

SUCCESSFUL WOMEN IN BUSINESS



SHOWCASING THE INFLUENTIAL WOMEN
DRIVING BUSINESS IN THE UK

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Successful Women In Business. UK Edition.

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Published by Mithra Publishing 2013

www.mithrapublishing.com

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The Journey To *Cause4*

In the back of my mind I always thought that I might want to start a business.

Up to that point my career journey had been slightly unusual. I had trained as a violinist at one of the UK's leading conservatoires - London's Guildhall School of Music & Drama - and then had a four-year career as a professional violinist playing in London orchestras. I then found my way into the charitable sector where I worked in a variety of communications and marketing roles and eventually became a Chartered Marketer.

Immersing myself in the world of arts and social charities I accepted a job in 2005 as Marketing Director of a socially-driven theatre company in the East End of London. The job turned out to be both a baptism of fire and fortuitous in equal measure. On my first day, one of the Directors said '*we need to raise £1m this year just to keep the charity going,*' and on that note....and quite by accident, I found myself plunged into the world of charitable fundraising. For a year I rolled up my sleeves to raise the money needed just to keep the charity on its feet.

Fundraising can be a brilliant career – challenging, entrepreneurial and developmental all rolled into one. After having learned on the job, made mistakes and followed my instinct to develop a number of charitable programmes that could scale up nationally, I realized in my subsequent role as Head of Fundraising and Marketing at the social action charity Toynbee Hall, that in fundraising I could make a difference. Here was a vocation where developing innovation and income generation plans, in partnership with organisations, could see the charity sector grow and thrive. I was inspired by being able to 'make things happen', and it is this concept that has formed the basis of all my entrepreneurial activities since.

Five years on from putting the full-time world of professional music behind me, I was in my element being able to work with a wide variety of people and to create programmes that could reach and engage people across a range of areas including arts, education and social justice. The more diverse the causes the better – and each new initiative fed new ideas into other projects. I was starting to gain a reputation for developing impactful charitable programmes and to fundraise for their ongoing sustainability – an area that I loved.

I was then lucky enough to become Development Director of the London Symphony Orchestra in 2007 – which involved a whirlwind three years of fundraising and international sponsorship development. One of my first projects was the creation of a programme named ‘LSO On Track’ – a multi-faceted programme working across ten East London boroughs providing thousands of school children with music and arts education programmes and opportunities linked to London 2012 and the Cultural Olympiad programme. For me, it was a proud moment indeed to see young people from East London taking part alongside the London Symphony Orchestra in Danny Boyle’s terrific opening ceremony in the Olympic Stadium in London’s East End.

And as the UK economy continued to wallow in recession it was the inspiration of the LSO On Track programme that seeded the kernel of the idea for setting up *Cause4*. I wondered if there was scope for a small organisation to work more entrepreneurially in the charitable sector, to specialise in creating programmes of scale and to look at developing interesting partnerships that could navigate what was set to be an ongoing challenging financial climate for charities.

....and over several glasses of wine in early 2009 (with my two fellow Directors) this small idea became reality.

The entrepreneurial idea

In May 2009, *Cause4* began trading.

Immediately we wanted to create a different sort of model, and a team that could work flexibly in partnership with organisations for the longer-term. As such, we banned the ‘c’ word (consultancy), which often conjures up images in the charity sector of over paid advisors that are not held to account for the strategies they create.

Cause4 seeks to support charities, philanthropists and social enterprises as development and fundraising partners across the charity, arts, sports and education sectors. We seek to be a modernising influence and leader within the Third Sector, offering relevant, contemporary solutions at a time when more creative, entrepreneurial approaches are much needed.

We work in three main areas - *strategy and fundraising, philanthropy and enterprise development* - and specialise in developing campaigns and programmes with strong potential to attract charitable support.

One of the keys to our early success was the creation of a new business model for *Cause4*. Our enterprising model allows the widest range of organisations to afford our services. We offer two fee structures, a competitive day rate and a relatively risk-averse option by offering a lower day rate plus contingent fee option (7.5%) based on fundraising success. This means that the financial risk is shared by *Cause4* with the charities, philanthropists and social enterprises with which we work, making it very far away in practice from what we feared, i.e. to be compared to the non-accountable, over paid consultant.

The model has proved to capture well the spirit of this Age of Austerity. Charitable Trustees and CEOs appreciate its transparency and cost-effectiveness, and in creating a model that clearly links expenditure to income, we also provide our staff with significant incentives for investing maximum effort and expertise into each organisation over an agreed time.

***Cause4* the business and driving forward**

We are now four years on, and the business is thriving – we have raised over £20m in charitable fundraising for clients, have a core team of 29 staff, have won multiple national and international awards for innovation and have a multi-faceted programme of clients from charities, philanthropists and social enterprises. We are also in a position where we are exploring a range of international opportunities to develop the business and to undertake major international philanthropy projects in countries as diverse as Ghana, Burma and Brazil.

It is rather difficult to understand how we've got to where we have - starting with a small idea that suddenly got much bigger. However, what's been important to recognise as we move out of start up phase to a more mature business is that we have at least proved the concept, i.e. that there is a real appetite and need for the sort of innovation in programme development and fundraising for charities, social enterprises and philanthropists that we specialise in creating. The world has changed, and the charitable sector needs to adapt and modernize to survive.

We've put innovation at the heart of the *Cause4* and encourage all staff to

take on their own programme development, business planning and ideas creation. One key innovation saw the launch of our Philanthropy Service in 2012. This new service targets top artists and sportspeople, as a professional, one-stop shop to grow charitable giving and through effective fundraising enables individuals to at least triple their investment. Current clients include a range of sports stars, artists and entrepreneurs. We also set up a new charity, The Philanthropy Foundation, to make it easier for a range of sports stars, artists and entrepreneurs to give, which is attracting a range of new clients. We believe this work is a real 'game-changer' and will prevent the proliferation of new charitable foundations that have insufficient governance and structure.

Cause4 has also started developing corporate philanthropy models. These models encompass sponsorship, CR and philanthropy and volunteering, and hold incredible potential for staff engagement, as well as for tax efficient giving.

Our key challenges

With any fast-growing SME, our key challenge has been that the reputation and opportunities for the business have grown far faster than the infrastructure or staffing we have been able to put in place. We are now seeking to put in place as many processes as we can to ensure that we continue to deliver a quality service. We know that not taking care of our processes and clients as the business grows is a key risk for us.

However, the really key issue has been recruiting staff with the right entrepreneurial mindset to cope with the demands of the business and the innovative and fast-paced way in which we aim to work. Having brilliant people as part of the business that are able to deliver for clients is essential, and the speed of delivery of quality work takes most new recruits by surprise - however honest we are in the interview! In particular, we have struggled to recruit senior people into the team to support growth. As such, it became increasingly obvious that we were going to need to 'grow our own' talent and therefore in 2010 we formalised plans to develop our own graduate 'Entrepreneurship' programme that would provide a solid basis for the future development of the business.

The other key challenge has been a personal one for me – a successful, demanding business that would keep me busy is a dream come true – and in four years I haven't been bored once. However, four years in, it is

increasingly difficult to know how to keep fiery and energized with a 24/7 programme of delivery. The model we've created is intensive – the ability for us to develop the programmes for charities and fundraising is often the difference between success or failure and so therefore it's pressurized and the stakes are high....and after a solid run of 90 hour weeks for the first time in my career I feel on the verge of burnout – not an easy reality for a 'doer' to face.

There has been no hiding from this. I've had to look exhaustion in the face and keeping going at pace when the business has great momentum is a constant test. One of the solutions has been to bring a great group of advisors around the business – people that can advise impartially and honestly. We've also restructured the board of Directors and our new Chair Sir Thomas Hughes-Hallett is bringing brilliance in both supporting and challenging both me and the senior management team – with the vision and energy that you might expect of a Chair charged with ensuring the success of this fast-growing enterprise.

Entrepreneurship most certainly isn't for the faint-hearted and recognizing your boundaries has to be the priority. Therefore, I've also needed to find a combination of support and activities that can help me cope with the demands of the business. I now have a programme of executive coaching, reflexology, and swimming – and however hard it is for me to maintain this sort of discipline and to look after my own well-being, I have made these activities regular and non-negotiable aspects of my day-to-day portfolio.

Skills and networks

On starting *Cause4* I had just finished an MBA at Ashridge Business School, so I had some good generic knowledge of business. This was a great platform, but where I have really benefitted in developing the business is by becoming part of a number of accelerator networks.

In the turbulent journey of running a start up business, there is nothing so leveling as networking with other entrepreneurs, finding out the realities, sharing information and realizing that however challenging it feels for you as an individual, everyone is facing similar issues.

Cause4 has taken part in the Cranfield School of Management Business Growth and Development Programme and I've also been lucky enough recently to be part of the Goldman Sachs 10,000 small businesses programme. This initiative, which provides access to education and support

services via programmes at top global universities including University College London and Said Business School Oxford, really demonstrates its power in its access to networks and the reflective time and challenge that comes from spending time with other entrepreneurs.

All these programmes have given us great critical challenges and have allowed us to focus our strategy and to make sure that we were taking on the right projects at an important time for the sector when funding is scarce. We have needed to focus on developing outstanding projects and programmes that could achieve maximum impact for the charities and social enterprises that we represent and to not get distracted by every opportunity that has come our way, however new and shiny!

Investing in talent

Perhaps the area that I am most proud of is our graduate talent development programmes. In the business as a whole we are looking for people that are passionate about charitable causes and that have an entrepreneurial outlook and ambition. We are much more interested in aptitude and talent than experience. We also expect our staff to be passionate about professional development, both for them and the staff that they manage.

We knew that we needed to develop our own talent to grow the business in the spirit that we wished, so in 2010 we set up our 12-month, fast-track, graduate training programme - the *Cause4 Entrepreneurship* programme, which seeks to address the widely-acknowledged shortage of entrepreneurial development and fundraising personnel within the charitable sector. We have trained eight graduates so far and have funding to support another 12 graduates in the next three years supported by Arts Council England. Last year our graduate Associates contributed some £4m in charitable fundraising for clients.

The Associates also run our daily blog site at www.cause4opinion.co.uk - aimed at being the sector's voice for critical commentary in the areas of fundraising, philanthropy and social enterprise. Undoubtedly, a useful arm for any start-up business is to have a group of 20-somethings in charge of the social media strategy.

We have also just set up an incubator hub for Creative Entrepreneurs in partnership with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama – building on our potential to create a training ground for a range of talented graduates. To support the development of new creative businesses run by actors and

musicians in our offices in central London alongside our graduate programmes is proving to be an irresistible combination. The programme includes access to mentoring, coaching, business planning, marketing and sales and funding. Graduates also benefit from use of *Cause4* office space for a 12-month period and are introduced to a range of entrepreneurial, community and partnership networks to support business development.

Learning from others

I'm completely passionate about giving young people opportunities that were not necessarily forthcoming for me; it is one of the great privileges of having set up *Cause4* to be able to create jobs and employment opportunities for graduates – we have employed 15 graduates just in the last 12 months.

When I look back to the time in early 2009 when I began telling people that I was about to set up *Cause4* I had many people who told me that we would struggle or that I shouldn't give up a regular wage and a promising career in the charitable sector. It is not lost on me that most of these detractors were other women!

I think that female entrepreneurs in particular suffer from a lack of positive role models. This coupled with the fact that women tend to be more cautious than cavalier about enterprise means that there is a whole generation of young people (and especially females) that never take the plunge into enterprise.

Within the busy world of *Cause4* we have therefore been careful to make sure that each member of staff has an external mentor, and I also find time to be a mentor for programmes such as the Aspire Foundation and Emerge Student Labs to support aspiring entrepreneurs. Such schemes are 'win win' in allowing me to learn from others but also reminding me that it's a good thing to be bold and to keep going with a 'risk positive' mindset. After all - what's the worst that can happen in running a business – you fail, but even if catastrophe happens, you will have learned some important things on the way for the next venture.

Future vision

I can honestly say that setting up *Cause4* has been the best thing I've ever done – I've learnt loads, understood my strengths and weaknesses and experienced both success and failure in equal measure. In developing a new business model, we've got our supporters and advocates and a

healthy share of detractors, as any disruptive new business is likely to have – it will be interesting to see what the next stage brings.

My final thoughts are the importance of setting BHAGs – or Big Hairy Audacious Goals. Every good business needs them to keep firing, moving forward and to galvanize the staff and team. In the next period we have three priorities of BHAGS for ensuring innovation and development in the fundraising sector including: training 50 new graduates into leadership careers, to raise £50m in new philanthropic investment and to set up one major entrepreneurial project each year that will be a game-changer for the sector. All good goals and we're hoping for great things ahead...

Michelle Wright

