

MAIL TODAY

IT'S HER BUSINESS

On Women's Day, listen to some gritty female startup stories

HOW difficult is it to start out as a woman entrepreneur? Are the realities and challenges the same for both men and women? Seven female startup founders share their experience of striking it out on their own, in a world that favours the male.

1 MANISHA RAO Proprietor The Luxe Café

THE ORIGINS
I conceived Luxe Café as a luxury lifestyle webzine that can act as a bridge between niche luxury brands and consumers across the country. It is a labour of my love and passion.

ON CHALLENGES
It is certainly a challenge to start out as a women entrepreneur, especially in a segment such as lifestyle which is perceived to be all about vanity and therefore not assigned due seriousness. Luxe Café is aimed at taking luxury to tier-II towns and beyond.

ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES
The ability to take risk is an absolute must. Also, the ability to stay focused and to offer customised solutions to problems is another attribute. A collaborative mindset is also vital.

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE
I always allow myself time and space to think through things, that is, I practise conscious detachment to gain an overall perspective which is what keeps you going in the long run and does not let you turn myopic.

2 POOJA DUBEY Co-founder Blinge.in

THE ORIGINS
I had about two years of work experience when I started Blinge, a fashion rental platform



for designer and branded outfits and accessories. The inspiration was my parents who set up their own private hospital. Though they were not entirely happy on me quitting a stable job, they told me they will be the happiest if I could prove them wrong.

ON CHALLENGES
It is always challenging when you are swimming in an ocean because you don't know the right direction or can't see the shore. But that's the best part. It makes you work harder and think smarter. Both men and women face equal share of challenges, though the challenges might vary. For instance, for a guy it might be the burden of his family while for a girl it must be the fixed time to get back home.

ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES
The three indispensable attributes are: an obsessive passion for your product; ability to quickly turn thought from chaos to clarity and learning from all the experiences you accumulate. There are no Eureka moments. Always try new things/fail/succeed/learn and move on. The key to success is not talent, but grit.

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE
By reminding yourself regularly

that you have targets to achieve and a supportive team that backs each other.

3 ANVITA MEHRA CEO, Confidential Couture

THE ORIGINS
The idea to start a pre-owned luxury products project came when I was studying at the UK-based Nottingham University. One day I saw this Louis Vuitton handbag but it far exceeded my student budget. Buying it meant I would have to survive on just coffee and bread for a month. So I researched online and found it cheaper on a pre-owned portal. Though I was initially sceptical about its authenticity and quality, I was delighted to find that it was original and also in the same condition as was mentioned on the website.

ON CHALLENGES
I have faced many challenges while establishing Confidential Couture. But as a woman if you know how to speak clearly and confidently, you can always get

your way around. You will always find people and places to avoid, but that shouldn't scare you away.

ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES
Risk-taking appetite, passion, patience, leadership qualities, perseverance, being a good listener and organisational skills are some of the essential attributes.

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE
During setbacks I distract myself by reading one of the articles that has appeared in the newspaper about Confidential Couture or watch youtube interviews with successful entrepreneurs or leading businessmen.

4 MEHAK SHAHANI Co-founder WedMeGood

THE ORIGINS
Prior to my wedding my husband and I were discussing how difficult it was to find good quality event managers who can organise everything for a wedding. That was how WedMeGood was born. I also docu-

mented my wedding on my blog. Prior to this I have worked as a risk analyst at the American Express for four years.

ON CHALLENGES
As women, we are a more risk-averse gender. We like to think, plan and analyse each step. But with a startup you have to just take the plunge. What may be more challenging for women is that the amount of effort and sheer number of hours you have to put into a startup is so huge that a lot of times your family may not understand why it is that you need to stay back in office till midnight.

ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES
Hustle, teamwork and persistence. You need to hustle and get things done because the most valuable thing in a startup is time.

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE
You need to look at the bigger picture all the time. Setbacks and roadblocks are inevitable, but if you have a vision and a goal then these are just minor hurdles. It is also important to balance your work and personal life. If you want to create a sustainable business, it is important to look after yourself as an individual too.



5 SANA CHOPRA Executive Director Carl's Jr. India

THE ORIGINS
Since childhood I have always desired to make something of my own and on my own. While I have worked for employers and absolutely loved it, I chose to become an entrepreneur because I believe that opportunities and freedom that I would get as an entrepreneur would be manifold than as an employee.

ON CHALLENGES
The average person in this industry is twice my age, hence I had to prove that age is just a number and make my work speak for itself. The industry doesn't have too many female figures at the top and it has been a bit of a challenge to make men accept instructions from a female. There are men who come to board meeting and not hand out a business card or not even make eye contact with a female in the room.

ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES
The most important quality is

focus. Once a vision and target is set in motion then you need to eat, breathe and sleep it. You need to dedicate time for the cause.

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE
I stay on course due to two things — I absolutely love what I do, and I have faith in my offering. I knew I had to be prepared for challenges before I acquired the franchise of Carl's Jr. in India. My goal now is to make Carl's Jr. India's favourite fast-food restaurant chain. Nothing worthy comes easily. Everyone has to pass the test of time, patience and perseverance in order to succeed.

6 SHILPI KAPOOR Founder BarrierBreak

THE ORIGINS
The idea to use technology to help people with disabilities came after I realised that my U.S.-based boss for whom I used to work was disabled. Observing the pain points in people's lives can open the doors of opportunity. I founded BarrierBreak, which focuses on accessibility and assistive technology to empower people with dis-

abilities. In the last 18 years, I have taught people at home and also set up a computer training lab for people with visual impairment.

ON CHALLENGES
In India, a woman with a voice, by definition, is a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult because you have to discover your purpose. It is like taking a deep dive into your conviction.

ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTES
I just don't give up. That's what works for me.

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE
I focus on the good and opportunities every single time. Walking into my office and seeing our staff including people with disabilities working together, supporting each other and making a difference in the lives of disabled people all around the world, helps me stay focused.

7 HARSHLEEN K. ARORA Co-founder The V Renaissance

THE ORIGINS
The idea to start The V Renaissance came after my r 'Stupid Eye', which amalgamates psychology and photography and accepted and published World Mental Health Co. The V Renaissance is all about expressing oneself through leather and luxury. Prior to this I have worked with Max F for nearly three years as a graduation in Abnormal Psychology from the University of Wales.

ON CHALLENGES
You can overcome most challenges through con hard work and lots of p It is important to learn balance in today's tim essential to have some time for every entrepre order to stay focused and nalise their energy in th direction without brunt-out.

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE
Business stems from a m Pursue it with your hea try to see the positive setbacks. Every crisis ca it the seed of an equ greater opportunity.

