



Patrycja Pielaszek, entrepreneur and founder of several start-ups, knows what it takes to set up a business.

As the daughter of an entrepreneurial visionary and pragmatist mother who grew up in two cultures, Patrycja has developed a strong personality along the way. She has founded several companies and helped even more get off the ground. Ask what else she does and she finds it difficult to answer, finally admitting that advising on start-ups, scale-ups and company transformations is her main focus.

A “digital wing woman” as she calls herself, she translates between the analogue and digital worlds: “So I’m not only digitising the old world, but humanising the new world at the same time.” Patrycja is a mentor rather than a traditional business coach. The difference? She doesn’t follow a set procedure. Her mentorship does not develop standard business cases or plans, focussing instead on progressive methods that fit well with developing an individual enterprise. She works on so many projects at the same time that she can’t count them on her fingers. Yet anyone expecting her to be stressed or overwhelmed couldn’t be more wrong. Talking to Patrycja means leaning back and listening. She has a solution for every problem, an answer to every question. She loves working with start-ups not least because the complex questions quench her thirst for information about innovative products and services but also because she has the chance to intervene in malleable, and

sometimes chaotic structures: “Chaos makes me creative.” However, Patrycja maintains a strict balance between chaos and order: “If you move within only one or other of the two logics, chaos or order, it doesn't spark creativity.” What drives her? Enabling knowledge transfer in all directions, team creativity, learning from each other and constantly improving herself. Originally from a communication and marketing background, she decided to set up her own business early on and has spent her life learning new professions. “Access to knowledge is free, that’s the great thing about it. You can learn nearly everything if you want to.” She absorbs new ideas like a sponge. Her energy is contagious, her openness captivating, and her inquiring mind prompts reflection. As founder of the WeCoCo.io platform, she is particularly committed to innovation processes based on diversity and inclusion – on integrating and making the most of the differences that every employee or stakeholder has to offer. She firmly believes that alongside a better society, this can also achieve better business results and fair opportunities for employees, families, communities and companies. Precisely this attitude of sharing and spreading knowledge rather than keeping it to herself is probably what makes her so successful and has helped her to build a huge community of start-ups and entrepreneurial experts in the widest sense. She and her community are mutually enhancing. The community is organically structured, self-sufficient and promotes individual development.

It is impossible to imagine Patrycja in a conventional job. What she does suits her nature and lets her apply her inquiring mind to developing new project ideas every day. It would be impossible to implement all of them herself, so she is happy to pass them on. It is not about her, it's all about the idea. She wants to teach and learn. Her latest project, Zukunftsbureau Kilchberg, is about creating a local place for people who want to work on their futures: a space for exploring possibilities, receiving feedback and developing creative ideas. And because she is an expert and enjoys sharing her knowledge, she uses her iCON10T blog and her community of business change makers, mavericks and other architects of the future to pass on what she knows. Patrycja also had answers to many of the questions that cropped up regularly during the interviews, some of which had remained unanswered.

Where do you begin if you want to found a start-up? Many founders don't plan to form a start-up, but are faced with a problem at work or in daily life, to which there is no satisfactory solution. Founding of a company is therefore often triggered by the idea for solving a problem, and the fire that keeps the company going is the passion for the problem. After the idea comes a lot of hard work: businesses don't build themselves. Founding a company requires solid groundwork, and you have to accept that some aspects cannot be planned or foreseen, so things may go slightly wrong. Success comes with the ability to adapt to new situations.

Is there a blueprint you can use to found a start-up? The first step is detailed market research on the product or service, potential customers and markets in the sector you want to do business in. Examining the demography of potential customers is an important basis for drawing up a business plan. What share of the population do they represent? Where do they live? You can get answers to questions like these from surveys and tests with user groups. A lot of statistical data is also available for free online. Before starting to sell a product or service, it's usually advisable to develop a brand. That involves ensuring you have a group of relevant people who want to buy the product as soon as you open for business.

What question should you ask yourself before starting a business? You should always ask yourself: Why am I doing this? And the next question: Is this reason strong

enough to keep me motivated for the next few years?

If you have a revolutionary idea that will change the world, or you do something so well that it would be foolish not to make money with it, that starts to answer the why question. But it's not enough to make you successful.

You still need to answer the following questions:

1. Am I passionate about my idea?
2. Does my idea already exist?
3. If not, why not?
4. Do I have what it takes to set up a business?
5. I am willing to put my personal life on hold?
6. Is this the right time for me, or is my focus elsewhere?
7. What will I live on for the next few years?
8. Do I know the right people, do I have a network?
9. Do I really want to do this? Really? TRULY?

Are there qualities that make a successful entrepreneur? I've helped found many companies in one way or another. The success of a company does not hinge entirely on the founder's personality, but certain qualities do help when it comes to making a start-up successful. Any woman who is a successful entrepreneur usually has the following qualities:

- willingness to take a risk, because founding a company is always a risky business.
- The ability to cope with pressure and uncertainty.

- The ability to accept criticism – or even better: an addiction to criticism. Honest criticism is hard to come by. Friends, family and even strangers tend to be nice rather than honest. Yet only honest criticism prompts reflection and helps you to move on.
- Curiosity: To be successful, you need to be a fan of lifelong learning, which is much easier if you are inquisitive by nature. As soon as you stop being curious, and think that you know everything about your subject, you don't stay up to date and it's all over.
- Connectivity: what men learn from an early age, we usually lack as women. We need to learn to use our contacts, and also have the courage to say we need something from them. Tijen Onaran describes this in her book *The Network Bible* in very practical terms.

There seem to be far more start-ups today than ten years ago. Why is that? You're right, the start-up scene in Switzerland is booming. Years ago, it became clear that corporate culture was changing, something closely linked to rapid societal change. The new generation wants more than a job; young people are looking for a meaningful way to develop their potential. That is why so many start-ups address topics included in the UN sustainability development goals and want to do their part for a sustainable future as a global community. Large corporate structures are too rigid to adapt quickly and hamper change. The age of the small enterprise has dawned, and global corporations cannot keep up with its pace. A lot of

major companies actually found start-ups themselves. They opt for intrapreneurship to achieve the agility, willingness to experiment and customer affinity required of them today.

What is your advice to aspiring founders with ideas, but no money? Look for outside capital by taking part in start-up programmes or competitions for young entrepreneurs. If that is not for you, you can build up a community of people interested in your product and launch a well-planned crowdfunding campaign to produce the first collection of your products or at least a prototype of it. The five most common financing options for start-ups in Switzerland are equity capital, outside capital, business angels, venture capitalists and start-up awards. Unfortunately, there is no road map or standard procedure. If she hasn't got enough capital herself, an entrepreneur will have to fight her way through this jungle of options.

What advice do you have for women who have the vague idea of starting a company? Look for mentors or sparring partners whose work you admire. This can be peer-to-peer or as part of a start-up programme. However, there is also a growing number of initiatives open to all where you can discuss your idea and get helpful feedback. In German-speaking countries, for instance, there are local future centres (Zukunftsbureau.org).

Why do start-ups fail? It is usually due to underfunding, staff not good at their job, a mismatched team, or lack of an end strate-

gy for the company. In the case of female co-founders, start-ups often fail because they are too similar and their skills are not complementary. The best way to evaluate a start-up is by looking at their goals. For this, you need to see the big picture – and every detail in it. If the timing doesn't fit, find out if the right moment has passed. If it has, find a way to equip your business for the future. Monitor trends and check what people have been waiting for. Entrepreneurship is not a destination, it is an adventure.

What advice do you have for people planning to build up a business?

You need to pay attention to four essential areas to make your start-up a success:

1. Founding a company: Which legal form should I choose – how, when and where?
2. Team: How do I put together my team? What is important when recruiting staff?
3. Money: How do I organise my accounting so I have everything under control?
4. Marketing: How do I find customers? How do I find distribution channels?

What is your vision for the start-up scene?

A guide or some kind of seal of quality for the jungle of endless programmes, funding opportunities, training options and so forth would be very helpful. I would like a better framework for promoting female entrepreneurs, more visibility for successful women-led businesses, and also individual role models to encourage other women to be bolder and implement their business ideas. We need more role models and mentors.

What is your vision of work in the future?

Fifteen years ago, the utopia of “new work” was succinctly described by Charles Handy, who said “work in the future is the passion that can pay for itself”. This vision did not seem too distant at the beginning of the twenty-first century: from heteronomy to autonomy, from wage worker to entrepreneur (or intrapreneur). Today's reality is a little different. Although the proportion of the self-employed, the founders, co-workers, project workers, entrepreneurs has risen significantly, the central cultural basis remains salaried work. A variety of working models beyond the nine-to-five model is emerging as a result of the gender shift megatrend, for men too. Demographic change is confronting age barriers in the world of work: there is an increasing demand for the skills of older people. Seeking autonomy and emancipation at work has become a boardroom topic because flexibility and innovative thinking has long become a production factor in a complex global business world. Self-directed work remains a hard, lifelong task. It calls for new cultural techniques: emotional intelligence, communication intelligence, network intelligence and so forth. It forces us to soul search, to probe our inner being, our talents: who are we – and who do we want to be?

How important are mentors to you when you start a business?

I use mentors in my professional and private life. They are incredibly important when starting a business. Mentor and mentee cooperation is sometimes planned, sometimes accidental. Ideally, it is a mutually enriching experience.

For founders, it is a perfect model for not having to go it alone when they set up their company. Experienced entrepreneurs can provide them with inspiration, advice and support. Mentors are often well connected themselves with a proven track record.

How did you discover your passion? I realised very early on that I wanted my own company, but I didn't do anything about it for a long time. Like many others, I also feel the need for security. I had a thousand ideas, but the courage to implement them came late on. People around me were very career-focused and initially I didn't trust myself to go my own way. I don't regret the experience though, because I pass it on to other female entrepreneurs and women keen to give it a try. The decisive spark for my latest start-up was my partner, who had just finished setting up his own company. We were able to support, advise, criticise and praise each other and create a think tank combining different industries to form a small ecosystem. It is precisely this diversity that generates the innovative power new business projects need.

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