

## MARGARET HEFFERNAN-A BUSINESS WOMAN VERSUS A WRITER

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### ABSTRACT

A distinguishable author of *The Naked Truth: a Working Woman's Manifesto about Business and What Really Matters, How She Does It* (published as *Women on Top*) and *Willful Blindness*, Margaret Heffernan etched a remarkable benchmark as a writer as well as a responsible business woman who highlighted the issues surrounding women in the commercial world of business. Margaret Heffernan began her career in television production, building a track record at the BBC before going on to run the film and television producer trade association, IPPA. In the United States, Heffernan became a serial entrepreneur and CEO in the wild early days of web business and was named one of the Internet's Top 100 by Silicon Alley Reporter in 1999. Crowned as the CEO of five businesses, Margaret went on to pen her business experiences and thoughts as she wanted to capture the reality of running companies in the words decorated with similes and metaphors. She not only dusted the dawning facts of the business world but also posed a horizon where business and English literature meet through her astonishing works. The paper tries to portray Margaret Heffernan as an 'authorpreneur', culminating her designations of being an entrepreneur and an author, through a brief study of her works, thus paving the way for a revolution that uplifts women over the global platform.

**KEYWORDS:** Authorpreneur, Entrepreneur, Business Woman, Women Writings, Margaret Heffernan

### INTRODUCTION

Margaret Heffernan is an entrepreneur, Chief Executive and author. She was born in Texas, raised in Holland and educated at Cambridge University. She worked in BBC Radio for five years where she wrote, directed, produced and commissioned dozens of documentaries and dramas. As a television producer, she made documentary films for Timewatch, Arena, and Newsnight. She was one of the producers of *Out of the Doll's House*, the prize-winning documentary series about the history of women in the twentieth century. She designed and executive produced a thirteen part series on *The French Revolution* for the BBC and A&E. The series featured, among others, Alan Rickman, Alfred Molina, Janet Suzman, Simon Callow and Jim Broadbent and introduced both historian Simon Schama and playwright Peter Barnes to British television. She also produced music videos with Virgin Records and the London Chamber Orchestra to raise attention and funds for Unicef's Lebanese fund.

Leaving the BBC, she ran the trade association IPPA, which represented the interests of independent film and television producers and was once described by the Financial Times as "the most formidable lobbying organization in England."

In 1994, she returned to the United States where she worked on public affair campaigns in Massachusetts and with software companies trying to break into multimedia. She developed interactive multimedia products with Peter Lynch, Tom Peters, Standard & Poors and The Learning Company.

She then joined CMGI where she ran, bought and sold leading Internet businesses, serving as Chief Executive Officer for InfoMation Corporation, ZineZone Corporation and iCAST Corporation. She was named one of the Internet's Top 100 by Silicon Alley Reporter in 1999, one of the Top 25 by Streaming Media magazine and one of the Top 100 Media Executives by The Hollywood Reporter. Her "Tear Down the Wall" campaign against AOL won the 2001 Silver SABRE award for public relations.

2011 saw the publication of her third book, *Willful Blindness* (Simon&Schuster in the UK, Bloomsbury in the US and Doubleday in Canada) which was shortlisted for the Financial Times/Goldman Sachs Best Business Book award. She is Visiting Professor of Entrepreneurship at Simmons College in Boston and Executive in Residence at Babson College. She is a Trustee of the London Library and sits on the Council of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and in the UK as well as one the boards of several private companies. She was featured on television in *The Secret Millionaire* and on BBC Radio 4 in *changing the Rules*, which won the 2008 Prowess Media Award. She has had three plays broadcast by the BBC and in 2011 has been awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Bath. She is married with two children. Her new book is due out in 2014.

## **MOST WIDELY HELD WORKS BY MARGARET HEFFERNAN**

### **The Naked Truth**

**The Naked Truth:** *A Working Woman's Manifesto about Business and What Really Matters* was published in 2004, just as issues surrounding women at work started to return to the fore. The book looked at the classic barriers to women's advancement and collected experiences and advice from successful business women who had overcome them. In particular, the book examined women's attitudes to power and how they define and use power differently from men. The book argued that whereas men see power as expressed through personal or organizational dominance, women see power as derived from orchestration. Men express ambition as defined by getting to the top, whereas women see ambition as the ability to live and work as they please. The book concludes by arguing that what women bring to the workplace is distinctive and highly suited to the non-linear complexities of modern business.

### **Women on Top**

*How She Does It* (republished in paperback as *Women On Top*) can be seen as the sequel to *The Naked Truth* insofar as it looks at women who have decided to eschew the struggle to succeed within traditional, male-dominated organizations in favour of running their own companies. The book examines the statistics underlying the growth and outsize success of women-owned businesses to ask: how is it that women achieve so much more when they get so much less in the way of institutional support and funding? This leads to an examination of women's motivation, their neurological and social advantages, and choice of markets, leadership styles, use of networks and advisors and their different approaches to mergers, acquisitions and exits.

As a part of the BBC radio, through interviews with hundreds of women entrepreneurs, Margaret Heffernan discovered that women are more values-oriented, more flexible, and less ego-driven than their male counterparts; as a result they're creating company cultures that are better able to meet the demands of the new economy, which is well reflected in her book where she urged for redefinition of the conservation business strategies. In effect, the book argues that woman's different motivations, thinking and leading styles specifically position them for entrepreneurial success. But much of what makes them succeed are approaches and strategies which men could also emulate if they understood how

successful they are. The book concludes by arguing that women set a particularly high standard for business success which might provide a powerful antidote to some of the failed business cultures of the past.

### **Willful Blindness**

**Willful Blindness:** *Why We Ignore the Obvious at our Peril* was published in 2011. In her latest book, Heffernan argues that the biggest threats and dangers we face are the ones we don't see – not because they're secret or invisible, but because we're wilfully blind. She examines the phenomena and traces its imprint in our private and working lives, and within governments and organizations, and asks: What makes us prefer ignorance? What are we so afraid of? Why do some people see more than others? And how can we change?

Examining examples of willful blindness in the Catholic Church, Nazi Germany, the SEC, Bernard Madoff's investors, BP's safety record, the military in Afghanistan and the dig-eat dog world of subprime mortgage lenders, the book demonstrates how failing to see—or admit to ourselves or our colleagues—the issues and problems in plain sight can ruin private lives and bring down corporations. The book explores how willful blindness develops and then goes on to outline some of the mechanisms, structures and strategies that institutions and individuals can use to combat it. In its wide use of psychological research and examples from history, the book has been compared to work by Malcolm Gladwell and Nassim Nicholas Taleb.

Margaret has put forth a nostalgic approach over the phenomenon of willful blindness, exploring the reasons that individuals and groups are blind to impending personal tragedies, corporate collapses, engineering failures—even crimes against humanity. As she quotes,

“The only consequence of their (employee) silence is that the blind (employer) lead the blind.”<sup>1</sup>

Margret incorporated a strand of ideologies that drive the contemporary business over the road of conservative commercialism. She also dropped the sprinkles of hope for revolution, as she in one way ends,

"This is wilful blindness on a spectacular scale and it would leave us abject with despair, were it not that all around us are individuals who aren't blind. That they can and do see more, and act on what they see, offers a possibility that we can be willfully sighted, too."<sup>2</sup>

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Margaret has set the century for an undefined revolution that has already been concreted in its abstractness. She ruled every world she entered through her wilful vision, wherein she let her work speak her talent. She is identified not by her name, not by her gender but by her work. And this is what is required for implanting gender equality not just in the business world but in every field a woman wishes to enter. Margaret Heffernan, is one of such greatest entrepreneurs who has penned for women in her works tinged with business strategies, but is equally an inspiration to all the budding business women as well as men.

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