

# *Get Out of Your Own Way*

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*Essential Strengths and Strategies for Women  
Entrepreneurs Who Want to Grow Their Business*

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## *Foreword*

### *A Tribute to Women Business Owners*

Not long ago, my city endured one of the worst ice storms in its history. Fully one-third of the city was without power. We had tree limbs falling on roofs, on cars and blocking streets. Schools and state offices closed, icy roads caused tragic accidents and one school burned to the ground. The governor declared a state of emergency.

Due to the dangerous weather, I had to reschedule one of our EWF International Forum meetings. (Our peer advisory groups are called Forums and our members -- women business owners -- meet monthly to support one another with strategy, problem solving and accountability). I called each of the twelve members to discuss new dates.

Guess where I found most of them?

Eleven out of twelve were at work! Only one was home, because she has three small children and school was cancelled. Some had no electrical power at their homes; some had no power at their office and were working by candlelight, bundled up in quilts!

Apart from being concerned for their safety, I have to say I was both amused and inspired.

The situation made profoundly clear to me the mentality of the female business owner: simply put, we have work to do and the show must go on. We have clients who need us, promises to keep, and employees who depend on us. While school children celebrate an ice storm as an unexpected gift of a day off, the business owner knows from a place deep within that there is work to be done, and if they don't do it, no one else will.

Some of our members run businesses that must operate, regardless of weather, 365 days a year, twenty-four hours a day. During the storm, I talked with Umi Chahal, owner of Choice Home Health and Choice Hospice. Though the power at her office went out, the business did not miss a beat. *“We saw every patient we could get to,”* she told me. *“Our first priority is patient care and we can’t let the weather stop us.”*

Nancy Hyde owns a CPA firm. Her clients had payroll and tax deadlines to meet. *“We have to be there for them,”* she said. *“We have to get these computers up and get to work.”* She quickly borrowed two generators and bought another, which was enough power to run the heat, the lights, and ten computers.

I’m convinced that women entrepreneurs share some sort of common DNA, despite their diverse backgrounds, personality types and skills. Inherent in this DNA is what people in the horse industry call “heart.” Ask thoroughbred breeders and they’ll tell you that a horse with heart has this rare combination of energy and courage. It won’t give up, won’t quit, no matter what the challenge. Heart has nothing to do with the size, beauty or pedigree of the horse. It’s an internal quality -- a generosity of spirit that compels it to keep trying, to master the challenge no matter how much effort it takes.

Women business owners have heart.

I believe business owners (male or female) don’t get enough credit or validation for the courage it takes to be in their role. We take for granted the tremendous pressure an owner feels for being responsible for the livelihoods of their employees and being responsible for the bottom line. The women entrepreneurs I know are not “greedy capitalists,” thinking only of their own profits or how to get rich. They are driven by a genuine passion that even they cannot always articulate. They are determined to do an excellent job at whatever they do. They have a work ethic that is unmatched.

We underestimate the diversity of expertise a business owner needs – they have to be competent at an incredible variety of skills. Unlike large corporations that have specialized departments to handle specific responsibilities, women business owners

have to be knowledgeable about everything from accounting to employment law, from management to marketing, from technology to teamwork, from website design to strategic planning.

You rarely see women business owners in the pages of your newspaper or featured in television interviews. They humbly go about their daily lives, putting one foot in front of the other, doing the best they can to take care of their families, their customers and their employees, not looking for recognition or accolades.

And yet, as hard as women entrepreneurs work, the hard truth is that most of them do not achieve financial success equal to men. Setting aside the gender comparison, they do not achieve the growth they dream of, or the financial success they deserve.

I wrote this book to help close that gap. The strengths women entrepreneurs bring to their work can work against them. We can be our own worst enemies. We have to learn how to get out of our own way first, so that we can learn and implement the business skills that will allow us to grow. We have to transition from our vocational roles (graphic designers, CPA's, nurses, trainers, dog-sitters, web designers and a whole slew of other technical professions that led us to owning a business) to becoming businesswomen. Becoming CEO's of our own companies.

This year marks fifteen years of EWF International helping women business owners grow and succeed while the Alpha Mare Academy introduced online training, designed to make learning more affordable and more accessible for women entrepreneurs around the globe. Both services demonstrate my commitment to strengthen and support women business owners.

I hope you'll join me in appreciating and honoring every woman entrepreneur you know for the unsung contribution she makes to her family, to her community and to our economy.

For those of you who are women business owners and leaders, this book is a genuine tribute to you. My hope is that this will be your best year ever!

*Darci Harris*

## *The Facts*

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### **The Center for Women's Business Research reports:**

- 8.3 million firms are owned by women (50% or more), employing more than 7.7 million people, and generating \$1.3 trillion in revenue as of 2012.
- Women-owned firms (50% or more) account for 40% of all privately held firms.

### **According to the Department of Commerce report:**

- From 1997 to 2007, the number of women-owned businesses grew by 44%, twice as fast as men-owned firms.
- Women-owned firms added roughly 500,000 jobs while other privately-held firms lost jobs.

### **That's the good news...now for the other statistics:**

- Only one in five firms with revenue of \$1 million or more is woman-owned
- 1.8% of all women-owned firms have revenues of \$1 million or more, compared with 6.3 % of men-owned firms
- While the number of women-owned firms continues to grow in number at rates exceeding the national average, they are not moving along the growth continuum.
- Only 13% of women-owned businesses generate more than \$100,000 per year in sales, compared with 30% of businesses owned by men.
- In 2007, the sales of the average women-owned business were only \$153,000, a quarter of the \$612,000 of the average business owned by men.
- Self-employed women earn only 55% of what self-employed men earn.

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## Chapter 18

### *Change: What got you here won't get you there*

*"You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore."*

Christopher Columbus

Try this fun experiment with me. Clasp your hands in front of you. Notice which thumb is on top, and which pinky is on the outside. Now release your hands and clasp them again, only this time put the opposite thumb on top and the opposite pinky on the outside.

It feels weirdly strange and unfamiliar, doesn't it?

You can try the same thing by crossing your arms. For me, my left arm automatically goes on top and I really have to work at crossing my arms with my right arm on top.

Did you have as much trouble with that as I did?

We are creatures of habit. We all have things that we've done for years, without thinking about it. There's no "right or wrong" to it, it's just what comes naturally.

When it comes to running your business, I bet there are things you've done a certain way for a long time. But as our business grows, we need to grow with it. And that means we need to do things differently.

That can feel very strange and uncomfortable. Old habits are hard to break.

One of the most difficult things for women entrepreneurs to learn is this: **what got you here won't get you there.** (Darn!)

In the start-up stage our businesses are typically... uh...shall we say, unstructured. Meaning, we fly by the seat of our pants. We have few systems, procedures or standardized processes. We make things up as we go along.

We also do most everything ourselves, at one point or another. Depending on your industry, it's common to know every single customer personally. You know exactly what to do, and you carry every detail around in your head.

That's normal. And appropriate for a start-up company. But as your business grows, you get more employees involved – or maybe you out-source certain projects or projects to independent contractors. You get more customers and there are more people involved in the process.

Now, in this growth stage, sometimes the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Things get disorganized. Things start to fall through the cracks.

You have more people coming to you for answers and decisions. They come to you because nothing is written down. There are no standardized processes and procedures. And they come to you because no one else can make a decision. Business is good, but life gets crazy. You're working harder just to keep up.

In this stage, it's very common for the woman entrepreneur to do what she's always done: apply more steam, press harder on the gas pedal. Meaning, work even harder.

Don't.

This is the very stage where you need to recall that little exercise of clasping your hands or folding your arms. Now is the time to remember: *what got you here won't get you there.*

At this stage of growth, the woman entrepreneur has to take a long hard look at herself. She has to ask herself this question: *"Am I willing to risk who I am for who I can become?"*

Why? Because it's necessary to change your leadership style. As our businesses grow, we need to grow too. We have to learn new things, new ways of communicating. We have to use new tools, new processes. And that can feel as strange and uncomfortable as deliberately crossing our arms with the "other" arm on top.

Try this: make a list of the five top skills and abilities that led you to where you are today. Now ask yourself, what have you been resisting because it feels unfamiliar and uncomfortable? Those things you are resisting could be exactly what your business needs right now. Change can feel strange and uncomfortable. But that doesn't mean change isn't necessary.

As our businesses grow, what we need most is the ability to **get comfortable with being uncomfortable.**

The real question is: *are you willing to risk who you are for who you can become?*