



# LESSONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

*Ten of the most successful global entrepreneurs share their stories of business growth and innovation with us*



## *Leila Janah: Samasource*

Born in Buffalo, USA, Janah's built a successful social business based on "microwork", helping people in need, while steadily growing her organisation.

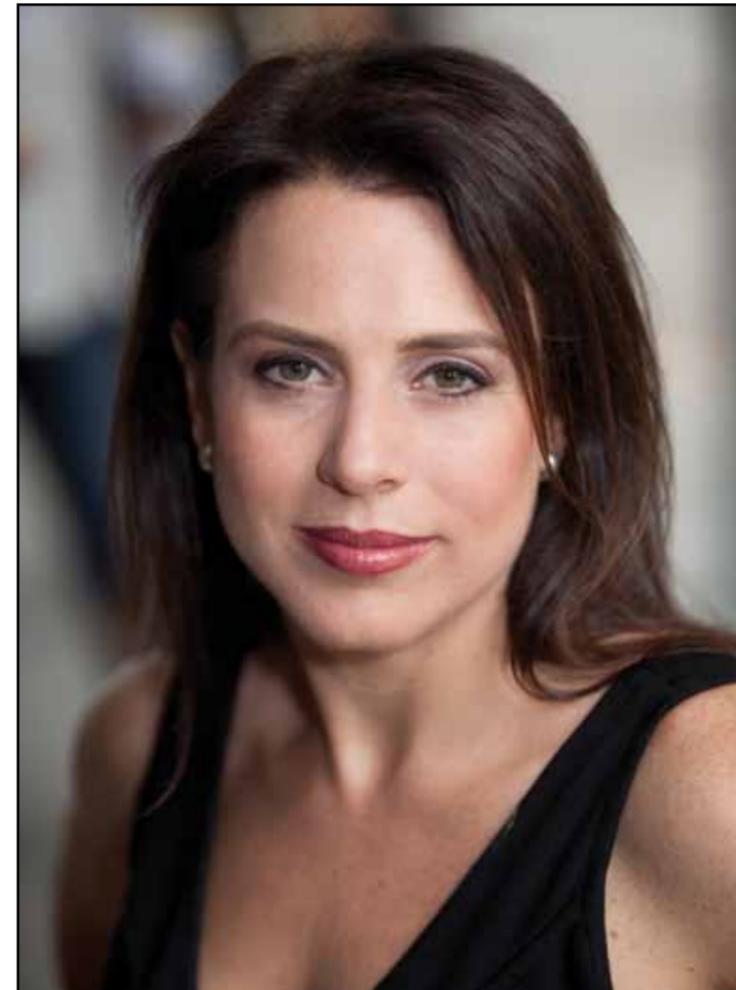
A recipient of the Rainer Arnhold and TEDIndia Fellowships, Janah's a former Visiting Scholar at the Stanford Programme on Global Justice and the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the Australian National University. In addition, she received the 2012 Innovation Award for the Empowerment of Women and Girls from former American Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

Having studied African development at Harvard and then worked for Katzenbach Partners (now Booz & Co) as a Management Consultant, the Silicon Valley entrepreneur started Samasource as a social business, giving disenfranchised women and youth work via the Internet. Starting in San Francisco, sales teams find large-scale data projects (companies battling with online tasks like comment moderation, tagging or transcription) from brands like Google and Microsoft. They then convert these into "microwork" via their technology platform, Samahub, breaking it down into manageable tasks and allotting them to unemployed workers who either possess digital skills or undergo training by Samasource's in-country partners. After a quality assurance process, the completed work is returned to the client.

"It's crushing to witness dramatic disparities in wealth and opportunity. And it's not really Africa versus the USA as much as it's those who draw the winning tickets in the birth lottery versus everyone else. I've seen plenty of poverty in America," says Janah, who spends most of her time commuting between her offices in Nairobi, Kenya and San Francisco. To date, over 2 600 workers have received over \$2 million (about R19 million) in living wages across nine countries and Samasource announced a 400% increase in accounts over 2011, maintaining over 97% client retention. It now anticipates triple-digit growth for 2013.

Janah's current plans include an experiment in crowd-funding surgeries and SamaUsa, a pilot programme funded by the California Endowment to train low-income college students to support themselves through online work.

**SUCCESS PRINCIPLES:** "I subscribe to former American President Benjamin Franklin's virtues: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity and humility."



## *Deborah Calmeyer: Roar Africa*

Zimbabwean-born Calmeyer started Roar Africa, a luxury travel company with four centuries of lineage to SA, in New York, USA in 2005. The 11<sup>th</sup>-generation South African, who studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, currently runs the business from her offices in Manhattan. It specialises in booking east and southern African journeys for mostly American clientele.

During its first year of operation, Roar Africa booked four trips; this past year it booked 70. The revenue, according to Calmeyer, has doubled every year since the inception of the business, despite the economic slowdown. However, she doesn't define success in terms of wealth. "Success to me is the freedom to work when I want, travel when and where I want and do my job from anywhere in the world," she says. She's always connected to her BlackBerry and computer.

Calmeyer admits she's not a natural team-player and relies on her own drive to get the job done. "From the moment I entered the corporate world with the rigid hours, vacation days, etc, I knew I had to do everything possible to get out of it!" she says.

**SUCCESS PRINCIPLE:** "Look presentable and be upbeat and outgoing, because you never know who you'll meet and where that will take you."

## *Laurie Schoeman: Intervention|Green*

New Jersey-born Schoeman started Intervention|Green in 2012 as a firm that develops and builds green infrastructure in New York City. It's currently working with a variety of institutional and governmental stakeholders to develop infrastructural projects and policies. Her former positions have included working at the Brooklyn-based United Nations environmental project, UNHabitat, as well as on community planning initiatives such as erecting greenhouses on the rooftops of buildings across the city.

Schoeman grew up in New Jersey at a time when it was booming. Its subsequent decline into a semi-slum, characterised by violent gang wars, criminals and dilapidated buildings, spurred her to enrol at Smith College, an elite all-women's institution where she studied political science. She consequently started her innovation business and has grossed over \$200 000 (about R1,8 million) through consulting fees in her first year, with projections of that figure tripling by 2016. The business, a multi-disciplinary firm, specialises in the development

and implementation of green infrastructural projects which cultivate environmental benefits, implement cost-saving measures, encourage environmental regulatory compliance and provide environmental education at an institutional level.

Schoeman sees success in terms of gender: "It's gaining support for women's entry into the construction sector as a strategic positioning. In Intervention|Green's first year of operation, we were certified as a New York City women-owned business."



**SUCCESS PRINCIPLE:** "Keep going."



*Susie Hollands: VINGT Paris*

The only property company in the French capital managed by expats, VINGT Paris – owned by Scottish-born Hollands – has helped its clients understand the city, its neighbourhoods and the French way of life for 10 years. Arriving in Paris for what was supposed to be a two-month stay, Hollands chose to remain there and start her dynamic business. “I started with one property in 2003. I now have 80 properties under management and 30 exclusive sales listings ranging from 300 000 to 5 million euros,” she says.

“I saw a need for tailored real estate search companies for international professionals coming to Paris,” she explains. Building on her success, Hollands launched a magazine for expatriates, also called *VINGT Paris*, featuring interviews with Parisians, art, culture, beauty, food and lifestyle. “It’s a far cry from the fluffy or the clichéd; this is the real Paris,” she says. Having studied history at Stirling University in Scotland and being a Francophile since an early age, she believes she’s following her destiny in her career.

**SUCCESS PRINCIPLE:** “In a crowded marketplace, creating a strong brand with a great reputation that regularly takes business away from household names like Christie’s and Sotheby’s is my greatest source of pride.”

*Mayara Campos and Tahiana D’Egmont: UniPay*

Campos, co-founder of UniPay, says she “fell in love with payments” while working as a Product Director in social games. “I realised many people wanted to spend money on virtual goods, but they couldn’t, because they had no credit card,” she recalls.

This inspired her and fellow UniPay founders D’Egmont and Sergio Costa to take stock of trends: “We saw an opportunity in Brazil to help professionals increase their payment acceptance through their mobile phones or tablets, using UniPay.”

Campos admits, however, that they initially came up against several challenges. Since Brazil’s known to have a risk-averse culture, UniPay struggled to find staff. “We had to show potential employees that we believed in the business and demonstrate how we were going to make it succeed.” Fortunately, with Brazil’s mobile market “rising like crazy” (Campos estimates the mobile payment market to be worth over \$6,6 million – about R62 million), they eventually managed to convince others of UniPay’s potential.

Campos believes that in the current global economic and social conditions, the time’s ripe for entrepreneurs. “The success of start-ups like Google and Facebook has shown people, and especially investors, that entrepreneurs can make it happen,” she says.

However, she adds that they must be able to manage crises, acknowledge their own faults and surround themselves with people they trust. “And love what you do, so that you’re motivated to work towards your goals.”

D’Egmont – who has previous experience of both business start-ups and the payments market – is realistic about the challenges facing entrepreneurs. “As a start-up owner, you need to take risks. In Brazil, it’s easy to get a well-paying, stable job, so it’s difficult to get other people to accept your risks and understand what you’re doing. I overcame this by having a clear view of what I wanted to achieve and knowing I could build something big.”

Focusing on this goal is also useful when she tries to achieve a work-home balance. “I remind myself that I need time for myself to stay healthy. If I’m not on top of my game, the work won’t get done. It helps to have a hobby outside of business.”



**SUCCESS PRINCIPLES:** “Have respect for those around you, from co-founders to investors, employees and customers. These are the people who really create your success. Working hard is also essential, as is being willing to learn more in our fast-changing environment,” says D’Egmont.



*Cjin Cheng: Cubie Messenger*

Taiwanese-born Cheng is no stranger to the world of entrepreneurialism: Cubie Messenger – “a free, fun mobile messenger allowing users to draw and chat on Android and iPhone” – is, in fact, her third start-up. The first two are also web and mobile Internet-related.

Her husband is MD of all three ventures. The Chengs devote all their time to their businesses, while parenting their four-year-old daughter – a challenging occupation, given the unpredictable nature of start-ups. Cheng reveals that in 2004, during the early days of the first business, the couple battled to stay afloat financially. “However, we just kept going, analysed the user data and feedbacks and worked to improve the service for others.”

With Cubie, Cheng appears to have got the mix just right: since its launch in March 2012, it’s been the fastest-growing of her businesses, with more than seven million downloads from users in Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan and Saudi Arabia. The app has also been featured on Google Play, which has attracted users from the USA and Latin America.

**SUCCESS PRINCIPLE:** “The messenger app is becoming an increasingly competitive area. There’s lots for us to learn and we’re just a small team of 11, but we try to provide the most fun for our users.”

*Eskom Tips:*

**FIND A MENTOR**

Are you struggling with a business challenge? Not sure how to handle sticky situations? The guidance of an experienced mentor can help you shave years off your business growth simply by learning from their mistakes.

At the Eskom Development Foundation, we know that this kind of advice is invaluable and through the Business Investment Competition, entrants are exposed to some of SA’s top entrepreneurs who can guide small and medium black-owned businesses in the manufacturing, agriculture and trade/services sectors.

*“I REMIND MYSELF THAT I NEED TIME FOR MYSELF TO STAY HEALTHY. IF I’M NOT ON TOP OF MY GAME, THE WORK WON’T GET DONE. IT HELPS TO HAVE A HOBBY OUTSIDE OF BUSINESS.”*

– Tahiana D’Egmont

## Carmen Tal: Moroccanoil

**Are you the sole owner of Moroccanoil?** Moroccanoil is an independently owned company co-founded by myself and my ex-husband in 2006.

**What do each of you do in the business?** At first we were both involved in the creative and financial aspects. Over time, we divided up the responsibilities, with me focusing on the creative side and him involved in the financial side.

**What challenges did you face?** The biggest one was at the very beginning, when many negative people told us not to pursue this venture because the market was already saturated with products. Even if you're confident that you have something amazing, naysayers can make you feel insecure. I'm very stubborn, though, and believed we had to continue.

**What management roles did you hold in the fashion industry prior to having your children?** I had a very successful career working at Ogilvy, a prestigious retailer. I ended my career in fashion managing the flagship store for Liz Claiborne. Fashion, hair and make-up go hand in hand. You can apply the same principles because they complement each other so well.

My background in haircare helped prepare me for my current role, as I was a salon owner in Montreal, Canada, for about two years, where I learnt a lot about different brands, the industry and the importance of using top-quality products.

**When you initially bought the fledgling Israeli company that imported argan oil from Morocco, what were your plans for it?**

The company we purchased was quite small at the time, but I was more concerned about building the brand than about expanding.

**How did you eventually go about expanding your product range?** We've been very lucky to have exceptional people working in the field who bring us the key information we need to expand the product range. Together with them, as well as fantastic chemists in Israel, we develop products that will really make a difference to consumers.

**How do you achieve a work-home balance?** It's essential to have the right support, both professionally and personally. I've had an amazing lady working for me at home for the past 18 years, while at work I have a hard-working team who keep things moving forward.

**You've said you rely greatly on intuition in running your business. Do you think this is a talent inherent in women entrepreneurs?** I've certainly met men in my life who are intuitive too, but I do believe it's more common among women. Intuition should be utilised by every human being – it's important to trust your instincts.

**SUCCESS PRINCIPLE:** "Live your brand every day."

*"EVEN IF YOU'RE CONFIDENT THAT YOU HAVE SOMETHING AMAZING, NAYSAYERS CAN MAKE YOU FEEL INSECURE. I'M VERY STUBBORN, THOUGH, AND BELIEVED WE HAD TO CONTINUE"*

– Carmen Tal



## Magatte Wade: Adina World Beat Beverages and Tiossan Tribe

Not many people would have the courage to take on a giant like Coca-Cola, but Senegalese-born Wade is one of them. A serial entrepreneur with a penchant for turning African-inspired products into global phenomena, she first conceived of the company during a visit back to Senegal, where she discovered her compatriots had abandoned their traditional drink, bissap, made from the hibiscus plant, in favour of Western beverages.

In 2004 she launched Adina World Beat Beverages, using venture capital funding of more than \$30 million (about R280 million).

"I quit a very comfortable job to do that, although people warned me that I knew nothing about beverages," she recalls.

Wade was forced to step down from her multi-million-dollar beverage company, but in 2010 she was again inspired by her home continent and launched Tiossan, a sustainable line of beauty products. She created a supply chain for these from scratch in Senegal, ensuring she was empowering marginalised African women. This passion led to her being named one of the Young Global Leaders of 2011 by the World Economic Forum. She's based in San Francisco, USA.

**SUCCESS PRINCIPLE:** "I'm driven by my sense of urgency and my awareness that parts of African history are being lost because my people don't feel their culture is worthy enough."

## Divine Ndhlukula: Securicor

When it comes to security, Ndhlukula has Zimbabwe protected – and if she has her way, she'll soon be safeguarding assets in Botswana, Malawi and Zambia too. Appalled by the shoddy service and incompetence in the security industry, she founded the company 14 years ago from her home, with four employees. Securico offers a wide range of services, including qualified guards, cash transit, risk assessment, alarms and monitoring in 15 offices around Zimbabwe. It now has 3 600 employees.

"I saw a gap in the industry. Companies weren't living up to the needs of the clients. The industry was notorious for wildcat strikes and guards were perceived as the lowest-paid workers in any sector. I wanted to create a niche in which people could carve out a career and people were a central feature of the vision," she says.

Ndhlukula, who holds an MBA from Midlands State University, has now gained recognition internationally. Women's empowerment is one of her passions and she's personally mentored numerous female employees at all levels.

"Some of the girls I started with are now in management because I mentored them. I deliberately targeted widows and single mothers, in order to give them the opportunity to earn more and support their children. Securico employs 900 women, while 68% of our board's comprised of females, middle management is 38% female and 54% of line supervision staff are female too," she says.

