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Khrys Vaughan of ‘In Her Company’: “Greater control over their lives and futures”

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By [Jerome Knyszewski](#), CEO of HeavyShift





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As a part of our series about [“Why We Need More Women Founders”](#), I had the pleasure of interviewing Khrys Vaughan.

Khrys Vaughan is a published author, Multi-passionate Strategist, and Creator of In Her Company, a women's empowerment brand focused on how women Create, Build, and Live. She has served on various boards/committees including SBA/Small Business Week-St. Louis, JCI International, and Women Build/Habitat for Humanity; produced an industry-first webcast, the first Women in Green Technology panel (with Ingrid Vanderveldt as one of the panelists) and created a unique literary group for women seeking to write better fight scenes and take their projects beyond the book. Khrys was recently selected to participate in the Steve Madden/Fearless Fund Get Venture Ready program. And works with multi-passionate mission-driven womenpreneurs to answer 'What's next?' and create a powerful plan to get it.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit more. Can you tell us a bit about your “backstory”? What led you to this particular career path?

I remember being five, listening to my mom and her friends share stories and talk about their lives. One lady mentioned she would no longer be able to do something (what, I don't remember) because her husband's job had changed. Another responded, "Well, you know how that goes. It's the men who do important work,". The other women, including my mom, nodded in agreement, and continued. My mom was a hard worker. Something about this conversation did not seem right. What I took away from it was only men do important things and everything shifted accordingly. I liked who I was even at five years old. I did not want to be a man. I just wanted to do important things, too.

In high school, I discovered I had a natural talent for business and took every course including study halls so I could ask teachers more questions. Afterward, I worked for a temporary agency that only placed me with senior executives and board members, many who mentored me for the duration of my assignments. I rapidly gained experience working within multiple companies and industries. And eventually began sharing my knowledge with smaller business owners facing similar problems. It was years later, after reading *Banker to the Poor* that I switched to working with women only. My vision is for women to become all they were created to be and step into their places. I view using business as a vehicle for good as a way to do so exponentially.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

I visited an antique shop recently and was drawn to a gold and ruby bracelet. My husband later returned and purchased it for me as a gift. Soon after, I learned it was made by female students in 1869 as a gift to Mary Julyan, their teacher, and head of the Royal Female School of Design in Dublin. Mary was one of few women in such a capacity at the time; one of even fewer earning a living from her art. Somehow this bracelet found its way from the wrist of a woman in Ireland, to the wrist of another, centuries later, in the United States who also empowers women. I view it as an example of how our work, and history, carries on.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

My dad was my greatest encourager growing up. I attribute him with my adventurous spirit and strong will. He always encouraged me to make the leap (often literally to my mom's dismay). Most times, I landed safely, and did not need him to catch me. But he was always there in case I did.

I, also, remain thankful to the men who shared their experience and insight all those years ago when I had just entered the business world. I was a 19-year-old temporary with a passion for business, and an agency that placed me on their best assignments. Seeing the inner workings of multiple corporations, coupled with various mentors over the next five (5) years was instrumental in developing my business acumen. As someone who was not an employee, to have had such an experience is priceless.

Is there a particular book that made a significant impact on you? Can you share a story or explain why it resonated with you so much?

Banker to the Poor by 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr. Muhammad Yunus. It totally wrecked the way I did business—in a good way. *Banker to the Poor* (BTTP) tells the story of how Dr. Yunus' spread a loan of 27 USD across 42 families, enough to lift them out of poverty. This led to the founding of Grameen Bank, and Dr. Yunus being recognized as the father of social enterprise and micro-credit. Before reading this book, I had noticed my clients were pleased, but not satisfied. They were experiencing positive results but were not necessarily happier working for themselves than they were for the organizations they had left. And some of the long hours they put in were spent wondering if their work held any significance or mattered beyond their profits. Within the pages of BTTP, I found answers I did not realize I was seeking, and a way to end the battle between work that mattered versus work that paid the bills. *Banker to the Poor* proved business could be used as a vehicle for good. And I gained an understanding of how the nuances of such a business stood to impact lives. I adjusted and began serving women only.

Do you have a favorite "Life Lesson Quote"? Do you have a story about how that was relevant in your life or your work?

Yes. The best advice I received is relevant to life as a whole. It is simply everything changes.

A few years ago, a fellow womenpreneur and I were having a discussion over lunch—where we were, current challenges, how we perceived the journey ahead. When the conversation turned to past decisions, she simply nodded and said, “Everything changes.” We only make decisions with the info we have at the time. We could have made a different decision, but in time that, too, would have changed. And may have turned out worse than what we believe to be the ‘bad decision’ we did make. It is a reminder to not get stuck in could’ve/should’ve/would’ve. But to accept you did the best you could and move on.

How have you used your success to make the world a better place?

I founded In Her Company on the belief great things happen when women gather. But, before this, In Her Company was a weekly radio show featuring diverse women in business. I was surrounded by women just as knowledgeable and credible as their better-known counterparts. Connections and opportunities were being missed because they did not know one another, so I created a platform to call attention to their work. Besides female listeners gaining insight from episodes relevant to their journeys, I held the first Women in Green Technology panel to showcase the wealth of opportunities that existed for women, created several topic-based mini-series for women to better utilize their voice, and more recently, called attention to practices threatening ancient cultures and traditions in Guizhou via the Not Just Tea panel. I enjoy being a catalyst for connections that would otherwise not have been made, and insight not otherwise shared, for both listeners and participants. This is an extension of my work with womenpreneurs. I get to play a role in bringing about solutions that will hopefully long outlast us.

Ok, thank you for that. Let’s now jump to the primary focus of our interview. According to [this EY report](#), only about 20 percent of funded companies have women founders. This reflects great historical progress, but it also shows that more work still has to be done to empower women to create companies. In your opinion and experience what is currently holding back women from founding companies?

Part of what holds women back is perception and access.

We often hear of entrepreneurship in relation to innovation and funding. Someone may have a viable idea for a business, but because they have not explored how to differentiate it in the marketplace, choose not to pursue it. Coinciding with this, a significant number of businesses are lifestyle businesses—companies that exist primarily to provide the founder with income or sustain a particular lifestyle, and do not outlast the founder. These businesses are not fundable. If a woman has dreams of Shark Tank (Incidentally, I interviewed Shark Tank veteran Lori Cheek for our podcast.), she may think if it is not fundable, it is not worth starting.

Regarding access, relationship networks are not sustainable and preclude a wealth of equally worthwhile opportunities. While some VC firms are adding female partners to attract these opportunities (entrepreneurs from underserved populations), the responsibility does not rest solely with female partners. This may be partly responsible for the rise of female-funded VC firms like Fearless Fund (www.Fearless.Fund) that invests in businesses owned by women of color. Fearless Fund equips women from pitch to funding, providing knowledge and insight to better position themselves and businesses to secure needed financing.

Women are starting businesses at twice the national average. Those owned by women of color, four and a half times that. Clearly, women **are** becoming founders, although some are averse to doing so. The question is not what's stopping them, but of access and resources to further develop and sustain them.

Can you share with our readers what you are doing to help empower women to become founders?

Empowering women is more of a lifestyle than career. I have worked with womenpreneurs for the past 20 years. What I have found is that many womenpreneurs show up powerfully in their lives, but still feel they are living beneath their purpose. They are unable to harness their unique skillsets, resulting in gaps in operations and strategy. Experience a lack of clarity that causes them to believe what they want to achieve is unattainable. In reality, it is a lack of structure and not having meaningful workflows, preventing them from moving forward. I do not want my clients grabbing at yet another straw, so my approach is wholistic, favoring more integrated, rather than compartmentalized lives. And begins with

mindset versus business to unlock their ability to dream again, uncover patterns of self-sabotage, so they can get a vision for themselves as great as the one they have for their business.

I, also, am presently conducting a survey of multi-passionate women to gain insight to better harness their unique power and elevate their capabilities. Such women are needed given the complexity of today's issues. If they can find a formula and tools that work for them in a 'choose one' world, some of the solutions within them may actually come to light. And that would be better for all of us.

This might be intuitive to you, but I think it will be helpful to spell this out. Can you share a few reasons why more women should become founders?

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Ok super. Here is the main question of our interview. Can you please share 5 things that can be done or should be done to help empower more women to become founders? If you can, please share an example or story for each.

1. Begin with ourselves. We often hear the statement you can't be what you have not seen, and generally accept this as true. I believe you do not have to see first but be first. 'Be' meaning have courage to act of the amazing gift of imagination God gave you. We do not need all the answers before we begin. The path forward reveals itself as part of the process once we step out. But often we are in our own way, and limit our possibilities before we even begin, by not wanting to dream too big or imagine too wildly. It takes courage to pursue anything, especially when there are no guarantees. And, of course, we want to be successful, but if we fail, so what? That 'failure' may

one day become the critical component that propels us forward.

2. The earlier entrepreneurship is presented as the norm, or viable option, the better. Incorporate age-relevant leadership training and hands-on entrepreneurial experiences early, within and outside the school setting. If done each year, children's natural skills/talents would become more evident, making it easier to nurture them as they continue forward. And the children would gain a stronger sense of self, confidence in their abilities, and gradually the direction they gravitate toward. It would be great to see students leaving junior high or high school as entrepreneurs rather than waiting until college. But regardless of if they did so or not, over the years they will have developed critical thinking, improved the quality of their decision making, self-reliance, and willingness to explore options.
3. Local women business owners (WBOs) intentionally engage high schools and colleges. Bi-monthly half-day workshops, week-long shadow opportunities (i.e., Take Your Daughter to Work week), other quarterly or annual events to interact with the next generation of entrepreneurially minded young women. These would be opportunities for young women to somberly consider their aspirations while hearing firsthand real-life examples that this could be them, too. And an opportunity for participating women business owners to recognize and nurture talent early.
4. Each one incubate one. WBOs with physical locations can consider taking a slightly larger space or carve an area within the existing space they presently have, for an emerging womenpreneur to occupy. The space could be used to test market, a rotation of 30-day pop-up shops, or on a consistent basis without the premature burden of overhead. Emerging womenpreneurs further benefit from the space share via proximity—picking up on business nuances, watching a more experienced WBO at work, and moments for discussion

throughout the day. The experience will enable her to determine business needs more accurately before entering a space of her own, ramp up faster without the premature burden of overhead, and develop an initial customer base, improving her odds of success.

WBOs operating virtually can do the same by identifying opportunities to invite emerging womenpreneurs into that would be beneficial for their development. An example for speakers would be to allow an emerging speaker to introduce and close your talk, or provided it is appropriate, share the stage so she can deliver her powerful three-minute signature talk, and **you** pay her. Small incremental steps can yield powerful results and be a catalyst for greater things if given the chance.

5. Contribute to and continue the new Old Girl's Network. As women business owners, we have the ability to provide opportunities for our daughters through the circles we build with fellow WBOs. Your circle may represent several different industries for your daughter to try her hand at and gain valuable experience. This places us in the position of being able to provide unique opportunities historically only afforded by corporations and those in the Old Boys Network. If the preceding steps have been available to our daughters, they will have grown up seeing women in positions of leadership as the norm. They will have a strong sense of self, confident of their value and purpose, equipped with tools for her life and others, and experience to back it up. In addition to employment opportunities, each of these circles could provide seed capital for these young women (2,000 dollars) to launch their own ventures. Of course, the hope would be for their enterprises to be successful. But the more powerful outcome is who she becomes in the process of doing so.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good for the greatest number of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger.

As women, we are half the world, and therefore bear responsibility for half its solutions. Just as individuals have a circle of friends, I think it would be great for womenpreneurs to form their own circle of businesses, complementary or not,

and select an issue/group that would best benefit from their uniquely pooled experience and/or resources. It could become a customary practice for businesses in these circles to close for two weeks (like Spring break) to execute on this. [Side benefit: If womenpreneurs do this within a same designated period, the collective economic impact of women-owned businesses closing would be noted, as well as metrics tracked from the social good done elsewhere). Projects could differ each year. The goal is not to do something for someone else, but to further facilitate what they can do for themselves, advancing solutions they can retain ownership of. It is foreseeable that some womenpreneur circles will discover they have a certain knack to deliver particular outcomes and hone that. Other circles may develop deeper ties within select communities and commit to taking them from empowerment to solution over the course of several years (i.e., working themselves out of a 'job' before moving on to another area).

We are very blessed that some very prominent names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this if we tag them.

That would be Tiger Woods. I admire his focus, resilience, and ability to foresee and map out a better game each step of the way.

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Multi-Passionate Women Survey: <http://bit.ly/multiwill>


Social media: www.instagram.com/i.khrys

And <http://anchor.fm/InHerCompany>—There will be a new mini-series late Spring called 'Create'

Thank you for these fantastic insights. We greatly appreciate the time you spent on this.

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Jerome Knyszewski, **CEO of HeavyShift**

Jerome Knyszewski (Kenchefski) serves as an advisor to CEOs of Fortune 500 companies as well as entrepreneurs who disrupt their industries. Jerome is also the CEO of HeavyShift, which builds, protects, and repairs the brand and reputation of many well-known celebrities, products and companies.