

## **Inspiring Women: how real women succeed in business**

Michelle Rosenberg (Crimson Publishing, 2007)

This fascinating book might not be on your must-read list. It's probably not on *any* list of books for Christian leaders. Yet I found it absolutely fascinating, very refreshing, and the source of some great insights into what helps women to 'succeed', often against the odds.

Michelle Rosenberg is herself a young entrepreneur who runs her own PR company, Poppy PR. In the book she profiles 26 women whose stories can inspire others, women who are behind some of the UK's best-known brands, including Coffee Republic, Pineapple, Cafedirect, Specsavers and Neil's Yard Remedies.

A friend who has recently researched women in the church as compared to women in business, found that numbers of talented women tend to 'drop out' of both. It was the inflexible hours and lack of scope for the entrepreneurial spirit which prompted many of those in this book to leave careers in the 'corporate' world and start out on their own.

And having done that, 'these mothers, wives, daughters and company leaders prove that women *can* have a life *and* succeed in business on their own terms'. So does the church have something to learn about allowing – even encouraging – its talented younger women to work more flexibly?

The back cover blurb suggests that the book illustrates that these women have succeeded 'through passion and principles, not sacrifice and spinsterhood'. There is certainly lots of passion in this book, and I found the presence of caring and ethical principles striking: for example in the way the women handle staff, and some of the businesses themselves, Cafedirect being the most obvious. Not much spinsterhood; but there *is* lots of sacrifice: different for different women, but including working until 2am, less social life, not seeing as much of their children as they would like to, and risking a great deal of money in starting a business.

I found the story of Liz Jackson, who is a Christian, amazing. Aged 25 she left her job in telemarketing to set up on her own, and founded Great Guns marketing, a multi-million pound telemarketing firm. That would be an achievement in itself for someone without an academic background or an MBA; she was also born with a degenerate eyesight condition and within 3 months of starting the company, was totally blind. Yet the company had 100 staff and 700 clients by the time she was 33.

The book includes direct quotes from the women themselves, and boxes with comments on role models and advice to other entrepreneurs. Another common theme is the need for courage and confidence.

The church needs entrepreneurs. We may call them pioneers, but it's about many of the same things: inspiration, passion, commitment and drive. We may lead in a different environment, but there is much to be learnt from the powerful stories of these women.