

Women & Leadership Australia eNewsletter

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**Inspiring women:
Liesl Capper-Beilby – CEO, Board of
Directors, MyCyberTwin**

"We create the world. We should not sit passively and wait for life or the world to act the way we want it to."

Growing up in a civil war in Zimbabwe, Liesl has successfully built two multimillion dollar IT companies, one of which she listed on the Stock Exchange whilst raising two small children as a single mum.

Liesl's is a seriously remarkable story.



Liesl Capper-Beilby is that rare breed of women who swims where many would sink. Indeed, back when the whole web bubble was bursting and nobody believed in the internet, Liesl carved out a business in search engine technology.

Thinking back to that time, Liesl reflects that "there is a lot of power in IT, and it can be intimidating".

She remembers going through five years of building the company from nothing.

"You're crawling through the desert towards your dreams, and people think they will appear smart and knowledgeable if they tell you 'It will never work', and [tell you] all the things you are doing wrong or supposedly not noticing."

Prior to listing that company on the Stock Exchange, and while in her twenties, Liesl built a multi-national education franchise to 38 branches in four countries. She took the business online, and exited the business successfully via management buyout.

Her latest IT venture is MyCyberTwin. Co-founded in 2005, MyCyberTwin makes virtual people.

As Liesl explains it in plain English, “we are a branch of artificial intelligence called ‘conversational robots’. We give brains to avatars, and these live on websites like National Australia Bank, providing sophisticated customer support.”

Liesl’s training is in education and psychology – not software – something she believes has given her a unique perspective.

Being somewhat of an outsider in IT, Liesl has faced her share of challenges.

“As a woman in a male-dominated industry, at times I’ve been disregarded or not taken seriously,” she explains.

“Just this morning I was in a high-level legal conference call on a contract, and the male attorney kept talking about the changes my male co-workers ‘wanted in’ the contract, without apparently even contemplating that I was the one driving the changes. It happens all the time, and my male colleagues hardly notice it. People also say they will wait for the ‘technical’ person, or I should get someone who ‘knows IT’ as an ‘advisor’.”

Liesl is no stranger to getting stuck into something she believes in.

“I grew up in a civil war in Zimbabwe, and had a wonderful, engrossing and sometime frightening childhood. This taught me that your happiness, and the world around you, is a construct of your mind.”

At one point, whilst protesting Nelson Mandela’s imprisonment in the 1980s, Liesl was in a crowd that was tear-gassed.

On her office wall she has a quote from Mandela, to which she pays great heed: ‘Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure ... You are a child of God, your playing small does not serve the world.’

Of all her achievements, Liesl says “I am particularly proud that I have retained my ethical and altruistic side in a very cut-throat money oriented industry. This has been harder than it may seem, and has even cost me my job before, when I refused to do something I considered unethical.”

Her advice to other women is simple: “Stop being a victim. Seize your inherent power.”

“Don’t worry if people will still like you or will think you are ‘hard’. ... Don’t let other people take credit, be vocal and forceful in stating who you are and what you have done. Women run around DOING things, hoping they will be noticed. Men stroll around schmoozing, and make sure they are noticed even if their role is peripheral.”

Having worked hard to prove herself in a male-dominated industry, Liesl is the first to admit to her share of mistakes.

“If you find yourself working with a man who is incapable of seeing business person first, woman second (you know what I mean!) don’t work with them. I keep breaking this rule, and keep getting burnt,” she reflects.

And she doesn't shy away from advice to other women about working with difficult men.

“If he is your boss, change roles; you will never get ahead. If he works for you, replace him, he will not listen to you, and will make you look bad.”

And yet, despite her strength and ambition, she believes that “women should not compete, but collaborate”.

“We need to be a lot more pro-active in the rights of women, even if we risk being labeled.

“You should also watch yourself closely, as you climb the ladder and work with men more and women less. You may start to subconsciously reflect the attitudes of men around you. Often as women get higher, we get more competitive, and you need to actively guard against this, and be supportive of woman coming after you.”

With great honesty, Liesl confesses her own mistakes.

“I sometimes catch myself making more eye contact with the men around the table, turning to the woman when it comes time to list the action items (as if they are the note-taker not the decision-maker), or paying less attention to a pregnant woman. Shame on me!”

For now, Liesl has one eye on her digital avatars, and one eye on the bigger picture.

“I want to list MyCyberTwin next year, but this time I don't want to work such long hours doing it, so my challenge will be to be brutally efficient about how I spend my work time and direct my thoughts and resources.”

“I also want to start my dreams of schools in disadvantaged communities before I am too old to see the fruits, or my before my soul is too corroded by the business world!”

“I intend to have a positive impact on the poor and oppressed of the world, and I hope when I am old I will be known for that, more than for making money in IT.”

In 2007, Liesl Capper-Beilby was honoured by the Women in Technology organisation, for her groundbreaking efforts in IT, as the recipient of their ‘ICT outstanding achievement’ Optus award. [More on Women in Technology](#)

Learn more about [MyCyberTwin here](#).