor – having someone who has walked in your shoes is invaluable and they will provide an honest perspective and ear to call on when things (inevitably!) come to a spaghetti junction.

*"Remember to be kind to yourself – self-compassion is just as crucial as hard work."*

Priyanka Sethi is head of sales, communication, media, education and information services at Tata Consultancy

"Focus on your strengths and amplify them. Surround yourself with the right team and step out of your comfort zone all the time!"

Lauren von Stackelberg is incoming chief inclusion and diversity officer at Tate & Lyle

"As you start and scale, keep purpose as the beating heart of your brand. You'll attract a diverse range of customers and talent with shared ethos and values."

Joy Foster is founder and managing director at TechPixies, which provides

## social media courses for women

“My top piece of advice for women entrepreneurs in 2021 is to start building their email list using a lead magnet, percentage discount or free offering and make sure they send out an update (this can be as easy as their top social media post for the previous week, a podcast or a vlog) every single week, rain or shine.”

Elizabeth Tweedale is CEO and founder of Cypher, a coding school for children aged 5 to 12

“When starting your own business, it’s important to be resourceful. You already have a support network of friends, families and industry connections – tap into that wealth of knowledge and don’t be afraid to ask for help.

“The most successful people in the world understand the importance of these positive relationships. Don’t underestimate how much they can help you – it could be the deciding factor between an opportunity for growth instead versus stagnation.”

Katya Linossi is CEO and cofounder of ClearPeople, which develops software and services for the modern digital workplace

“The best piece of advice I can give anyone is to be courageous. In the early stages of my career, being brave helped me overcome challenges. When I was younger, my Dad gave me the confidence to be brave and try new things – my most memorable experience is diving with Ragged Tooth sharks without a cage in South Africa.

“If it wasn’t for courage and that little voice in my head telling me ‘Why not give it a try?’, I would not be where I am now. Starting your own business is daunting and simply having experience isn’t enough – you will need courage and self belief to achieve great things.”

Amandine Le Pape is cofounder and chief operations officer at secure chat app Element

“As a founder, it’s easy to keep your head down and just concentrate on running your business. You may look back on your progress from time-to-time, but you’re always focused on the next challenge. Only when you start talking about your work, will the world know what you’re capable of. The journey towards accomplishing your goals may be long, but it’s important to recognise how far you’ve come – so don’t be too humble.

“Remember to explain your work and celebrate successes. People want to hear about vision and progress. Sharing these can inspire others and provide you

with fresh ideas and extra support. One thing's for sure: if you don't communicate, the world will ignore you!

"Unfortunately, female entrepreneurs remain an exception in our current world. However, this empowers us with a strong mandate to share our success with the world and inspire other women, demonstrating that female leadership should be the norm."

*"We owe our girls a vision of what a world of equality looks like!"*

Gabi Matic is programme director at ATI Boeing Accelerator, an accelerator for sustainability startups

"Don't be scared to ask questions, fail or make mistakes. It doesn't mean you are a failure, it just means you are learning and getting better. But, when receiving any advice – no matter how well-meaning – make sure you understand who you are getting it from and how relevant their experience is. Always be polite but recognise that each of our backgrounds and experiences are unique, and that you know your business best."

Cathy White is founder and director of marketing agency CEW Communications

"You can't achieve everything at once. Work on your priorities, and keep the list small. This will keep you focused and allow you to work on the essential and avoid the unessential requests on your time. It will also make you better at delegating wherever possible."

"Regardless of what those priorities are, remember you must remain a priority to yourself, always. If you're not looking after your physical and mental wellbeing, you and your business will suffer. Entrepreneurship is a very long marathon, not a sprint."

Kay Phelps is founder of HR-focused PR agency PR in HR

"I started my niche business 25 years ago – we're a PR company and raise awareness and trust for brands in the HR sector. It's vital to be laser-focused on your 'why' – who you help, what you do for them, and why this is important. Pin it down exactly so your messaging is focused."

“The ‘Why’ also helps you work with the best people. If people understand who you are and get behind it, it’ll make so much difference to your customers, teams, prospects and referrers.”

Antoinette Daniel is founder of ethical cleaning agency *Just Helpers*

“Network as much as possible – it’s one of the keys to success. Build your online presence by putting yourself out there across at least four platforms, using one or two as your main portfolio. Doing this will help you find a tribe of people that you can journey with.

“It’s really important that when you hit the highs and lows of having your own business, you have people you can be real with. Good networks are also where exciting business deals can get done.

*“After all, the ‘old boys network’ continues to work well. It’s about time us women did the same.”*

Cat Jones is founder and CEO of slow travel agency *Byway*

“My advice is summarised by a poster on the wall at Founders Factory – ‘Think big, act small, move fast’. Get your product (or some minimal early version of it) into users’ hands and learn as fast as you possibly can.”

Mikela Druckman is CEO and founder of waste recognition software company *Grey Parrot*

“You do not need to please or be liked by everyone. Surround yourself with people that you trust and believe in your mission and do not compromise on your own values. If you are scared of starting something, ask yourself: “If I don’t, who will?””

Caroline Sim is founder and CEO of natural skincare and supplement brand *Botanycl*

“Don’t wait too long to turn your idea into reality, or someone else might beat you to it! You don’t always need lots of money to launch a product. If you start with small orders of about 500 units, you may find you’re able to keep startup costs low. Facebook advertising is really helpful when starting out as you can control your daily spend and only spend what you can afford, which you can scale as you start to grow.”

Binny Shah is founder of social media agency *Binny Shah Patel Social* and cofounder of *The Social Media Tini*

“Outsource your weaknesses so that you can focus on your key strengths when it comes to running your business. I outsourced my accounting and tax return as it caused me so much pain and stress, and the time I spent on it took away from other aspects of my business. Handing it over to someone who knew it inside out enabled me to not think about it and focus on scaling up my business.

“This can apply to any aspect of a business where an area isn’t your strength such as legal, social media, or marketing. You’re still just one person and you can’t be single-handedly responsible for everything. By outsourcing, it will actually help you grow your business.”

*And last but certainly not least is something we can all be mindful of:*

Elena Brook-Hart is founder of slow fashion brand [Handmade Stories](#)

“Stop worrying about what other people will say. It’s your life – do it for you! ”

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