

What if you opted out of the 9-to-5 merry-go-round and created your own empire?

These entrepreneurial badasses tell us how they did it, and reveal how you can do it too.

WRITTEN BY CHELSEA CLARKE & RACHEL DEBLING

Like a BOSS

The daily grind can get exhausting: Endless commutes in bumper-to-bumper traffic, early morning meetings before you've even had a sip of coffee, and constantly having to answer to higher-ups. If you're simply working to pay the bills, and your dedication to health and fitness is relegated to after-work hours and weekends, it's tempting to dream of being your own boss and putting your passion in the driver's seat. These nine female entrepreneurs let us in on how they took the self-employment plunge, turning their skills for wellness into full-blown, money-making careers, and share their secrets to own it in business.



Ashley Conrad

CLUTCH BODYSHOP

Ashley, a personal trainer whose LA-based fitness brand Clutch Bodyshop will be celebrating its 10th anniversary next year, knows that celebrity trainers are a dime a dozen these days. The definition itself is loose, and it's more often than not applied to someone with little more than a selfie stick and a general proximity to a well-known name. "There are too many 'fitness experts' now; people have never been more confused." It's a label Ashley herself has been given by the industry, but that's to be expected when a person has helped some of the most profitable bodies in the business shape their moneymakers.

But instead of seeing the volume of competition as a deterrent, she used it to

her advantage, especially in her early career. As Ashley built an empire of nutrition, fitness, and apparel, she never compromised her original vision for the Clutch Bodyshop brand: to bring the quality and knowledge that her elite clients profit from—and demand—to the masses.

The biggest thing that she hopes her positivity and results-driven brand will do is dispel the myth that in order to make it in the biz, you've got to show skin—and lots of it. "It upsets me that the industry has turned into this space where women are only an image," she says. But the impetus is far closer to home than Hollywood. "The only reason it's happening," she cautions, "is because we are allowing it." Though initially grim, that statement actually holds a powerful message: if women are allowing it, women can also change it. Through Clutch, Ashley's doing her part to put that reality into motion with her company's gender-neutral branding, no-bull advice, and a capable physique that commands respect from men and women alike.

“**ASHLEY'S ADVICE:** First impressions are still as important as they have always been. I want people to walk away better than they did when they first came into my presence.”



CATHY'S ADVICE:
Carve out as much spare time as you can to devote to your true passion until you can replace your income. Today, women can build a home-based business doing anything!

Cathy Savage

CAMP SAVAGE & CATHY SAVAGE COACHING

Savage, a word associated with the fierce and ferocious, also happens to describe the business acumen of Cathy Savage to a T. But when it comes to her personality, she's anything but—her warm, motherly demeanor has won her fans across the continent and the admiration of the cutthroat fitness industry as a whole.

Mama Savage, as her devotees refer to her, is one of the most respected women in the biz for the last “30 freaking years”—and it's easy to see why. The Savage brand employs only a few dozen, but the reach has been felt by tens of thousands of women who have solicited her coaching services and have attended her camps—not to mention the countless others who look to her for online inspiration.

It's not an exaggeration to say she single-handedly thrust the fitness-camp phenomenon into effect, an achievement that many weekend warriors have to thank her for. Still, being the first on the scene comes with its downfalls, namely imitators who aim to ride one's coattails to the top. Cathy fortunately sees this oft-perceived slight, much like the saying goes, as the highest form of flattery. “I consider it a compliment, but I wish that instead of stealing the goods they would be original, as we need unique ideas in the industry.” It's that go-get-'em attitude that has endeared her to so many, and pushed her to become one of the most sought-after mentors in the industry today—and, most likely, for years to come.



LISA'S ADVICE:
There are incredible outlets online. Finding a community that will support you is important for success in business, and also in life.

Lisa Van Ahn

LVA FITNESS & I AM INITIATIVE

When asked about how she got into the sport of kickboxing, Lisa Van Ahn doesn't sugar coat it: “My boyfriend at the time pushed me out of his car, and I landed on the curb of a kickboxing studio.” Taken literally or figuratively, this sentence distinguishes Lisa as someone who can take a hard knock and turn it into opportunity—which, as it turns out, is exactly what she has done throughout her career, a journey that has taken her from Vegas in her early years as a trainer, to her entry in the U.S. National Kickboxing Team, and back to her hometown of Minneapolis where she found purpose and, ultimately, success.

Lisa is proof of the value of a good mentor—or two. Samantha and Beth, the sister duo who owned the studio, introduced Lisa to the sport that would eventually define her, and helped her learn a side of the business that isn't available in any classroom. “I never had any formal business training,” she explains. “I learned almost everything on my feet.” It wasn't long until she went from a few weekly clients, to heading up her own studio.

Conditioning muscles isn't her only M.O.—strengthening hearts is equally as important to this self-proclaimed “daydreamer.” Female empowerment is the merchandise Lisa delivers through her workshops, aptly titled the I Am Initiative, to women and girls of all ages, including Girl Scout troops across the nation. She has even developed a kickass character, the I Am Girl, to help bring this message to the youth of today, and she has noble aspirations of a day in which she uses I Am to help sex-traffic victims.

Lisa cautions that the journey to personal and professional satisfaction isn't always easy. “The first few years of business, I had a bartending job on the side to be able to keep myself afloat.” But as her business grew, she was able to leave behind work that didn't speak to her and focus on the things that did. The payoff for Lisa, as many entrepreneurs will attest, is in the joy of doing something you can be proud of. “I've gained so much clarity in my mission in the world,” she reflects, “and I find motivation and excitement in following this adventure.”

CATHY SAVAGE PHOTO: JASON HALBERT/VISUAL ARTS; LISA VAN AHN PHOTO: DAVID PUENTE



Meghan Telpner

ACADEMY OF CULINARY NUTRITION & THE UNDIET SERIES

In 2006, Meghan learned that the digestive troubles she'd been experiencing were Crohn's disease—it was a diagnosis she would eventually turn into a self-made empire.

Embarking on a path to become a certified holistic nutritionist, not only did Meghan cure her disease (after her doctor's insisted it was incurable), but she also realized she wanted to empower other people to transform their lives through good food and healthy habits. “I didn't want to teach nutrition in a clinic,” says Meghan. “I wanted to do it around a dinner table. That was the inspiration for creating my first cooking class.”

Dinner-table cooking classes inevitably sparked family-style conversations, and motivated Meghan to expand her business to include a blog, and begin offering online courses and programs. “I grew with the demand, and I let my business evolve alongside what the community was asking of me,” she says. Now the author of the *UnDiet* and the *UnDiet Cookbook*, Meghan has also created the Culinary Nutrition Expert program, a course that provides professional certification in culinary nutrition, and reaches a wide audience with certificate-earners in over 25 countries.

MEGHAN TELPNER PHOTO: NIKKI JUMPER; KAREN GAUVREAU PHOTO: AMES PATRICK

MEGHAN'S ADVICE:
Get super clear on what your mission is, why you want to create this business, and who you plan to serve. Say yes to the things that support your mission (that mission is not your bank account).

KAREN'S ADVICE:
Take the initiative to learn something new, and keep up with your industry's trends.

Karen Gauvreau

RIPPED FEMME

In 2014 when Karen was running her personal training business, she would recommend that her female clients stack several supplements, products, and other specific ingredients to achieve their fitness goals. She knew how integral it was to support the female hormonal system, which is entirely unique from that of a man's, but there wasn't a single product on the market made just for women that could compare to what she was after. “None of them have been effectively formulated to work with a woman's body and hormonal system,” Karen says. “By optimizing the female endocrine system, one can optimize her fitness and performance, health, and body composition goals.” Recognizing that need in the industry drove Karen to co-create Ripped Femme, the first female-focused sports supplement brand to integrate the essential property of reinforcing the female hormonal system.

Ripped Femme officially launched in 2016 with the release of two products to the Canadian market, and it's growing fast. With 12 employees across Canada and an increase in availability to ten countries, the company is on track to launch two more products this year. Karen emphasizes the value of being aware of every aspect of the company, from production and sales, to design and athlete sponsorship. “It's crucial to be involved in every department, product, and initiative of the company in this important stage of brand building,” she notes. Karen champions continued learning, saying that even if you don't have a formal education, there are plenty of ways to increase your knowledge on your own. “Expanding your mind is one of the most imperative steps towards empowering yourself and becoming successful in business.”



Sia Cooper

DIARY OF A FIT MOMMY, LLC

Once a nurse making less than 40k per year, Sia's humble blogging roots began as a way to keep herself accountable when her weight reached an unhealthy maximum. Sia posted recipes, progress photos, and workouts, but soon something happened on the blog that she didn't expect: tons of traffic. "I received countless emails from women wanting to venture down the same path," says Sia. "I realized this could lead to something bigger."

After becoming a certified personal trainer and creating a successful line of home-workout guides designed for new moms that weren't ready to get back in the gym, Sia filed for an LLC (qualifying the blog as a limited liability company) and *Diary of a Fit Mommy* became an official business. Now in its second year, her business brings in over eight times the amount of income Sia was earning as a nurse. "My biggest sources of revenue come from e-book sales and through affiliate marketing," she says. "I have zero employees, and I refuse to let anyone else answer emails because I want my followers to have access to my authentic self."

Sia admits that her training as a nurse didn't lend itself to understanding the ins and outs of business marketing, but she credits her success to her tenacity to learn the tricks of the trade, in order to sell her products. Sia's work days are spent writing about health and fitness and cultivating a strong online community from her home office. The only down side? "The Internet never sleeps," she remarks. "Sometimes I feel like I'm constantly plugged in, but that's the trade-off for my passion. I wouldn't change it for anything."



SIA'S ADVICE:
Anything is possible when you work hard. Create your brand, build upon it, and give your followers something worth coming back for.



"It's not hard work—it's heart work."

Ashley Johns *FIERCE FORWARD*

"I remember walking through my life like a zombie. I was just existing, and not really living," recalls Ashley. Anxiety attacks, being overwhelmed at work, and Mexican take-out were daily occurrences in her life, but on New Year's Day in 2009, she decided she had to make a choice: she could continue spiraling downward, or she could claw her way out of the deep, dark hole she was in. It was in that pivotal moment that Ashley chose to Fierce Forward.

From this powerful and personal initiative, Ashley was determined to help others make similar choices as well—to live their best lives, and to do it now. A Facebook page where she posted daily thoughts about choices, fitness, and growth eventually became a quarter-million-dollar per year business where clients could purchase wearable intentions in the form of bracelets (deemed "Armor") with messages from "Courage" and "Strength," to being "Badass" or "Tough as Nails." "I am mindful about the act of being intentional and it's important to me to support

women," says Ashley. "These beads are handmade by women in Africa, and by wearing the Armor, you're supporting them and their communities."

Through her business, Ashley has been able to live and breath her mantra that anything is possible; that opportunities are limitless. "Life is a gift, and we don't know how much time we have here," she says. "It's our duty to not just exist, but to live our fiercest lives possible. It all starts with the choice to begin moving forward. When it gets hard, remember that it's not hard work—it's heart work."

ASHLEY'S ADVICE:
"Write down why you do what you do and look at it every day. When it gets hard, remembering your purpose and passion will get you through."

SIA COOPER PHOTO: MEGHAN PHOTOGRAPHY; ASHLEY JOHNS PHOTO: MHAU ANTHONY



DIANA'S ADVICE:
Write out a business plan, and don't be afraid to have people weigh in on it. There's always someone you can learn something new from."

Diana Goodwin *AQUAMOBILE*

Armed with over a decade of experience in the aquatics industry, an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University in Illinois, and dissatisfying, endless workdays as a management consultant, Diana put together a business plan that would eventually become AquaMobile, a service that brings swim professionals to clients' homes or condo pools. "I started thinking about growth," Diana reflects. "My first market was in Ontario, Canada, but I knew I wanted to expand into the United States."

And expand she did. To date, AquaMobile has provided swim-based services to thousands of clients, and employs approximately 1500 traveling swim instructors across North America. "We're constantly thinking of new ways to keep our staff engaged. We mainly use an online forum where staff can connect, share feedback, and ask questions," says Diana.

For Diana, no two days are the same, and she reveals that if you have a hard time with uncertainty in the workplace, the entrepreneurial life may be a tough one. "The flexibility that being your own boss has is a huge benefit to running your own business, but not knowing what each day will be like can be a challenge," she says. "One email in the morning can change my whole day, no matter what I had planned."

But it's not without constants. Diana says running her business always includes investigating new products, meeting with potential partnerships, strategizing the direction of the company, networking, and creating blog content. "Educating people about water safety is essential to me; you never know who you're reaching. We received an email from parents in India, telling us their child had learned to swim through the help of our online video tutorials. It was incredibly rewarding."

DIANA GOODWIN PHOTO: JONATHAN BELASKI/ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAITURE; JEN RANDO PHOTO: MATT GODFREY/PHOTOGRAPHY

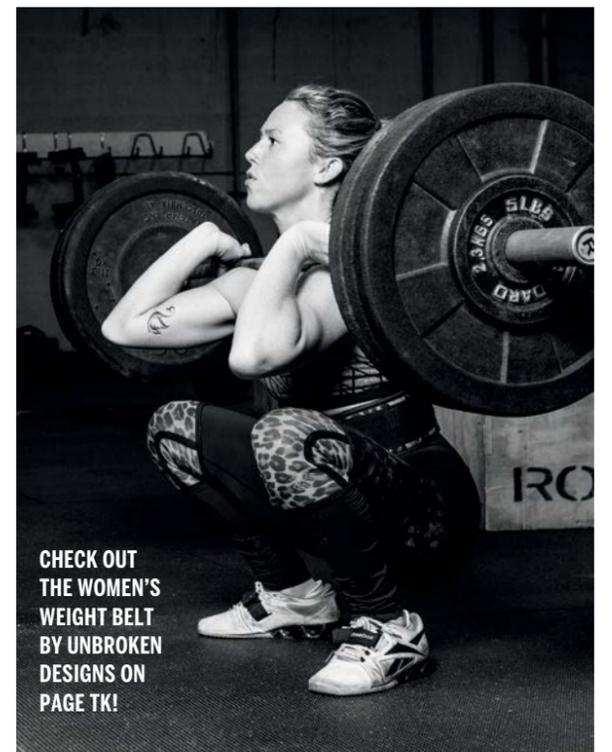
JEN'S ADVICE:
 The difference between business winners and everyone else is the pedestal on which they put their company. Treat your brand like your baby."

Jen Rando

UNBROKEN DESIGNS

Both physically and entrepreneurially speaking, Jen wouldn't be where she is today if she had never tried CrossFit. With the encouragement of her husband, Jen gave the sport a chance and was introduced to a community and sense of motivation, the likes of which she had never experienced before. But she still felt there was something lacking. "I knew pretty early on that I wanted to be a part of this phenomenon, and noticed the glaringly missing female presence in the sport," she recalls. Looking around at her fellow athletes in the local box, she saw strong bodies and wills, but little female representation in the accessories department. That's how in 2011, Unbroken Designs was born.

Jen and her team haven't stopped at flashy, flattering fitness jewelry, although it is a keystone of the brand. Their product line has expanded into training accessories, like weight belts and vests, that offer functionality with a feminine touch. The company's success can be attributed to well-placed sponsorships and methodical partnerships, including those in the Strongman and bodybuilding arenas, and Jen is proud to report that their message has spread far beyond the gym walls. "We have been contacted by domestic abuse victims, recovering addicts, and cancer patients in remission who all have their own personal meaning of what 'unbroken' means to them," she says. These connections have deepened Jen's devotion to these causes and has allowed the brand to form a closer bond with their audience.



CHECK OUT THE WOMEN'S WEIGHT BELT BY UNBROKEN DESIGNS ON PAGE TK!