

Kate Shepherd on doing Something Different

 By Leigh Andrews

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Kate Shepherd is one of those accomplished individuals who seems to have been born ready to succeed. She's founding owner and creative director of Something Different, a décor and design business in the events industry that she started in a home office when she was just 18, confident at having spotted an unfilled niche in the wedding market.

“ When I took my suggestions to employers of other companies... they laughed me off and were uninterested in modifying business to catch a newmarket. Therefore, I saw a gap, went off and did it myself. ”

This she did in conceptualising and executing wedding and party briefs for clients nationally, with a strong focus on in-house, custom-built items and out-there creative. Since then, the company has doubled in size almost every two years, and is a top leader in its field and a multimillion rand business.

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~ Classic Elegance ~ Stunning image of @weddingconceptssa wedding a few weeks back. We can hardly recognize the venue! Sparkling romantic chandeliers and fairy lights give such a warm glow to this space. #weddings #events #decor #design #interiordesign #creative #bride #bridgetobe #weddingsincapetown #eventdesign #eventdecor #capetown #unique #style #lighting

#designcompany #creativesolution #weddingofmydreams #event #weddingdesign #weddingdecor
#wedding #weddinginspo #twinkling #sparkling #chandeliers #fairylights #crystal #romantic

A post shared by Something Different (@somethingdifferentza) on Aug 1, 2017 at 8:01am PDT

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Shepherd's business prowess has been recognised as a regional entrepreneur of the year finalist for the Business Women's Association of SA or BWASA, and prides herself in promoting not only growth and advancement from a young age but also promotion of women in business, as well as through trainee programmes and learnership opportunities that range in skill from carpenters, to furniture constructors, to electricians, project managers, bookkeepers and graphic designers.

All this before she turned 30. Here, Shepherd shares her experiences, insights and advice as well as a few of the specific challenges females face in the workplace and how to overcome them.

■ ***Let's get right into it: Are enough SA women getting a chance to shine in their industry and shatter that oft-referenced glass ceiling?***

It's very tough to be a leader in any sort of business, I think in our industry – being such a creative one – much more than in others. There are many incredible women making headlines and changing the shape of our industry, but gender equality is always a struggle and the pathway to the top can be much tougher in a male-dominated arena.

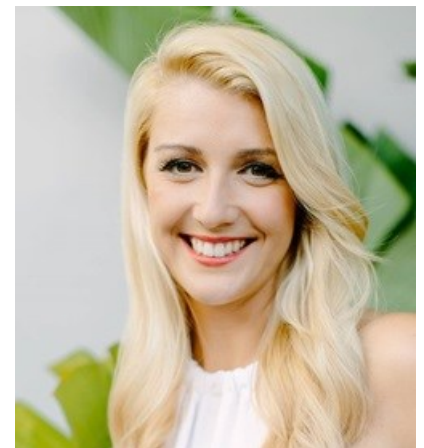
■ ***As a female business leader, what's the most stressful and enjoyable aspect of your workday?***

Dealing with the team is definitely the most tiring and stressful part of a day – managing such vast characters and having to be a leader, a confidant, a therapist, mom and disciplinarian is pretty exhausting. This can also be the most rewarding aspect when they make you proud, represent the company and show their team spirit, making you feel like a proud mom. For me, the most enjoyable part of my day is when I get to be creative, come up with beautiful designs, events or proposals and pitch them to clients. I like the risk and reward in that process.

■ ***List a few of the specific challenges females face in the workplace.***

A pet peeve of mine is that firm women are so quickly called 'bitches' in the workplace. Whereas a man would just be a 'strict boss' or 'kicking butt'. I think it's such a fine balance for women to manage their teams in a way to both inspire them and empathise with them but at the same time have their respect by acting swiftly and firmly when needed.

Another aspect that can be frustrating is that some women can be far too soft as a result. In South Africa, some women have been molycoddled and wrapped in bubble wrap – there's too much protection and they can't behave or react like other employees. It's important to always remain professional at work.



Kate Shepherd, founding owner and creative director of Something Different.

■ ***How can we ensure the next generation results in more empowered females and better gender representation in the creative industries?***

Women need to be raised properly by their parents to start with as all lessons begin at home, and strong women make comfortable, stable leaders. We need to ensure that a culture of giving and lack of entitlement is promoted to avoid arrogant leaders. Then we need these well-balanced and confident women to make sure they push for equality, constantly, in stereotypes, in the workplace and in the life they create for themselves.

■ ***Who's your current female work inspiration – both an older mentor and a youngster who's attracting the spotlight.***

I'm a huge fan of Sheryl Sandberg and have read all her books. Currently, I am reading Carrie Green's [book](#), which is great for starting entrepreneurs and the wonderful BWASA introduced me to some incredible local ladies and talent – many young millennials with all the enthusiasm and energy to boot with really bright careers on the horizon.

Here's hoping we get to promote their success stories soon. [Click here](#) for Shepherd's MyBiz profile and contact her through the following channels for more: [web](#) | [Facebook](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Pinterest](#)

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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