

EIP



International Women's Day 2021: Q&A with Justyna Strzeszynska, founder & CEO of Joii

This year, the International Women's Day theme is 'choose to challenge' with a focus on challenging change to create a gender equal world.

The day marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality, celebrating women's achievements and raising awareness against bias. Throughout the year, we have observed EIP clients who are committed to improving gender equality and today we are celebrating them.

Meet Justyna Strzeszynska

Justyna is the founder and CEO of Joii, the period care company that develops smart solutions and familiar products filled with patented technology. Founded in 2019, the company will launch its products soon.

Prior to starting Joii, Justyna founded Genius Ventures, an angel investment network investing in alternative energy projects.

Hi Justyna. Could you tell us a about your background and what made you want to start Joii?

Hi EIP. My background is in investments, marketing and research. Prior to starting Joii, I founded Genius Ventures, an angel investment network investing in alternative energy projects.

In contrast, my entrepreneurial journey with Joii is actually quite personal. It started out with a more personal need to find better period care solutions. After years of searching, it was apparent that this category lacked the development and innovation it deserved to really cater to every individual need. The category seemed to be full of over promises, over marketing and now, superficially sustainable organic cotton brands. I felt a need to bring real innovation and honest sustainability to this category.

Joii Lab was created initially to research and strategise better solutions but in fact resulted in multiple patent applications and a desire to bring these advancements to market.

What has your journey been like as a female entrepreneur, and do you feel your gender has been a barrier or a positive thing?

I started working on Joii at the beginning of the major women empowerment movements in 2018, therefore I felt incredibly supported not only by my closest friends but also by different communities. Currently there are many varying accelerators and programmes for female entrepreneurs. However, in my opinion, it is still hard for women to be

accepted by all gender programmes as the general perception is that many female led businesses are mainly purpose driven, not commercially driven.

One of the reasons I started my business was to be able to work on my terms and my terms have a lot to do with my feminine side. I wanted to bring a real, tangible improvement to people's lives. I also wanted to implement the 'no asshole rule' and by no means is being an asshole exclusive to men. I wanted my workplace to be toxic-free.

Do you think there are enough female entrepreneurs and investors? If not, what is needed to encourage more women to venture into business?

There are definitely not enough females on both sides of the table. Alison Rose, CEO of NatWest Group, Review of Female Entrepreneurship found that only 13% of senior people on UK investment teams are women, and almost half of investment teams have no women at all. Furthermore, less than 1% of UK venture funding goes to all-female teams.

However this is changing and any aspiring female entrepreneur should know that there is plenty of help and advice out there. I think it is important to say that the entrepreneurial journey starts with you, from following your passion to wanting to change or improve something.

You have to want it enough to keep going and not be discouraged, because there will be many challenges along the road. I think normalising those challenges, normalising failures is extremely important, as there is no entrepreneur who hasn't failed at some point or hasn't been told 'no' or 'that's not going to work'. Personally, I love to read these inspiring stories and watch people coming out of these situations much stronger.

Finally, in celebration of International Women's Day, is there any advice you would give

to aspiring female entrepreneurs?

In the UK and elsewhere there are many networking groups and communities, so if you see a problem and you can think of a solution, you may have an idea for a business. You should sign up to a few of them, surround yourself with other entrepreneurs, listen to their inspiring stories, good and bad ones and see for yourself if this is something you want to pursue. At first this could be just your side hustle.

My advice - start small and eventually you can work on it full time. Second thing is, don't listen to everyone, as there will be plenty of people discouraging you to do it, people not understanding your vision etc., listen to people who have done it themselves and have actual advice to offer.

At EIP, we are committed to diversity and inclusion. We believe in equal opportunity in all areas and we are proud that diversity is a core part of our culture.