

A WELL-ROUNDED APPROACH TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Sometimes the best ideas come out of necessity.
And so it was with the Lead Entrepreneur facilitated
round tables that are at the heart of
Going for Growth.

WORDS: PAULA FITZSIMONS

It was clear from the beginning that role models were highly influential but ten years ago when the idea for **Going for Growth** was hatched, there simply were not enough successful female entrepreneurs available to an initiative that wished to include at least 60 participants in each six-month cycle. One to one mentoring was clearly not an option. Accordingly, the concept of peer support around a table facilitated by a Lead Entrepreneur was born, with eight Lead Entrepreneurs facilitating 64 participants. Not only did this approach leverage the involvement of a relatively small number of Lead Entrepreneurs but, as each of these was participating on a voluntary basis, the initiative was highly cost effective.

From the completion of the pilot, it became apparent that the round table approach also contained several unexpected positive benefits. It reduced the psychological isolation of the participants and increased their confidence. The entrepreneurial journey is frequently a lonely one. Around the table, participants found likeminded individuals, all of whom shared the same passion for their businesses, were focused on growth goals and frequently shared the same

challenges. Confidence grew from the realisation that the challenges being faced were not confined to an individual. While the businesses were different, the issues were often similar.

The way the six-month cycle was structured, also drew strength from being based on peer support. "Good" peer pressure helped those around the table achieve the goals and milestones that they had set for themselves at the outset. Success was applauded, difficulties shared in a confidential environment and collegiality assisted in the persistence needed to keep focused.

The result was that those who completed the cycle reported increased confidence, a newly found supportive network and a sense of being nearer to achieving growth goals. Besides these positive benefits, the outcomes could also be measured in tangible outcomes — increased sales, new jobs created and a greater number of exporters.

The backbone of the initiative is the Lead Entrepreneurs. Through their involvement, participants can draw on the goodwill of successful entrepreneurs who share their insights and experience with others at an earlier stage of their entrepreneurial journey.



1:
LEAD ENTREPRENEUR OONAGH O'HAGAN WITH HER GROUP THAT RECENTLY COMPLETED CYCLE 10 OF GOING FOR GROWTH.

Back L to R:

Aoife Lawler, The Irish Fairy Door Company; Irene McGrath, Kerona Scientific; Anne McGoldrick, Spectrum Health; Ciara Young, Killary Adventure Company; Ann Chapman, Stonechat Jewellers; Sadie Chowen, The Burren Perfumery; Charlotte Bradshaw, Dylan Bradshaw.

Front Sitting L to R:

Oonagh O'Hagan, Meagher's Pharmacy Group, Lead Entrepreneur and Christine King, Castle Homecare.

2:
ACORNS LEAD ENTREPRENEURS MEET THE PRESIDENT OF IRELAND IN MAY 2018

L to R: Triona MacGiolla Ri, Caroline McEnery, Alison Ritchie, Sabina Higgins, **President Michael D Higgins**, Anne Cusack, Mary B Walsh, Anne Reilly, Deirdre McGlone.



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Going for Growth over the last ten years has assisted over 600 women in achieving their growth aspirations and has been recognised internationally by the EU Commission and the OECD for the excellence of the initiative.

Supported by Enterprise Ireland and KPMG, there will be a new call for candidates for the 11th cycle of Going for Growth in late October. If you are a female owner-manager of a business with strong ambitions for growth and would like to participate in the next cycle, you should register your interest on (goingforgrowth.com) and we will send you out an application form, just as soon as these are available. We expect many more applications than there are places available. But if you don't apply, you certainly cannot be selected!

The peer support approach with round tables facilitated by voluntary Lead Entrepreneurs has also been tested with other cohorts of entrepreneurs and has proven successful.

ACORNS — Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-ups — is now in its fourth year, with the selection process just completed for ACORNS 4. This initiative, supported by

the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, is designed to support early stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland to create new businesses (acorns.ie). The participants are offered a six-month intensive engagement with Lead Entrepreneur facilitated round tables.

The ACORNS Lead Entrepreneurs act on a completely voluntary basis. They are drawn from the Going for Growth Community and have all started and grown businesses in rural Ireland. For those who successfully complete the cycle, this is followed by a phase of further development in which the Lead Entrepreneurs play a key role. Support does not end there, however. Participants are subsequently invited to join the ACORNS community and to continue to be supported through the initiative.

ACORNS has been selected to represent Ireland in the European Enterprise Promotion Awards 2018, Investing in Entrepreneurial Skills. Going for Growth won this award in 2015.

Back for Business is another initiative, which employs the same peer learning approach in facilitated round tables of early stage entrepreneurs. In this instance, the entrepreneurs are made up of returning or returned Irish emigrants. Supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the initiative is designed to assist those returning to Ireland who wish to set up new businesses. The common denominator among this group is time spent out of Ireland.

While away, they have gained very valuable knowledge and skills, which they can bring to their new venture. On returning to Ireland, however, they frequently find that their professional networks have weakened, and their knowledge of the entrepreneurial support eco-system is no longer current. Back for Business is designed to bridge these gaps, while through the peer learning approach strengthen the foundations of their new businesses and position them for development and growth (backforbusiness.com). A review of the pilot just completed indicates that these objectives have been achieved.

And so the Lead Entrepreneur facilitated round tables, which started out as a "needs must", have turned into the backbone of these initiatives. Long may they continue!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paula Fitzsimons is the founder and Managing Director of Fitzsimons Consulting (fitzsimons-consulting.com), which specialises in entrepreneurship and growth. She and her team designed and implemented each of the initiatives described above and have championed the peer learning approach based on Lead Entrepreneur facilitated round tables.

3: MINISTER CIARÁN CANNON AND BACK FOR BUSINESS

Back for Business participants and Lead Entrepreneurs with Minister Ciarán Cannon, Minister for State for the Diaspora, at the celebration in Iveagh House to mark the successful conclusion of the pilot programme.

