



breaking the bias

BECAUSE YOUR IDENTITY SHOULDN'T INFLUENCE YOUR SUCCESS



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WELCOME

Welcome to 'Breaking the Bias', Paragon Law's magazine which puts a spotlight on a range of women who are pursuing careers in what have traditionally been seen as male-dominated industries.

In homage to this year's theme of #breakthebias we have asked the women featured whether being a woman in their field of work has affected them in any way. Whilst the various interviews differed by each individual, themes such as motherhood, imposter-syndrome, and collaboration were frequently drawn upon to illustrate just some of the challenges in which women face today and the coping mechanisms used to overcome them.

We would like to say a massive thank-you to Emma Okenyi from Paragon Law, Hamsa Rajashekar from Batra Group, Lauren Crow from MJC Law, Lili Zhu from Career Insider, Alison Thomas from Unique & Loved, and Jessica Barry from The Co-Working Club for taking the time out of their busy schedules to contribute to this project.

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Whether deliberate or
unconscious, bias makes it
difficult for women to move
ahead. Knowing that bias exists
isn't enough, action is needed
to level the playing field.

Source: internationalwomensday.com

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#breakthebias

International Women's Day is celebrated across the world on the 8th of March every year. It is a time to reflect on the progress made, celebrate the achievements of women, and call for change.

Whilst society has undoubtedly come a long way in terms of gender equality, no country has truly achieved it. We may have gone to the moon and have created a global telecommunications system but 2.7 billion women are legally unable to access the same jobs as men, and one in three women will experience gender-based violence. Clearly then, the mission to pursue gender equality continues.

Every year International Women's Day adopts a new theme, in 2021 it was #choosetochallenge and this year it is #breakthebias. As the name suggests the theme is encouraging individuals to call out bias, overcome stereotypes, and break inequality. Only through a collective effort can we #breakthebias and forge women's equality.

On average men earn
17.9% more than
women per hour.



Women are **3x**
more likely to work
part-time than men.



The UK ranks **23rd**
on the global gender gap
index.



26.7% of FTSE 350
company board members
are women.



Source: gov.uk

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You do not have to feel fully
ready to take up an
opportunity - we are never
always 100% ready for all
opportunities that come our
way.

”



EMMA OKENYI

SENIOR SOLICITOR - PARAGON LAW

Emma Okenyi is a Senior Solicitor at Paragon Law, working in the firm's Personal and Family Immigration Team. Emma joined Paragon Law in 2012 as a Senior Caseworker but in 2017 she successfully qualified as a Solicitor.

AN INTERVIEW WITH EMMA OKENYI FOR BREAKING THE BIAS

CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF
OUTLINE OF HOW YOU CAME TO
BE IN THE POSITION YOU ARE
CURRENTLY IN?

I was born and raised in Kenya and came to the UK in 2000 to study Law at the University of Hull which was later followed by the LPC. I intended to return to Kenya and join my mother's legal practice but I met my husband here and we went on to have a son. Following the birth of my son I took a 4-year break but once this was over I volunteered as an adviser at Citizens Advice Bureau in Nottingham for about a year where my interest in immigration law piqued. With this interest in immigration law I worked as a Senior Caseworker for Refugee and Migrant Justice and later as a Lead Refugee Advisor for the YMCA. In 2012, I joined Paragon Law as a Senior Caseworker and in 2017 I qualified as a Solicitor.

THE LAW INDUSTRY IS ARGUABLY
CUT-THROAT, HOW DO YOU
THINK YOU MANAGED TO MAKE
A BREAKTHROUGH?

By having an open mind – it was difficult trying to make a breakthrough at the beginning. At university you are made to believe that there is a set career path to law- i.e. law degree, LPC/BVC and then a training contract and qualification. I discovered late on that this is not always the case. For me I had to go through a somewhat non-conventional path before I finally qualified as a solicitor. There are many paths to getting into the law industry which do not necessarily follow the set path or what is perceived to be the conventional path. Had I known this early on, I may have saved myself a lot of anguish and money!



"THERE ARE MANY PATHS TO GETTING INTO THE LAW INDUSTRY WHICH DO NOT NECESSARILY FOLLOW THE SET PATH OR WHAT IS PERCEIVED TO BE THE CONVENTIONAL PATH".

DO YOU THINK THAT BEING A FEMALE LAWYER HAS HELD YOU BACK IN ANY WAY?

To some extent. Taking time off to have a family, for example, made it really difficult to get back into law and I had to basically start from the bottom and work my way up. Even once I was able to get back on the legal ladder, I feel being a parent meant that I missed out on good networking opportunities because they did not align with my childcare duties. I also feel that while flexible working to accommodate childcare duties is actively promoted, it has been an obstacle to promotion when I see how quickly men in a similar position have been promoted.

WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

I start working at 8am everyday - sometimes I'm in the office and sometimes I'm working from home. Regardless of where I am, I kick-off the day with a coffee and start

scrolling through my inbox to note down any deadlines I have. I then create a to-do list which prioritises deadlines and client meetings. At lunch I always try to get out and have some fresh air to clear my head and if I'm in the office I'll use this time to do a bit of window shopping which always ends up in me lugging back bags of shopping to the office (I can't resist a bargain!). I then spend the rest of my day dealing with phone calls, emails, casework, drafting representations, and sorting out any supervision queries.

My working hours are usually 8-4pm but this can sometimes vary depending on what urgent matters I have to deal with as well as the number of deadlines. Some days I may be lucky and log off completely by 5pm but more often than not, I cook dinner for my family at 6pm and then log back on to finalise any outstanding work before logging off around 9pm/10pm if I am lucky!

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**I FEEL BEING A PARENT MEANT
THAT I MISSED OUT ON GOOD
NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES**

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**WHAT PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD
YOU GIVE TO OTHER FEMALES
WANTING TO ESTABLISH THEIR
OWN BUSINESS?**

Law is still a challenging career for women but there are so many opportunities for women to succeed. There are times I doubt if I made the wrong choice in choosing law – usually when I am struggling with maintaining a work-life balance but the difference you make to clients' lives soon dissipates that negative thought. To succeed I would say you need to:

- 1 BE OPEN TO WHERE LIFE TAKES YOU.**
- 2 SELECT A LAW FIRM WHICH ALIGNS WITH YOUR ASPIRATIONS.**
- 3 START NETWORKING EARLY ON.**
- 4 FIND A MENTOR.**
- 5 BE WILLING TO TAKE RISKS AND SAY YES TO OPPORTUNITIES.**

**WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN
FIVE YEARS' TIME?**

I would like to be in a position where I can set up a mentoring initiative bringing together female lawyers all over the world to offer mentorship to young girls and women thinking about joining the legal profession. I think with advances in technology this is something that can be done on a worldwide basis.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS ONE OF
THE HARDEST THINGS WOMEN
ARE FACING TODAY?**

Gender inequality.

Despite some progress mainly in the West, the majority of women in the world have less access to education, health and finance than males. Even in the legal profession, women still earn significantly less than their male counterparts.

**HOW DO YOU THINK WE
SHOULD ACTIVELY BE
ENCOURAGING OUR FEMALE
FUTURE GENERATIONS TO
SUCCEED IN LAW?**

Through early mentorship and by experienced female lawyers actively speaking to the future generation about their path to law. From the time that young people start thinking about career choices they should have mentors to guide them, talk them through the various paths to law, answer any questions about the profession, and promote the benefits of a legal career.

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Law is still a challenging
career for women but there
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WHICH WOMAN HAS INFLUENCED YOU THE MOST IN LIFE?

My mother. As a single mother of three children in Kenya, she managed to set up her own successful legal practice in what was then a mainly male dominated profession and in a very patriarchal African society. I watched her face challenges that could easily have derailed her, but she forged ahead with great determination. Despite being so busy she made time to still be a mother to me and my siblings- and hardly missed any important milestones in our lives. She was the one who instilled a work ethic in me (I was often in her office on weekends or during school holidays helping with making tea for clients and doing general admin). She was the one who ignited my love of the law – even though she would have preferred if I had studied medicine.

I am in awe of her ability to adapt to change - having left the law for some years now, she has ventured into farming and has the same enthusiasm for it as she did when she set up her law firm. She is the person I turn to for advice when I am facing personal and career challenges.

WHAT DOES BEING A WOMAN IN LAW MEAN TO YOU?

Working in a constantly challenging and changing environment and helping to bring about change not just for myself but for future generations.

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We need to understand and
acknowledge the various
roles a woman plays

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HAMSA RAJASHEKAR

LEGAL COUNSEL - BATRA GROUP

Hamsa Rajashekar is a qualified lawyer who specialises in matters of International Business and Economics. Since gaining her Bachelors Degree in Law (which was later followed by a Masters in the subject), Hamsa has gone on to work as the Legal Counsel for several well-known firms. Prior to her current position, Hamsa has worked in the US, India, and the UK fulfilling a variety of roles including Associate, Legal Fellow, and Judicial Law Clerk.

AN INTERVIEW WITH HAMSA RAJASHEKAR FOR BREAKING THE BIAS

**CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF
OUTLINE OF HOW YOU CAME TO
BE IN THE POSITION YOU ARE
CURRENTLY IN?**

Having completed my Bachelors in Law from Bangalore, India, I moved to the USA to pursue my Masters in Law at Georgetown University, Washington D.C. Upon completion of my masters, I was lucky enough to gain some experience in the US market by working at the Georgetown University and at Blackboard Inc.

I then decided to re-join my family in India and used to work with Kochhar & Co., one of India's pre-eminent corporate law firms.

In 2018, I moved to London and started working with Batra Group since then. Batra Group specialises in manufacture, distribution and marketing of brands and has a wealth of experience in apparel, accessories and footwear sourcing. It has a Global presence and has its headquarters in London and Mumbai with their offices in India, Singapore,.

China, Indonesia and Portugal. The Batra Group's vision is to build a sustainable business that creates shareholder and brand values whilst sticking to its core values of Humility, Success, Passion, Family Ethics and Transparency.

**THE LAW INDUSTRY IS ARGUABLY
CUT-THROAT, HOW DO YOU
THINK YOU MANAGED TO MAKE
A BREAKTHROUGH?**

My father has been my backbone throughout my journey and has always guided me through it inside out. I owe this to him.

I let my work speak for me. Being dedicated and hard-working helps. It's important to build your own identity. Recognitions will come your way based on your good work.

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**IT'S IMPORTANT TO BUILD
YOUR OWN IDENTITY.**

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"SOME RISKS ARE WORTH TRYING AND TAKING".

Additionally, I have also been very lucky to find the right mentors. My current mentor (Mr. Rudy P Rudran – CEO/Director at Batra Group) has always ensured that I'm on the right path and has been guiding me through this journey. Working with the right people is extremely important and I'm blessed in that way.

DO YOU THINK THAT BEING A FEMALE LAWYER HAS HELD YOU BACK IN ANY WAY?

No! I hope it never does!

WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

The spectrum of work varies from day to day. I act as the first point of reference on all legal and HR matters for the Company. My role allows me to work very closely with my Board of Directors and assist them on a range of legal matters. My day goes on from negotiating and executing various commercial contracts

including but not limited to license, distribution, supply, agency, consultancy, sourcing agreements and service contracts to carrying out certain HR tasks that involve drafting employment documents, handling redundancies and other employment related proceedings. It's been a fascinating experience so far!

WHAT PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER FEMALES WANTING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN BUSINESS?

1. Some risks are worth trying and taking.
2. Stay confident and determined.
3. Believe in yourself, always.
4. Be adaptable and open to constructive criticism.
5. Give importance to the learning curve and always look for an opportunity to learn.
6. Love and enjoy what you do! Be passionate about your work.
7. Accept your mistakes and learn from them. Don't work mechanically and try not to repeat your mistakes.

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Without support from the families or employer, it practically becomes impossible to play multiple roles at the same time.

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"GIVE IMPORTANCE TO THE LEARNING CURVE AND ALWAYS LOOK FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN".

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

Right here with better experience and happy memories!

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS WOMEN ARE FACING TODAY?

The constant need to manage domestic responsibilities and social pressures along with one's career at every stage of life is one of the hardest things women are facing today. Without support from the families or employer, it practically becomes impossible to play multiple roles at the same time.

HOW DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD ACTIVELY BE ENCOURAGING OUR FEMALE FUTURE GENERATIONS TO SUCCEED IN LAW?

I feel we first need to understand and acknowledge the various roles a woman plays! A woman is expected to do everything at the same time. We need to understand, accept and support these facts.

WHICH WOMAN HAS INFLUENCED YOU THE MOST IN LIFE?

I will definitely have to name two women. My paternal grandmother – D. S. Vimala Gopal Krishna Rao and my mother - Srilatha Shekar! Although life wasn't easy for them and they had their own set of struggles, not only did they embrace it but also made their own mark! They have seen it all and done it all.

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THE CONSTANT NEED TO MANAGE DOMESTIC RESPONSIBILITIES AND SOCIAL PRESSURES ALONG WITH ONE'S CAREER AT EVERY STAGE OF LIFE IS ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS WOMEN ARE FACING TODAY.

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You don't have to get where
you want to be all on your
own.

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LAUREN CROW

DIRECTOR AND SOLICITOR - MJC LAW

Lauren Crow is a Director and Solicitor at MJC Law. Lauren has been practising law for over 10-years and within that time has been awarded the Solicitor of the Year by the Nottinghamshire Law Society and was also named the Junior Lawyer of the Year at the Law Society Excellence Awards.

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAUREN CROW FOR BREAKING THE BIAS

CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF OUTLINE OF HOW YOU CAME TO BE IN THE POSITION YOU ARE CURRENTLY IN?

I am currently one of the three co-founding director/ owners at MJC Law in Nottingham. We set the firm up in 2018 so that we could focus on providing services in the areas of law which we are most passionate about. Since that time, we have grown to a team of 12 specialising in Court of Protection, community care and mental health cases.

THE LAW INDUSTRY IS ARGUABLY CUT-THROAT, HOW DO YOU THINK YOU MANAGED TO MAKE A BREAKTHROUGH?

When I first got to university, I definitely had an inferiority complex and doubted whether I was cut out for a career in law. However, a few things helped to give me the confidence to pursue it. Firstly, I managed to find an area of law that I enjoy and am good at. Secondly, I trained at a firm which was trying to develop a specialism in an area of law

in which I had done a 20 month stint as a paralegal. This meant I was given an opportunity to be integral to the development of that practice at a really junior stage of my career.

Lastly, I was lucky enough to be surrounded by people (both men and women) that I was inspired by and saw my potential and nurtured it. A lot of it was being in the right place at the right time!

DO YOU THINK THAT BEING A FEMALE LAWYER HAS HELD YOU BACK IN ANY WAY?

I certainly still suffer with imposter syndrome and there are definitely still situations that I feel I don't belong.

Of course, I am not saying that men don't also suffer the same but from my experience it does seem to be something that more commonly affects women.

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I HAD AN INFERIORITY COMPLEX AND DOUBTED WHETHER I WAS CUT OUT FOR A CAREER IN LAW.

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"AS WOMEN MANAGE TO CLIMB THE CAREER LADDER, IT COULD BE SAID THAT THEY HAVE EVEN MORE TO JUGGLE THAN THEY DID BEFORE".

WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

I like to go to the gym first thing in the morning so that I don't have time to talk myself out of it throughout the day. If I am in the office, which is usually around 3-4 days a week, I usually get there for about 9am. Most of my days are spent fee-earning and so I might have court hearings or meetings to attend or prepare for. I might also have internal meetings with those I supervise or with other members of the management team. I try to leave the office by no later than 6.30pm.

WHAT PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER FEMALES WANTING TO PURSUE A CAREER IN THE LEGAL INDUSTRY?

The biggest piece of advice I can offer is that you don't have to get where you want to be all on your own. I didn't come from a family where I had connections that would give me a foot in somewhere, but I wish I had asked for more help from those around me at the more formative stages of my career (the worst anyone can say is no). Luckily,

I have had people throughout my career who have offered me help even when I didn't ask.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

I hope I have seen MJC Law go from strength to strength. In particular, I hope that our junior members of staff have developed into successful lawyers and so that we can provide a greater offering of services to our clients who are some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS WOMEN ARE FACING TODAY?

The pressure to "have it all". I think we are making slow progress in our careers, albeit gender pay gap, promotions and retention issues still exist. However, even with greater equality in the workplace, it does not mean that there are not the same pressures as there were always outside the work environment such as with children, at home or other caring responsibilities. So, arguably, as women manage to climb the career

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**I WAS ALWAYS ENCOURAGED
TO BELIEVE THAT NOTHING
WAS BEYOND MY REACH.**

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ladder, it could be said that they have even more to juggle than they did before.

**HOW DO YOU THINK WE
SHOULD ACTIVELY BE
ENCOURAGING OUR FEMALE
FUTURE GENERATIONS TO
SUCCEED IN LAW?**

A key issue seems to be around the retention of talented females within the profession. Things have to change to make working in the law more attractive – such as through better maternity leave/ pay, improved arrangements for childcare, more flexible working arrangements, less presenteeism etc.

Hopefully as more women rise through ranks to positions of leadership and so are the ones making the decisions, we will see more progress in this regard.

**WHICH WOMAN HAS INFLUENCED
YOU THE MOST IN LIFE?**

Undoubtedly, my mum. I had a difficult upbringing and am not from a background that is typically associated with those who go on to have careers in the law. It is only as I have reflected as an adult that I realise how difficult it must have been for my mum to support us with our dreams whilst also making ends meet. However, to my mum's great credit, I never felt that we went without and, more importantly, I was always encouraged to believe that nothing was beyond my reach.

**WHAT DOES BEING A WOMAN IN
LAW MEAN TO YOU?**

There is a perception that some women who have had career success pull up the ladder behind them. I'm lucky in that I don't think I have come across many of those women and I certainly don't intend to be one. I feel a responsibility to the next generation of all lawyers, but particularly females and those from other under-represented groups, and so hope that I can guide, inspire and be an effective role model for them.

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Be bold, you might fall, but
you will never regret it.

”



LILI ZHU

FOUNDER - CAREER INSIDER

Lili Zhu is the founder of Career Insider, an online education and consulting company. They provide training and service to allow international talents and business to accessing the UK market. Since its beginnings in 2016, Career Insider has already gone on to win multiple awards and gained over 300,000 social media followers across 12 countries.

AN INTERVIEW WITH LILI ZHU FOR BREAKING THE BIAS

**CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF
OUTLINE OF HOW YOU CAME TO
BE IN THE POSITION YOU ARE
CURRENTLY IN?**

I started my business right after university, and have been running it for 7 years.

**MANAGERIAL POSITIONS TEND
TO BE DOMINATED BY MALES;
HOW DO YOU THINK YOU
MANAGED TO MAKE A
BREAKTHROUGH?**

It might be easier for me as I started the business on my own, but the start-up environment is male dominated as well. My key is to just focus on the work and the value I can bring to consumer and partners while bring visibility to my work. I have a social media following of 300,000, and regularly share my insights and journey: it makes it harder for anyone to ignore me.

**DO YOU THINK THAT BEING A
FEMALE MD HELD YOU BACK IN
ANY WAY?**

In some ways, maybe. But everything is double sided. Personally, I don't mind being overlooked a little bit just because I am a woman. I find that being underestimated often gives me a better angle and longer time to understand my counterparts, and eventually puts me in a better negotiation position due to their own limitation.

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**BEING UNDERESTIMATED
OFTEN GIVES ME A BETTER
ANGLE AND LONGER TIME
TO UNDERSTAND MY
COUNTERPARTS.**

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WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

I normally do all the planning and brain work in the morning, and have meetings from 11:00-15:00 onwards. I will head home at around 17:00 to my child, and spend some family time before getting back to work when she goes to bed.

HOW DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD ACTIVELY BE ENCOURAGING OUR FEMALE FUTURE GENERATIONS TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS, OR ESTABLISH THEIR OWN COMPANY?

By offering chance to try, to fail and to learn at an early stage.

WHAT PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER FEMALES WANTING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN BUSINESS?

Be bold, you might fail, but you will never regret it.

WHICH WOMAN HAS INFLUENCED YOU THE MOST IN LIFE?

I don't think I just have one, but the work of Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, Wu Zetian, Ruth Bader Ginsburg all inspired me.

WHAT DOES BEING A WOMAN IN BUSINESS MEAN TO YOU?

It means I can use the power of business to make the changes I wanted to see in the world.

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We need to enable women to
be successful leaders and
entrepreneurs without it
having to detract from the
other roles they have in life.

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ALISON THOMAS

FOUNDER - UNIQUE & LOVED

Alison Thomas is the founder of Nottingham-based clothing brand, Unique & Loved. With a powerful and personal message behind its name, Unique & Loved is a truly inspirational clothing brand. After having a child, Alistair, who has Down Syndrome, Alison wanted to show others that he (and everyone else) is Unique & Loved.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALISON THOMAS FOR BREAKING THE BIAS

**CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF
OUTLINE OF HOW YOU CAME TO
BE IN THE POSITION YOU ARE
CURRENTLY IN?**

When agreeing the terms to return to work following my second maternity leave, I started not sleeping and felt anxious at the thought of going back to work and feeling like I was failing at both work and being a mum, like I had after my first. As a family we made, what was for me, a huge decision not to return to work. Before kids, my career had been incredibly important to me. After kids it still was, but I didn't seem to be able to make it work around what I wanted to do for my children too.

I did constantly think about how I would return into employment after having a career break. I had been used to being a leader, making decisions and effecting change and I was concerned that in returning to employment after having a break I would not be able to access such an opportunity and even if I could, having not worked for a long time,

the fear of failure was quite real.

I thought of self-employment to meet my career goal needs, but it felt like something that other people did rather than me.

Alongside this I was thinking about ways of helping to alter perceptions about individuality. My youngest son Alistair has Down's Syndrome and we have experienced a lot of awkwardness around us, as if people aren't sure whether we are happy he is who he is.

One day the two thought streams crossed each-other and I decided that I could start my own business celebrating individuality. So I did.

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**I DECIDED THAT I COULD
START MY OWN BUSINESS
CELEBRATING
INDIVIDUALITY. SO I DID.**

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"REFRAMING PERCEPTIONS OF FAILURE INTO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES HAS BEEN, AND REMAINS, AN ONGOING CHALLENGE".

WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO SET-UP THEIR OWN BUSINESS, WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO TAKE THIS LEAP?

I wanted to take this leap as I wanted to be able to work flexibly around my family, and I felt compelled to share an important message of celebrating individuality.

I was fully supported by my family who helped me overcome the barriers that either existed, or that I was imagining.

I was also incredibly fortunate to inherit some money that I could invest in my first products. This reduced the pressure that taking out a loan would have placed on me and ultimately my family.

I had the idea, the passion, the support, the opportunity and the finance. I was in an incredibly privileged position and knew I had to take a chance on myself.

DO YOU THINK THAT BEING A FEMALE BUSINESS OWNER HAS HELD YOU BACK IN ANY WAY?

Women are less likely to take risks than men. Although risk was a concern for me, for instance, I didn't feel comfortable taking on cost-prohibitive bank loans, it was able to be mitigated by my privileged family situation (being able to support our family on my partner's salary) and my fortune in inheriting enough money to cover my first products. Without this I am unsure I would have taken the risk.

We made a choice for me not to be employed so that I could look after our children, now starting my business I retain the majority of responsibility for the children, partially to do with my partner's working hours and expectations and partly to do with me wanting to keep the level of involvement I have previously enjoyed. It does mean that this can limit my working time and the business does become a second priority when our children's needs need to be met, both planned and unexpected.

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THE MAIN BARRIER THAT HAS HELD ME BACK WAS THE ASSUMPTION THAT I WAS GOING TO FAIL.

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But the main barrier that has held me back was the assumption that I was going to fail. Women are more likely to require support with their self-esteem and belief in what they are doing. I knew I had a good idea, but I assumed that someone else would be able to do it better than me. Believing that I am the best person to achieve my vision requires constant effort. I need reassurance that I am on the right track. Reframing perceptions of failure into learning opportunities has been, and remains, an ongoing challenge.

WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

Get the boys ready for school, do school drop off, do a 15 mins Joe Wicks, shower, then my working day starts at 10:15am. I can be liaising with suppliers, building relationships with charities and potential Unique & Loved models and ambassadors, picking and packing products, doing my accounts, and running my social media accounts. I have til 3pm before school pick up and the race to feed the boys before afterschool activities start!

WHAT PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER FEMALES WANTING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN BUSINESS?

Try to make sure your support network is in place. This support needs to be both practical from a business perspective, so you know who you can turn to for guidance and information about the nuts and bolts of building your own business and, also emotional support. I have found running my own business can be lonely. I have found that having people who I can turn to for reassurance, to keep me motivated and to keep me believing in myself and my business essential. I have been fortunate to have supportive family and friends and have receive excellent business and emotional support from the We Are Radikl Community. I would recommend women join this community whatever stage of the business journey they are at.

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I HAVE FOUND RUNNING MY OWN BUSINESS CAN BE LONELY. I HAVE FOUND THAT HAVING PEOPLE WHO I CAN TURN TO FOR REASSURANCE, TO KEEP ME MOTIVATED AND TO KEEP ME BELIEVING IN MYSELF AND MY BUSINESS ESSENTIAL.

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I think trying to live up to the unrealistic expectations can be exhausting and regular feelings of failure can have negative impacts on women's physical and mental health.

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WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

That Unique & Loved is a well-known, well-regarded brand, successful due to its quality products and its purpose of inspiring love, celebration and acceptance. Unique & Loved will have developed, and be known for, the relationships it has built with charities that support individuals to reach their potential. Individuality will be celebrated through talks and workshops in schools and the community. And I will be comfortable that my business can cover my salary and those that I will have employed.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS WOMEN ARE FACING TODAY?

The expectation to be everything to everyone. To be the best version of ourselves, to be the best we can be at work, achieving the best home, and being the best partner and mother. I think trying to live up to the unrealistic expectations can be exhausting and regular feelings of failure can have negative impacts on women's physical and mental health.

HOW DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD ACTIVELY BE ENCOURAGING OUR FEMALE FUTURE GENERATIONS TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS, OR ESTABLISH THEIR OWN COMPANY?

Completely restructuring the work-life balance. I was brought up in a generation that encouraged women to believe they could have everything, which was amazing, however, the

"WE NEED TO ENABLE WOMEN TO BE SUCCESSFUL LEADERS AND ENTREPRENEURS WITHOUT IT HAVING TO DETRACT FROM THE OTHER ROLES THEY HAVE IN LIFE."

structures didn't exist to enable us to have everything without, in some cases, imploding. We need to allow future generations to not only believe they can achieve anything, but also, put the support systems in place to do so without breaking. We need to enable women to be successful leaders and entrepreneurs without it having to detract from the other roles they have in life.

WHICH WOMAN HAS INFLUENCED YOU THE MOST IN LIFE?

Yvette Khouri-Bent. Without her knowing it, Yvette helped me to understand what kind of person I wanted to be and helped give me the confidence to be it.

WHAT DOES BEING A WOMAN IN BUSINESS MEAN TO YOU?

It still feels very strange defining myself as a woman in business, but when I consider the women in business that I am working alongside, supporting and accessing support from and what we are all individually and collectively trying to achieve, I feel incredibly proud.

I also feel incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to be working autonomously on something I am passionate about, I feel privileged to be able to have had the access to this opportunity when many others have not, I feel lucky to have support and to be believed in.

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Just because you are
choosing to work for yourself
doesn't mean you have to do
it alone.

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JESSICA BERRY

FOUNDER - THE CO-WORKING CLUB

Jessica Berry is the founder of The Co-Working Club. The Co-Working Club provides a space for female business owners to come together, support one another, and collaborate with each other. Jessica took the leap into self-employment in 2017 and found the lack of a team around her negatively affected her. On a whim Jessica created regular meet-ups for women in a similar position. 2 years later and The Co-Working Club is going strong, with plans to open its own space under development.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA BERRY FOR BREAKING THE BIAS

CAN YOU GIVE US A BRIEF
OUTLINE OF HOW YOU CAME TO
BE IN THE POSITION YOU ARE
CURRENTLY IN?

After graduating from University with a degree in Photography I felt totally lost, I decided to set up a lifestyle blog as they were all the range at the time and that ultimately led me to spending a few years working within digital marketing. During this time I started to gain some freelance work from connections I'd made throughout various stages of my career journey and eventually it got to the point where I was able to take this full-time and dive into the world of self-employment where I was working as a Social Media Manager.

Being my own boss meant working from home and I found that I really struggled with the transition from a busy office environment to spending everyday at home alone and soon the lack of human interaction really started to affect my mental health. I knew I needed to change something if I were to continue working for myself long term so I set about

creating a community that would bring more connection to my days and would also help other female business owners, freelancers and remote workers who were experiencing similar struggles.

So that's when The Co-Working Club was born! I started by simply hosting co-working meet-ups once a week from a coffee shop in Nottingham and over time I realised that I wasn't the only one who found working from home lonely. Over the following months, more and more like minded women came along to the meet-ups but in March 2020 we had to press pause on in-person events and take our community online when lockdown came into effect.

The Online Club was such a lifeline for myself and my members during

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"RUNNING A BUSINESS CAN BE EXTREMELY LONELY AND ISOLATING SO SURROUNDING YOURSELF WITH LIKEMINDED WOMEN WHO ARE ALL NAVIGATING THE SAME HIGHS AND LOWS CAN MAKE SUCH A DIFFERENCE".

what was an extremely intense time of physical separation and through weekly calls and a very active Slack channel we were able to build a really tight-knit and intimate online community which allowed like minded women from all over the UK and beyond to come together and create connections.

Fast forward to March 2022 and I am now preparing to open Nottingham's first female-only co-working space which has been my dream for a number of years now and I'm SO excited to be able to provide a welcoming space for women to connect, collaborate and empower one another! The Co-Working Club is SO much more than traditional networking as we focus on building real relationships that stretch way beyond just work chat and into solid friendships. Community is at the heart of everything we do as we navigate all aspects of working life together as a team!

I obviously never set out at the beginning of my career thinking I would be doing what I do now but The Online Club was such a lifeline

for myself and my members during what was an extremely intense time of physical separation and ultimately it has led me to running the business that I do today which I'm so grateful for!

WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO SET-UP THEIR OWN BUSINESS, WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO TAKE THIS LEAP?

Around 2016 I started listening to podcasts for the first time and I discovered this whole world of female entrepreneurs who were sharing stories about setting up and running their own businesses and it really ignited a spark in me. I found it inspiring to see so many women taking charge of their careers and choosing to become their own bosses. I had always considered myself to be a fairly ambitious person and never quite felt settled in any of the roles I had in the past, I always wanted to strive for more and whilst at first I didn't know exactly what running my own business would look like, the idea of entrepreneurship and building something of my own really

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CREATING AN EFFECTIVE MORNING ROUTINE WAS A BIG FOCUS FOR ME DURING LOCKDOWN

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appealed to me. In particular it was the freedom of time and place, the flexibility over my schedule and the ability to remove the earning cap that I had been used to within traditional employment.

Looking back now, I do think that a number of the reasons I wanted to work for myself were down to the highly glamourised view of entrepreneurship that we often see online such as coffee shop working and after actually taking the leap I quickly realised that the reality is in fact a VERY different story. Since setting up The Co-Working Club I have always strived to be as open and honest about the highs and the lows that come with running your own business and working from home which I hope helps budding entrepreneurs to have a better idea of what to expect.

WHAT'S A TYPICAL DAY LIKE FOR YOU?

I usually wake up around 7am, get showered, dressed and put on some make-up which is still important to me despite working from home as it helps me to feel ready for the day.

I then have breakfast and listen to an inspiring podcast or audiobook, I also do a bit of reading and journaling before heading up to my desk to start work. Creating an effective morning routine was a big focus for me during lockdown when it was so easy to slip into working every waking hour of the day! I've found that setting these clear boundaries and taking this time for me in the morning helps to set me up in the best way to take on the day.

Once I'm at my desk I'll usually check in with members of The Online Club community on Slack, respond to emails and social media messages and then crack on with my tasks for the day. I have calls with The Online Club three times a week so I'll hop on Zoom if so. Our most popular calls are definitely our virtual co-working sessions where we share what we're going to be working on with the group, then work is timed into 40 minute bursts. At the end of the session we come back together and

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share what we managed to get done which is a great way to add accountability to your day when you work for yourself.

Around midday I'll take my lunch break which is always spent away from my desk. I usually have some food and then go for a walk to get some fresh air and listen to a podcast. The afternoon is usually spent doing content creation or admin for The Online Club. At the moment, most of my time has been taken up preparing the new co-working space ready to launch in March so most days I've been swapping my laptop for a paintbrush instead!

WHAT PIECE OF ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER FEMALES WANTING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN BUSINESS?

My biggest piece of advice for aspiring female business owners is definitely to invest time into building a community around you. Just because you are choosing to work for yourself doesn't mean you have to do it alone. Running a business can be extremely lonely and isolating so surrounding yourself with likeminded women who are all navigating the same highs and lows can make such a difference and help you to feel less alone in what you're striving for.

Creating contacts and collaborating with other entrepreneurs is also a great way to grow your business and especially within the community we've created within The Co-Working Club, all of our members want one another to succeed. There's no element of competition, instead everyone is happy to recommend one another for work, shout about the business they're building and

"FOR ME, BEING A WOMAN IN BUSINESS MEANS CARVING OUT THE FUTURE I WANT FOR MYSELF AND HOPEFULLY EMPOWERING OTHER FEMALE BUSINESS OWNERS TO DO THE SAME!"

ultimately be one another's cheerleaders. That support is absolutely invaluable when starting out building a business.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

Hopefully still growing The Co-Working Club community and continuing to help to bring together and empower like minded women!

HOW DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD ACTIVELY BE ENCOURAGING OUR FEMALE FUTURE GENERATIONS TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS, OR ESTABLISH THEIR OWN COMPANY?

I think starting to share entrepreneurship as a viable career choice as early as possible within education is so important to help as many women consider the path as being possible. I personally never thought of myself having the

'necessary traits' to become a business owner as the only examples I had seen up until that point were men in suits like Alan Sugar on The Apprentice. As a fairly introverted person I wondered whether I had the resilience to become a business owner but hopefully by more women opening up and sharing their journeys online it will inspire a whole new generation to believe that it is possible for them too.

I also believe that providing support to women establishing their own business is so important as it's a fairly common statistic that 20% of new businesses will fail during their first year so offering valuable advice and encouragement can hopefully help more female founded businesses to succeed.

WHAT DOES BEING A WOMAN IN BUSINESS MEAN TO YOU?

For me, being a woman in business means carving out the future I want for myself and hopefully empowering other female business owners to do the same!