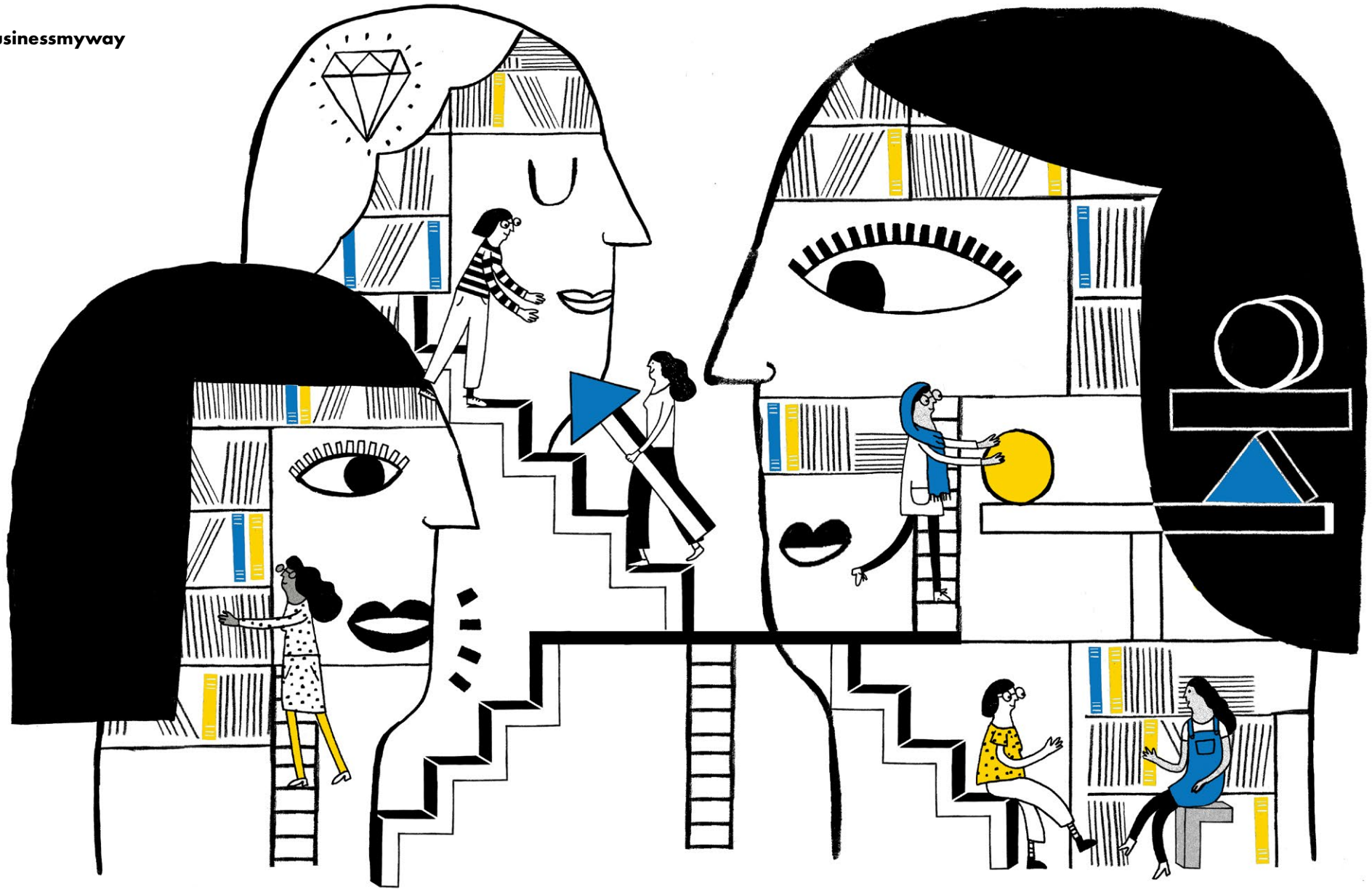


My business my way

A toolkit for helping female entrepreneurs build their success

#mybusinessmyway



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Download here >
nottingham.ac.uk/go/mybusinessmyway

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mybusinessmyway@nottingham.ac.uk



My business my way

Being an entrepreneur means...

...creating pathways that fuel my spirit and my chosen lifestyle.

Anika Vassell

...having an original idea and making it happen.

Emma Britton

...believing in and following my passion, to make a change for the better.

Norma Gregory

...being creative and being market-led – fuelled by passion!

Rebecca Bull

...being focused and having a vision; for how I want to work, what I want to achieve and how I'm going to get there.

Helen Fores

Entrepreneur: a person who sets up a business or businesses, taking on risk in the hope of creating value.

Adapted from the Oxford English Dictionary



This toolkit is for you if you're a woman running your own business. We hope you'll find it useful whatever stage of business you're at; whether just starting out or 10 years into your journey.

We created this toolkit to support you to own your space in the entrepreneurial landscape. This is important for moving away from the idea of having to perform to the 'rules of the game' – which, when you scratch at the surface, suggest a pale, male and stale version of being an entrepreneur.

We've divided the toolkit into 3 sections: My Self, My People and My Success. Each section has been designed so you can reflect on and evaluate your journey so far, find the right people to work with and work out your own definitions of success as a female entrepreneur.

The tools have been created to be used again and again. For example, 'My achievements' can be used weekly (if not daily!), the 'My audiences' tool can be filled in for each of your key audiences and 'My vision and goals' can be revisited over and over as your business evolves.

We don't believe there is a right way to build your business, be an entrepreneur or define success. We believe there is your way.

We'd like to thank all the women who have been part of this toolkit's journey (read about this on page 18).

We all wish this had been created when we first started so please pay it forward to women you know. And let us know how you get on by joining the conversation **#mybusinessmyway**

I am an entrepreneur because...

As a starting point, try writing down your take on what it means to be an entrepreneur. You can use the quotes and the simple definition on the left as inspiration.

Share your definition **#mybusinessmyway**

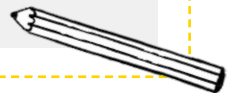
1. My Self

When I was asked for my take on what being an entrepreneur means, rather than it being something I automatically reeled off, I sat back and thought about it. And there is something about the language that is interesting here; that statement would have probably previously put me off but by working through it I was positively reinforcing my ideas into a belief system and reinforcing that I am an entrepreneur.

Amy Phipps



My reflections and doodles



My story

Starting and running a business can be daunting. This tool supports you to map out your story so far, in terms of both your personal and professional life. It calls for you to reflect on your journey and prompts you to highlight your best qualities, life experiences and the skills that you bring to everything you do. If you're struggling to fill this out, ask your friends and loved ones to help.



What are your key skills and talents?	What drives you?	Why did you start your own business?	What does your business offer?	How has your business evolved?
Professional				
Personal	What businesses have you already worked with/ for?		What problems do you solve for your customers and clients?	
What is your proudest achievement?			What positive things do people say about you/ your business?	

My achievements

We all have thoughts that can hold us back and put the brakes on what we think we can achieve. These are called self-limiting beliefs or even 'mind monkeys'. Examples of these might be 'I'm not good enough', 'No-one will want to work with me' or 'If I try I'll fail'. These mind monkeys can catch us out at any time - whether we're just starting out or a number of years in. One way to manage them is to spend time every day, week or month (we'd recommend daily!) writing down what you've achieved in your business. This will help you recognise that you are good enough, you are making progress and mistakes you may make along the way are all part of the journey.

Write down something new you've tried this week

Write down a big picture goal for your future!

Write down 3 things to celebrate

1

2

3

Reflect on what you've learnt from these achievements

My values

Your values come from an understanding of what is important to you in life. They're a set of principles or behaviours – unique to you - that guide everything you do. Taking the time to understand your values and to know why they're important will fuel your confidence and resilience as you develop your business. They'll also help you to build your brand and inform how you describe yourself to your key audiences.

[View possible values >](#)

Value 1	Value 2	Value 3
↓	↓	↓
Why is this important to you and your business?	Why is this important to you and your business?	Why is this important to you and your business?
↓	↓	↓
How do you bring this to life in your business?	How do you bring this to life in your business?	How do you bring this to life in your business?

2.

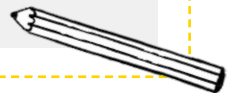
My People

I never realised how many networking events are out there and that networking can be something so supportive and nurturing, and full of free advice and knowledge. I always thought it was 'suits on', have lots of business cards and that everyone was going to be really patronising or judgemental.

Hana Glover



My reflections and doodles



My network

Never underestimate the power of one to one connections! This tool asks you to research the kind of places you could go to network online or in person. Looking for inspiration to find your network? Have a search in places like Facebook groups, Eventbrite, Meetup, LinkedIn groups and Twitter chats.

Networking is great for approaching people you feel could be ideal customers or influencers who could support your business. But we also know that using networking to build your community without a monetary goal attached is useful too. This way you can build a network of supportive people in a similar situation who will be there for you. And if you don't find the right networking group for you in your area, why not think about starting your own?

[Read this Forbes article >](#)

Where could you go to network either in person or online?

What's your motivation for this network?

Your reflections and follow-ups



My pitch

Being able to summarise your business in a few short sentences will help you when you're introducing yourself at events, online and to prospective clients. This tool helps you nail down what you do, who you help and the value you bring.

It doesn't always come naturally at first, but it's a great way to open conversations and get people excited about what you do.



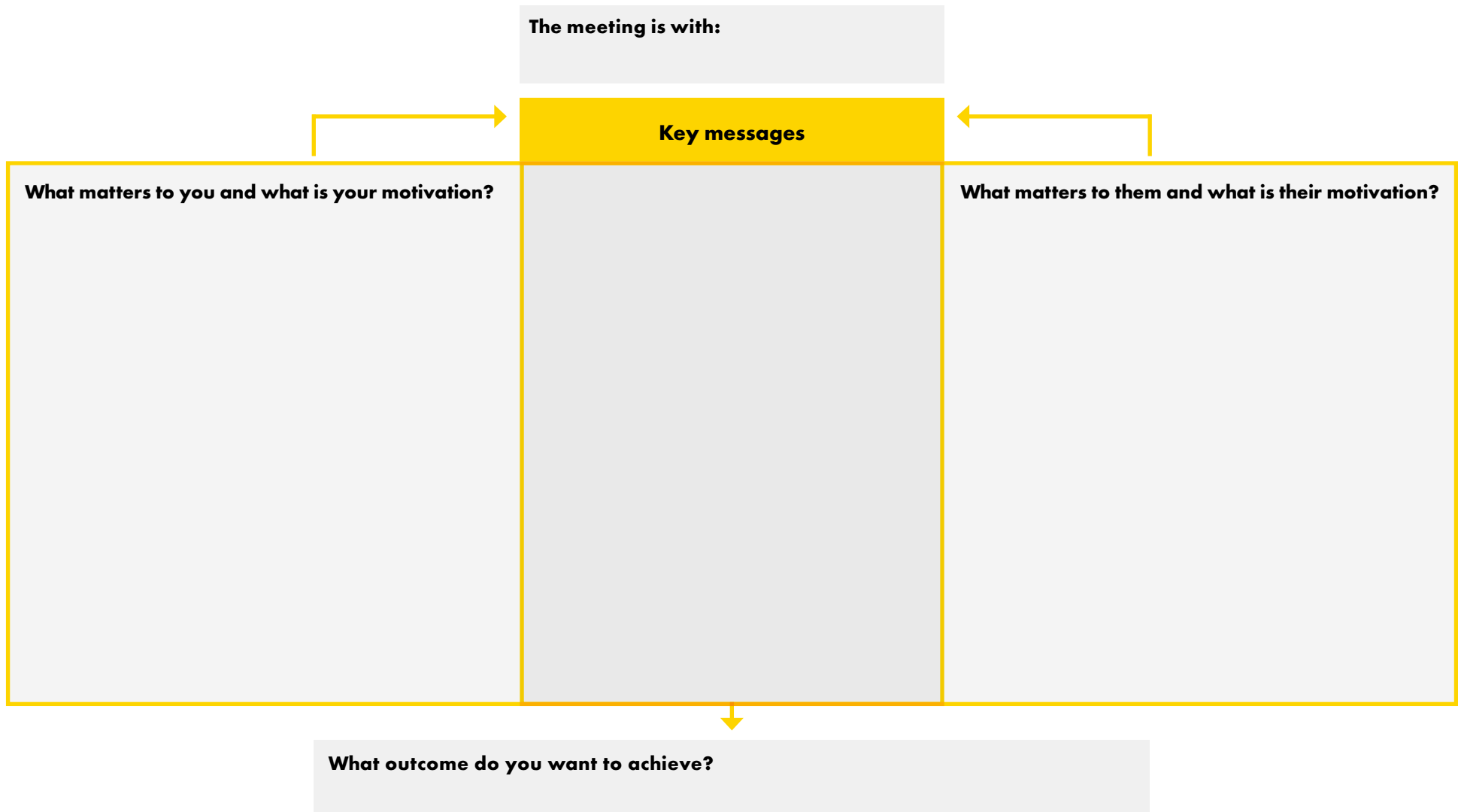
I am...	The problems I solve...	The difference I want to make...

My audiences

With the structure of your pitch in place, you can now think about how to tailor it for meetings with different audiences.

Each time you have a meeting consider what matters to you and think about your motivations, alongside what's important to the person you're meeting, and their motives. You may be passionate about your environmental credentials but your bank manager will want to hear about your robust business plan! Which messages will ensure you stand out while meeting their expectations?

Before key meetings decide what would be the best outcome for you and how you can steer the conversation in the right direction to achieve it. Then, if the meeting doesn't quite go according to plan, reflect on why and work out a new message to try next time.



3.

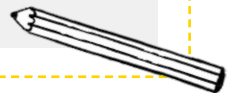
My Success

In the early stages of my business I always thought that I needed to grow the agency, to take on more staff. But actually success for me is running a business where I can pay myself a living and to own a business I'm passionate about and one that I care about. I realised I was striving for things I didn't want - what I really love is the original idea - the original concept.

Anna Gray



My reflections and doodles



My definition of success

Creating your own definition of success is one of the most liberating elements of being an entrepreneur. You can describe in your own language what you aspire to, how you're going to get there and how you'll reflect on everything you're going to learn along the way. This is your time to create your own definition of success; one which fuels your vitality as an entrepreneur.

What does success as an entrepreneur mean to you?

What goals can you put in place to achieve your success?

What steps will you take to achieve your goals?

How will you feel if you achieve your definition of success?

How will you notice and capture everything you are learning?

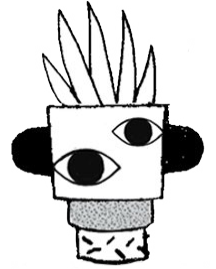
How and with whom will you celebrate your successes?

My business needs

When running your business it's likely you find yourself juggling many things. This tool is great for helping you reflect on what needs to be done to help your business run smoothly and make it a success. Tasks such as accounting, web design, copywriting, technical support and photography are just a few that come to mind!

If you're like most small businesses, you'll be doing all or most of these tasks yourself. But as your business grows, consider where your time is best spent. Use this tool to reflect on what people, software or processes you could put in place so that you can do more of the things you enjoy in your business.

Employing someone to help you with some of the tasks is just one option. You could also find a skills exchange partner or download free (or paid for) software to make the job easier and take pressure away from you.



All the things you need to do...		
Which tasks do you need help with?		What are you good at/ want to learn about?

My vision and goals

Having dreams and knowing where you want your business to be in 3, 6 and 12 months will give you direction and help you create a feasible business strategy. It's not about having a rigid 5 year business plan but having a vision and putting some goals in place is a proven pathway for achieving your version of success. We suggest you make your goals **SMART** – they're more likely to be successful this way. So, make your goals: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound.



3 months	6 months	12 months
Money goal = £	Money goal = £	Money goal = £

Using this toolkit

Investing time in yourself and your business will pay dividends. All too often we're caught up in the 'doing' of our business and forget to pull back and take a fresh look at where we are and where we want to be.

You can use this toolkit on your own, but we know there's a lot to be said for going over things with likeminded people on a similar journey.

So, here are 3 ways you can link-up with others to use this toolkit:

1. Set up a toolkit club (like a book club) either online or in person, where you can meet each month and, for example, go over how your values guide you, how people are responding to your business and check you're each achieving your own version of success.
2. Find an accountability partner so you can support each other through the process of getting established in line with your values, bringing important audiences on board, and maintaining balance in your work-life.
3. Join us at **#mybusinessmyway**
Share your thoughts with others, give us feedback and connect with a wide network of female entrepreneurs. What are you waiting for?



Further resources

Books

The Empowered Entrepreneur

Elizabeth Cairns

Draw a Better Business

Cara Holland

The Multi-Hyphen Method

Emma Gannon

The Thoughtful Leader

Mindy Gibbons-Klein

She Means Business

Carrie Green

Quiet Girls Can Run the World

Rebecca Holman

Work Like a Woman: A manifesto for change

Mary Portas

Little Black Book

Otegha Uwagba

TED Talks

The power of vulnerability

Brene Brown

Your body language may shape who you are

Amy Cuddy

The power of believing that you can improve

Carol Dweck

Women in business: entirely unremarkable

Kirsten Hall

Can we all “have it all”?

Anne-Marie Slaughter



Participants

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www.bluntcrayon.com

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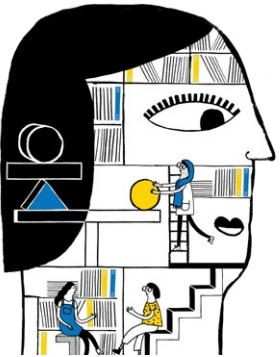
Yvonne Richardson

[y?Marketing](#)

We credit the work of Anna Wray for the illustrations www.annawray.co.uk and Karina Lyburn for the photography www.karinalyburn.co.uk

Also thank you to Samantha Hicks for her valuable research assistance.

About the toolkit



2015 Research Beginnings

In 2015, Isobel, alongside Dr Janine Swail, carried out a piece of research to explore how women who start businesses engage in effort to both feel and seem legitimate as entrepreneurs. Existing research had been biased towards masculinised 'rules of the game' and largely suggests legitimacy strategies and approaches steeped in these norms.



2017 Research Findings

Isobel and Janine's research uncovered some interesting insight into women business founders and entrepreneurial legitimacy:

- **Entrepreneurial Identity Work**
Over time women worked at nurturing their own version of 'entrepreneur' i.e. defined my way
- **Relational Orientation**
Female entrepreneurs were adept at gaining legitimacy from and with "business besties"
- **Personalized Success Criteria**
Beyond having prestigious clients and/or significant profit, feeling legitimate was linked to personal criteria i.e. not accepting compromises to their 'authenticity' or work-life balance.

2018 Research Impact

In 2018 Isobel secured a small budget to build upon her research. Along with Alex, Debbie and Sarah the idea was to co-create a toolkit to fuel confidence, conversation and a sense of community for women who run their own business.

Over the latter half of the year, we hosted workshops with a wide range of female entrepreneurs. These inspiring events advanced our ideas about toolkit content and very much fed into refining the final toolkit.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who spoke so honestly and freely at these workshops, thank you!

The Future

The next steps are just as important. Please join Isobel, Alex, Debbie and Sarah in encouraging this refreshed and inclusive understanding of entrepreneurship.

You can add to the growing number of voices that advocate the rich diversity of what entrepreneurship is and whom it involves.

Join the conversation: **#mybusinessmyway**



About the toolkit



We thank the University of Nottingham for supporting this toolkit through ESRC Impact Accelerator Account and the Impact Leaders Programme funding.

The project team



Isobel is an academic who researches environmental, social and female entrepreneurship to understand identities, authenticity and legitimacy.

Having met Alex, Debbie and Sarah, and realising the value of co-creating knowledge, the toolkit idea was born. Isobel is passionate about carrying out research in partnership with entrepreneurs and about pursuing pathways to have a broader impact beyond academia.



Alexandra started her creative agency in 2014 - allowing her to have creative freedom in design and life.

Having previously worked with larger fashion houses such as Adidas x Stella McCartney and Hugo Boss, she now works on branding, packaging and websites for small fashion start-ups at the beginning of their business journey.

She works with charities and community projects with their printed materials and social media campaigns. Previous clients include Experian and the British Heart Foundation.

lineanddotcreative.com >



Debbie started her entrepreneurial journey in 2013 with no real plan in place.

Today she has supported over 350 businesses get clarity, confidence and more customers. She lectures at the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University on Digital Marketing, podcasts weekly at Women Who Create and co-created the Blue Stockings Society in 2014 with over 1,000 members. She is still working on that business plan.

debbiedoodah.co.uk >



Sarah made the leap from corporate to entrepreneurial life in 2013.

With her first business 'We Are Unstuck', Sarah works with some of the world's leading brands, introducing them to Design Thinking and fuelling their creative confidence to solve the problems that matter to them and their customers. Inspired by the women she's met along the way and recognising the gap that exists for female entrepreneurs, Sarah has this year co-founded 'Work.by Design' - an accelerator for female-founded businesses across the Midlands.

workbydesign.co >