

A MEMO FROM Lisa Agasee



» WHEN I OPENED MY CONTACTS BOOK A COUPLE OF MONTHS BACK, AND INVITED FEMALE friends, colleagues and acquaintances to join me for drinks, little did I know how life-changing the evening would prove to be. I was even less prepared for the fact that it would inspire a completely new career path.

Only when I set about compiling the guest list did it occur to me quite how many of my friends and contacts actually run their own businesses. From an art gallery to a new Italian accessory brand, from Ayurvedic beauty products to grown-up colouring books, the range of expertise and creativity on show is really impressive. It was this diversity that gave me the idea to hold a business card prize draw: an added bonus for guests who would see this as yet another way to promote their various ventures.

No sooner had I emailed my guest list with details of the prize-givers than word of mouth began to spread. A further flurry of responses dropped in to my inbox, many of them requesting permission to bring along other professional contacts. The buzz being generated by my event was tangible. It soon dawned on me what a gap in the market there was for this kind of social gathering.

On the evening I found myself playing host to around 100 women who attended The Hospital, an über-stylish private members' club and media haunt in London's Covent Garden. My guests were an upbeat blend of entrepreneurs from the fields of music and media, film and fashion, digital and TV, literature and art, beauty and alternative health, restaurants, PR and even London's first cat café.

As I addressed the throng I joked that with this many talented women in the room we ought to be allowed to run the country for a month. Not only would we manage to fix double the problems in half the time, we would still find time to get our



hair and nails done. The ensuing laughter and applause were music to my ears. This warm and supportive atmosphere was incredibly uplifting. Many guests told me afterwards it was precisely this that made the evening such a success.

I awoke the following morning to a tidal wave of glowing emails and praise-laden

Facebook and Twitter posts, thanking me for having organised such a wonderful event. Some went so far as to say that they now felt inspired to take their businesses to the next level because of it. The question on everyone's lips was when

and where my next event would take place, and it's something that I certainly intend to repeat with an exciting programme of female networking events and workshops throughout the year.

We are all aware of the media's latest great debate about the urgent need to boost female entrepreneurship and what can be done to address the lack of women on the boards of FTSE companies. None of this is for a frivolous purpose. Women in business don't leave their personal attributes at home in order

to succeed in the workplace. We promote and encourage teamwork, and bring balance, reason and overview into creative and business environments. A recent feature in *The Guardian* highlighted the fact that attracting more women into business could prove a significant step to economic growth.

There was also a Procter & Gamble experiment in which women allocated to a series of marketing teams demonstrated clearly the many positives arising from the incorporation of the female element. Not only did output increase across the board, but 'yin-yang' teams were shown to work better together. The female factor is clearly essential for morale and in fact I saw this first-hand the night of my inaugural women's networking evening – let's hear it for the girls!

Having built up an enviable network of contacts as a successful music PR for 20 years at EMI, Sony and as an independent consultant, Lisa Agasee has spent the past 10 years as a lifestyle and business PA and is currently setting up a new venture to connect and support women in business. Contact her on Twitter @1womanworkforce

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