



“Shaping Progress”

Why women in business need International Women's Day



International Women's Day (IWD) on 8 March has been marked by women's groups around the world for over 90 years. IWD's global 2008 theme of 'Shaping Progress' is in honour of a special event 100 years ago, when 15,000 women marched through New York demanding better pay, shorter hours and voting rights.

International Women's Day is a day that inspires women everywhere to achieve their full potential whilst celebrating major achievements in the struggle for equality, justice, and peace. Recognised by the United Nations, some countries even have a national holiday on 8 March!

Significant progress and change has been achieved in society's attitude to women's equality, but despite offering women more choices than they may have had two or three decades ago, this special event is by no means obsolete.

We may have more women in the boardroom and many highly visible female role models in every aspect of our society, but it is easy to forget that women still don't benefit from equal pay nor are they present in equal numbers in business or politics. Worldwide, women receive 30 to 40 per cent less pay than men for the same work; they have less access to education and proper health care and are exposed to higher levels of violence.

Recent research* has also shown that women in this country are still finding it hard to break through the 'glass ceiling' to get positions on the boards of Britain's biggest companies. In fact the number of female CEOs decreased in 2006. Part of the reason may be that many women have an 'inner inhibitor: with success coming at too high a personal price, they shun the boardroom as a consequence.

Where women business owners are concerned, recent research in Scotland* has shown that men are 72% more likely than women to be the owner or manager of an entrepreneurial business over three-and-a-half years old. Although the number of women starting businesses is actually far higher than five years ago, women are still facing barriers that prevent them from achieving long-term success. It is also thought that women are less likely to believe that they have the skills to start a business and that they are more likely to fear failure.

In 2004 Aurora was commissioned by the DTI's Small Business Service to identify the barriers women face and their needs when starting and growing a business. These include having knowledge about finance, gaining access to women-owned business networks and successful women business-owner role models.

The Success Network for women in business was founded in 2005 with the aim to fill a gap between networking and personal & professional development in order to help women progress their business. Success Network not only connects professional and business women but provides a stimulating learning environment, that offers women vital stepping stones to success:

- exchange of information
- peer level support, encouragement and motivation
- knowledge and skills to overcome challenges and barriers in business, and
- personal development to help women achieve their full potential

Success Network is now looking forward to its third celebration of International Women's Day Event in the Thames Valley which this year will be on 5 March. Called “**Networking & Working Together for Success**”, this event will again be packed with motivational learning, inspirational speakers, fun and plenty of opportunities to connect with like minded women. Details are available on www.successnetwork.org.uk/workshops.htm or for further information please contact Ute Wieczorek-King, ute@successnetwork.org.uk or 07729 212299

*Research and figures provided by UN and TUC websites as well as www.internationalwomensday.com