



DIFFICULT ROADS,
OFTEN LEAD TO
BEAUTIFUL
DESTINATIONS

EMILY FROM MAMATOT

Although I worked in retail whilst at University I've spent the last ten years working in the corporate world for an international professional services firm. However, career disappointment just before maternity leave left me feeling somewhat unmotivated to return to the corporate world. Sadly, and all too often, employers don't provide the flexibility that parents need to allow them to truly fulfil their potential at home and in their careers. It was time for me to take a look at my own priorities and begin planning for the dream of running my own business and working in a flexible way to suit my life as a mama.

The mamatot journey began on a trip to Copenhagen when Hector was just a bump. The independent shops and department stores of Copenhagen were such a revelation, filled with beautiful, contemporary and modern products of the highest quality. I returned to Scotland armed with a list of all the brands and products I'd set my heart on, excited about the internet shopping that lay ahead. Sourcing the products proved much harder than I had first expected..... and the idea for mamatot was born.

Starting a business from scratch has been one of the most interesting and exciting challenges I've undertaken. Learning about web platforms, social media, postage services, business banking and working with independent international brands has been a steep learning curve, but also rewarding and fulfilling. Leaving my secure corporate job was a big decision but I have been absolutely overwhelmed by the love and support of those around me, especially the community of female business owners.

My advice to anyone considering taking the leap would be to follow YOUR heart. There will always be those around you whose advice & guidance casts doubt in your mind. However, if you think it's a great idea then it is likely others will too. It's still important to speak to as many people as you can about their experiences and seek their nuggets of advice but don't aim for perfection. Nothing is ever perfect and it certainly isn't when you start out. It's better to do something rather than nothing.

"If you are always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be".

Maya Angelou

EMMA FROM ERGO LAW

Female business owners are still in a minority, particularly in some of the more traditional industries. In the legal profession, it is still very unusual to find a female owned firm, albeit that female solicitors now outnumber their male colleagues in Scotland. Ergo Law is a boutique law firm specialising in employment law and based in Edinburgh. It was established in January 2016 by two solicitors, Emma Reid and Cathy Donald, with the aim of staking a place for a different type of firm in a traditional legal landscape.

Emma and Cathy saw a gap in the market for a law firm which embraced flexible working and a modern business model. One of the drivers behind setting up the firm was a desire to achieve a better balance between work and life, alongside real career satisfaction. Emma and Cathy have found that, particularly for certain workplace issues such as maternity and pregnancy discrimination, individuals and businesses alike are often keen to instruct a female solicitor. Ergo Law's message is simple - law doesn't need to be dry and distant. Instead, Ergo provides a service which is compassionate and spirited as well as being of the highest professional standard.

KIM FROM TREEHOUSE

I've always wanted my own business and more than that I've always wanted a shop. It's the interaction with people that I love, and the instant feedback on our displays and the stock we carry. There is seriously no better compliment than 'I love your shop'. My background is banking - retail banking. I joined one of the large ones as a graduate and was a branch manager by 23. From there I moved into training and HR. After that I worked for my Dad which gave me the experience and drive to do something myself. BUT could I do it myself? What was my idea? How could it be different than all the rest?

Sophie is my sister (8 years my junior), and having graduated in Retail, was working in London for a famous kid's store. We started to flirt with the idea of doing something ourselves and before long we had a fully developed business plan. We work really well together; she's detailed and I'm always planning the next step, she's creative and I'm analytical, she's cautious and I'm a risk taker. The truth is we often disagree, but we listen to each other and the outcome is usually something in between. It seems to work.

We have learnt so much along the way, especially when it comes to managing people. There is no doubt about it recruiting, training, motivating and engaging a team to deliver the service you and your customers expect is the hardest part of running a business. We currently have 12 members of staff plus us making up a team of 14. Right now, we are all female and many work part-time hours to fit in around being a mum. We have made mistakes in the past, but the important thing is to learn from them, and focus on the now.

Communication is absolute king and we operate a really successful system of a basic comms book that everyone reads at the start of each shift. We will only move forward all together and I believe we have created our own treehouse family, who really care for each other in and out of work.

In a small business there is no fixed role for us or any of our fabulous female team - we are all business planners, merchandisers, buyers, accountants, marketers, website developers, social media directors, sale assistants, the list goes on.

Running our own shop as sisters is more than a career, it is a lifestyle and knowing when to switch off is what I'm working on this year. I wonder what going out for lunch wit

KARINA FROM TURTLE TOTS

I had followed a very traditional route until having kids. School. University. Travel. University again. Employment. That's what everyone did, right? Then I had my first child and I unhappily went back to my full-time job after maternity leave (there was no option to work part-time or flexibly in any way!).

However, after number two came along, my outlook shifted. I decided it was time for change. After a decade of employment using my degrees, I started to think, was this forever? Was this my passion? I enjoyed my job, sure, I loved working with people, but was I passionate enough about it to be away from my children? No! So, what was my passion? Was there a flexible job out there for me that I would love? Surely not.

Starting with my passion. That was easy. Swimming. As a competitive swimmer, lifeguard and swimming teacher at school and university, swimming has always been a massive part of my life. I'd started swimming lessons with my teeny tiny son, eager that he too would share my love of the water and determined that he would experience all the benefits swimming can bring. And I LOVED it. Following my daughter's arrival, I couldn't wait to get her in the pool and make more memories.

So that was it. I knew I had to be in the water. I wanted to share my passion and bring other parents on the journey with me. I did my research and set up Turtle Tots Edinburgh & East Lothian in 2012.

When things really took off I had to think about expanding my team. Finding people who share my passion. This is where I've always been so fortunate. Our team is now made up of 12 wonderful local women. Somehow I've found people who share the same love for teaching babies to swim as me, and who truly understand that every parent and baby that swims with us is so special and deserves to be treated as such. The personal touch and enthusiasm is just so important for us all, and I couldn't do it without them. Each of them bring something special and different to our team, and every one of them is 100% supportive of each other in every way. .

There have been hurdles along the way, like the time when seven of us were pregnant at the same time! Yes, that was a little bit of a juggle... but we made it work and here we are, after 5 years and having taught thousands of babies to swim, still doing what we love every day.