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Speaker, author, investor and catalyst for entrepreneurial growth.

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# Top Lessons From Exceptional Women Entrepreneurs

There has never been a greater need or time for women to start businesses.

We need their abilities, experiences and skills more than ever in the very competitive world of commerce. Today I honor and pay tribute to bright women of all ages who have and will undertake a significant risk to launch a flourishing enterprise. It's been my great privilege to be associated with many talented female business founders and they deserve my praise and encouragement. All are remarkable women.

As an angel investor and venture capitalist, it is my pleasure to engage with a growing number of strong woman leaders. What I admire most about these tremendous executives is their empathy for employees, vendors and customers. They seem to have a profound ability to understand and feel what's in the hearts and minds of people. As such, they tend to be superb communicators and advisors. In addition, I value their integrity, industry, insight, kind hearts, conviction and superb people skills. They are deep thinkers. They are visionary. They conceive brilliant strategies and can execute them adroitly.

In many ways, they surpass and out hustle their male peers. They intuitively manage resources, processes and priorities extremely well. Lastly, and most importantly, they understand the marketplace and its customers. Perhaps it's an inherent ability, or a learned skill. Whatever the case, I recognize that women are cognizant of nearly any business issue including their thoughts on the needs, feelings, aspirations and desires of consumers.

Recently, I asked a few high achievers to share with me the lessons they have

learned as leaders of thriving businesses. Here are their comments.

**Amy Rees Anderson** is the award winning CEO of [MediConnect Global](#), a leader in medical record retrieval and management and one of the largest health information exchanges in the country. Here's her advice:

- Always do the right thing, no matter what the consequences of doing the right thing will be. At the end of the day there is nothing more valuable than your integrity, both in life and in business. [Success](#) will come and go but integrity is forever. If you always choose to do the right thing, it won't matter what the outcome is because you will be successful as a human being in the areas that matter most. That is true success.
- Great leaders believe in their people. They help each person to see the potential that exists inside of them and they believe in their people's ability to achieve amazing things. I have been truly blessed with many great leaders throughout my career. They inspired me to accomplish all I was capable of, even when I didn't feel that confidence on my own.
- I believe in the power of a "goal poster." I have had mine from the time I started my first company at the age of 23. When you limit the goals you make visual, you are limiting the possibilities that can come into your life. We should never limit the picture we have in our heads because God intends us to be a masterpiece!



Amy Anderson is CEO of MediConnect Global

**Cheryl Snapp Conner** is the founder of [Snapp Conner PR](#), a highly successful public relations company.

- It's critical to have a strategic perspective, always. Interestingly, I've seen research (from [Zenger Folkman](#)) that points out that every top line leader – 100% – is exceptionally strong in this trait, whether woman or man. Yet there are many tremendous women executives who never attain the top role due to lack of this trait.
- The mark of a great leader is that they instill and bring out the best in the team they lead. In times of high pressure, that's an easy thing to forget as leaders revert to the mode of "the CEO will just charge in and fix it." That's a mode of operation that shortchanges both yourself and your team.
- The ability to be quiet and listen is a marvelous attribute. Perhaps the most powerful lesson I've learned is when to *not* talk, but just listen. Especially when situations get heated, it's valuable to remember it's the person who's *not* speaking who's generally holding 90% of the cards.
- Never make a key decision in the heat of emotion. The ability to wait, think and consider options before responding allows you to consider what it is you want to happen, and whether what you're about to do is the best way to arrive at that goal. In that light, chewing somebody out or reacting in anger will almost never make a situation better, and will generally make the outcome much worse.



Cheryl Conner is Founder of Snapp Conner PR

**Alison Prince** is the President and founder of [PickYourPlum.com](#); a fast growing business that caters to the women.

Blessing lives through positive work experiences, opportunities, and growth

have been key ingredients of our success. Pick Your Plum has created a culture that encourages happiness and hard work. It has become a part of our daily life and helps our 'Plum' team be on the same page.

- We spoil customers and they reward us. Random acts of kindness, under promising and over delivering with surprise extras has provided us with a faithful clientele.
- Our motto is Stay Positive. We note that our tasks are challenging. We work long hours. We know that if we concentrate on what's negative it will show in our performance and results. As a company, we strive to rise above what troubles us. Our daily goal is to be happy, productive and focused on the positive.
- We hire the best people and take care of them. We focus on people who are loyal, share our culture and work hard.
- We are grateful. We are thankful for an opportunity to build a company that blesses the lives of many people.



Alison Prince is the Founder of PickYourPlum.com

**Alison Wistner** is a Director of [Mercato Partners](#), a private equity fund investing in high growth technology and consumer companies.

- As an investor in technology companies, I find myself at the intersection of two areas (private equity and technology) that are underrepresented by women at all levels. Technology companies, senior leadership teams, boards of directors and investment firms have not attracted women in proportion to their participation overall as entrepreneurs or as graduates of business schools. One of the reasons may be a lack of awareness.
- In technology companies and earlier stage companies, recruiting is often a function of your network and who you've worked with in the past/ leadership team or in a Board room but awareness is an interesting topic for women in these fields. The solution for greater diversity is not a quota, but driving awareness that homogenous opinions prohibit good decision making.
- The best leaders recognize that diversity fosters different opinions and leads to better outcomes. In male dominated industries, there's a tendency for women to pattern opinions and behavior around male colleagues to help fit in and succeed. Some of the most impressive female leaders I've encountered surround themselves with people who continually challenge their thinking. Different is good.
- I've found that good leaders are also exceptional communicators. This is not a uniquely female trait, but women leaders are often better at fostering open environments with frequent dialogue with the senior leaders. The culture of a company is incredibly important, and a lack of transparency becomes a foundation for uncertainty and unhappy employees. Good communicators earn trust and loyalty among a team and foster better collaboration as a result.



Allison Wistner is a Director of Mercato Partners

Finally, **Kathy Caprino**, M.A. is Founder/President of [Ellia Communications, Inc.](#) — a leading career and executive coaching and training firm. Kathy is a career coach, writer, [Forbes contributor](#) and speaker on

women's careers, and the author of [Breakdown, Breakthrough](#). From Kathy:

- **“Build It and They Will Come” is not a successful business strategy.**

No matter how expert you are in your field, if your business model – the way you plan to generate revenue – isn't viable or doesn't support financial prosperity and growth, you won't be successful. Get the advice and guidance you need to ensure that your products, services and business plan are viable, your market is well defined and reachable, and your understanding of the financial and marketing landscape is what it needs to be.



Kathy Caprino is Founder and President of Ellia Communications, Inc.

- **Don't break yourself against “what is” – use it to your advantage, instead.**

In these recessionary times, many entrepreneurs face tough challenges that make them rethink how they're doing business. Rather than resisting these challenges, and breaking yourself against them, open your eyes, ears and heart and listen to what the market and these challenges are telling you. Perhaps your prices don't reflect the value you're offering, or perhaps you're marketing to the wrong demographic, or your offerings are too narrow to serve the client base you've attracted. No matter what the challenge is, look at it closely, and don't disregard the messages your business is trying to share with you. Use the information to the utmost, to make your business and your offerings stronger and more compelling.

- **You can't do this alone – you need “just right” partners.**

You need to hire the right partners – individuals you respect and like, and who have the right stuff to bring your business forward exponentially. In my [Forbes coverage and interviews](#) with successful entrepreneurs such as [Brendon Burchard](#), [Tory Johnson](#), [Sara Blakely](#), [Sally Hersherger](#), [Mary Lou Quinlan](#) and others, they all share the importance of building a superlative team who 1) gets exactly what you're trying to do, 2) is on the same page about how you want your business represented, and 3) includes people you respect, enjoy and who can collaborate well.

- **Don't make “failure” an excuse to give up.**

Top startup investor and advisor [Judy Robinett shares](#) that the most successful entrepreneurial ventures typically fail three times before hitting success. Unfortunately, women, unlike men, tend to internalize “failure” and struggle with recovering quickly and moving on effectively. They often don't understand that failure is an inherent and holistic part of the success, and they give up too soon. [Sara Blakely](#) shared that she heard “NO! – it's not going to work” a hundred times as she moved forward to build her billion dollar empire SPANX. The key is to recover from failure quickly, readjust, absorb the core lessons, then move forward as a leader who is better, stronger and more committed to your organization's success.

- **If you don't have confidence, take action and get it.**

Many female entrepreneurs compare themselves with other successful businesswomen and think “I don't have the confidence they do.” They don't understand that you build the confidence and self-esteem necessary by *taking action* – the confidence comes from the action, not the other way around. As [Brendon Burchard](#), author of the best-selling books [The Millionaire Messenger](#) and [The Charge](#), shared with me, confidence comes from our own will – from our deep conviction that we need to be confident for reasons that are core to our lives, our mission and our values, such as: 1) I have to share my voice in the world, 2) This product needs to be out in the world, 3) I have to do this for family, or 4) I've got to do this because it will change the world.

I thank each of these women for sharing their lessons. Our business world includes many more like them, and it needs many more. Who are the women entrepreneurs you admire, and what are the traits they exemplify? I welcome

your thoughts.

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