

# Fearless

## ELLE'S 11 BASIC LIFE LESSONS WE'D DO WELL TO HEED

### 1. **Women business owners need real life experience:**

You can rote-learn all the accounting and business language in the world but what's going to make you a superb business woman is your ability to use real life experience to help your clients and make great sales offerings.

As Elle pointed out in court, the cardinal rule of perm maintenance is that you're forbidden to wash your hair for 24 hours afterwards, a fact which secured a case-winning admission in cross examination. 'The rules of hair care are simple and finite. Any Cosmo girl would've known.'

Elle used real life knowledge to cross-examine her witness and to discredit her testimony. And she taught as the 'bend and snap' to gain the attention of an admirer. All in a day's work.

So, whether it's that part time job you had in college, the crazy teacher you learned from in high school or what you've gleaned about food presentation from Facebook feeds what you know about life and people is just as, if not more, important as how you learn and apply the rules of your business. You never know when that tabloid magazine you read at the doctor's office or grocery line will spark your next big idea!

Also, we have to use our experience both good and bad in order to know what to do and when to do it. Our experience shapes us and guide us to know how to continue along our journey.

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In her book *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg suggests that we set big goals and be ambitious about figuring it out. In other words, we “Fake it till we make it”. Also, we need others to feel they know us, and that they want to get to know us better. This will help us in most situations.

We need to connect to our prospects and customers/avatar. We have to get to know them, and their main pain points to offer solutions. But most important you have to be authentic and be willing to be transparent in order for others to resonate with your message.

## **2. It helps to think outside the box:**

Don't be a copycat and regurgitate tired old arguments that you think others want to hear. In *Legally Blonde*, when Warner Huntington III makes a comment about legal precedent during a law lecture, Elle takes the opportunity to use her own powers of deduction and forms her own logic, albeit a unique idea for the case being examined.

Logic and critical thinking are essential for higher executive functioning. It takes vision, seeing beyond the books and normal limits of your formal training as well as not being afraid to put your hand up in a conversation and ask questions. Not knowing an answer and seeking to get the answer is the process by which some of the greatest innovations were made. Innovation in the quickly evolving high-tech and online business arena requires adopting the 'New Rich' mentality, if you are going to succeed, by gaining time, flexibility and mobility.

You might be asking yourself why the metaphor of the box is so commonly used. Simple, because it conveys conformity. In past, employees were rewarded for adhering to operational systems, but now, being able to create your own box or better yet, erasing all dividing lines has greater value, as it

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fosters a culture of collaboration and leveraging against other knowledge not already contained.

Unfortunately, not all industries adhere to this paradigm shift in organizational psychology. Take for example the healthcare industry. Healthcare is behind in implementing and leveraging technology [in most cases], customer-centeredness and optimizing timely and cost-effective outcomes. Wendy has long advocated that healthcare providers would do well to explore other industries that could positively impact their operations.

### **3. Don't be afraid to stand out from the crowd:**

Why on earth would we want to be like everyone else? Why would we want to conform to an industry stereotype? Answer – Because it's safe!

What makes the world (and the profession) an interesting place is that we are all different – we all think and work differently (and thank goodness for that!).

So, it might sound like a cliché but don't lose yourself as you begin your business. If, like Elle, the color pink, shopping, shoes and scented paper are your thing, then don't be ashamed – embrace it!

If your favorite thing to do on a weekend is to sit and watch *The Real Housewives* and eat jars of pickles in your undies, that's fine too.

Just because you like quirky or frivolous pant suits or snort when you laugh doesn't negate your intelligence or business skills and you don't have to be serious or two-dimensional. Find a way to combine what you love along with your business and above all keep it real.

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Elle was laughed at during her first law lecture, humiliated in her bunny outfit, rejected by a study group and you know what? She never gave up and never lost her sense of self – she just became more determined to succeed.

Elle's graduation speech, highlights the point that you should always have faith in yourself. Don't try to change yourself to achieve success – just be you and be the best version of 'you' that you can be. You can be either your worst enemy or best friend. The only person standing between you and your goals is yourself.

Have you seen the video called "The lone nut" it is a very inspirational video that starts off with a shirtless man dancing, soon there is a second, and then more and more people join in, making complete fools out of themselves but they were now the norm and no longer "the lone nut?" They started a revolution to where now the individuals not dancing were the outcasts. This is a great example of how we can persist and stand out to be who we are and get others to follow.

Can you think of times where you purposefully stood out and didn't do what was expected? What were the results of that behavior? If positive, did it reinforce you to continue? If negative, did you give up or change?

## **4. Build your client's trust:**

Despite criticism from Callahan and the rest of his team, Elle stayed true to her word and kept Brooke's potentially career-ending alibi confession a secret. Elle shows us how important it is to maintain integrity. It is vital to building trusting relationships. When trust is fostered, value is inherent, and there is no need for a hard sell.

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A few tips to help you enhance your skills to cultivate trust in your relationships.

- A. Respect other's time
- B. Consider individual work styles
- C. Keep commitments
- D. Listen to their pain points and be solution focused
- E. Communicate clearly and openly
- F. Be transparent, if it doesn't work tell them
- G. Under promise and over deliver (or deliver the unexpected)

## **5. Let the doubt of others in your ability to succeed, motivate you.**

Elle's boyfriend Warner broke up with her because she was too "blonde," however she was not going to let this or anything else stop her from getting admitted to Harvard Law. When she arrived at Harvard, she was judged based on her appearance. Being turned away from the smart crowd didn't faze her one bit. She created her own path for success.

In business and life, there will be judges and haters. Let this be your motivator. No matter what you do, there will be people that support you and others that doubt your ability to succeed. You can choose to listen to those skeptics or just hit the "mute" button.

Marie sexton, a well-known fiction author, has a famous quote that goes like this; "You can't control what others think. The only thing you can control is yourself. Some people will look down on you for your choices in life, no matter what they are. You can't do anything about that. The only thing you can do is decide how to live your own life, and to hell with everybody else."

- A. Use affirmations to align and remain positive.
- B. Keep a positive attitude. Negativity spreads fast, so keep it under wraps.

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- C. Hear what the doubters say, listen to it, understand where it may be coming from then dismiss it. It might not be you they are doubting but it may be coming from a place of jealousy, or other complications that you do not need to get yourself entwined in.
- D. Use your failures as a propulsion to get it right the next time. We all learn from what we do. Just figure it out and do it better.
- E. Avoid those Nay Sayers that are constantly at your door.
- F. Surround yourself with people who understand and support what you are doing on a more regular basis.

## **6. Finding a mentor who supports you is vital.**

Professor Stromwell wanted nothing more than to see Elle succeed. When Elle was turned down by Warner and had a moment of weakness, Professor Stromwell told Elle, "If you're going to let one stupid prick ruin your life... you're not the girl I thought you were." We all need these individuals who are going to push us to be better and stronger.

Mentors are people who can and want to help you in your business and life. They will help you build leadership, value, and character. They can be from your own industry or not, they can be the same gender or not, it all depends on what you want to get out of the relationship. Mentoring is about the transfer of wisdom from one to another. The only requirement is that you pick someone that you can learn from. Someone that either has business knowledge you want to learn, or has done something you want to emulate.

According to Nicole Fallon, strong mentorship can provide an advantage for any professional at any career level, but for female

professionals, especially those in leadership positions, a mentor can make all the difference. With the guidance of a trusted mentor, women can learn

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to overcome the internal and external factors that hold them back, and go on to successfully grow in their careers (Nola Hennessy, founder and CEO of Serenidad Consulting)

Criteria to consider when selecting a Mentor

- A. Identify someone you admire and respect
- B. A good active-listener
- C. Truth-teller
- D. Someone, who has different strengths than you
- E. Know your mentoring needs, find someone who can add value
- F. Someone with actual time with you Remember you can have more than one mentor.

## **7. Take your time, learn the dynamics of your industry, don't give up, and learn to be productive.**

Elle showed up to class on the first day with nothing but a pink notebook and fuzzy pen. She had not read the assignments and failed to answer questions when called on. Although she was embarrassed in front of her entire class and kicked out, this was not going to stop someone like Elle Woods. Instead, she got the supplies she needed, read the assignments, and impressed everyone with well-articulated answers in the next class.

We want to spend a bit of time on this topic. As we start to learn more about our new way of doing business, or even in the old way, we still have to look at our productivity and how we can accomplish more and do it faster and more productive.

The Pareto Principle was named after the economist Vilfredo Pareto who found that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by just 20% of the population. In the 1940's Pareto's theory was advanced by Dr. Joseph Juran, an American

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electrical engineer who was widely credited with being the father of quality control. It was Dr. Juran who coined it "The Pareto Principle".

Currently when we talk about the 80/20 rule we are referencing the relationship between input and output. This means that roughly 80% of the effects of what you are doing come from 20% of the causes. Or in other words, 20% of the invested input is responsible for 80% of the results obtained.

Another application of the Pareto principle, constructed by Randy Mayeux, a corporate trainer, is the 96-minute rule, which maintains that knowledge workers should devote themselves to their most important tasks for that time period each day to improve their productivity. This was derived from taking 20% of time from an 8-hour work day (who does that anymore).

In utilizing this rule, workers should avoid multitasking and protect themselves from interruptions and distractions such as phone calls, email or anything else distracting. The first 96 minutes of the work day is considered the more effective, although it does vary from one individual to another.

This rule can significantly help you prioritize things within your business or your life. If you can figure out what 20% of your time produces 80% of your business results so you can spend more time on those activities and less time on others, leaving the rest of your time to do all the other things you want/like to do.

Now this doesn't mean you can just slack off and not do anything else that might create more business, but you want to spend the majority of your time on what makes the most sense to be successful.

We as business leaders often get pulled into many directions, whether it is a new program or venture or helping grow and teach others, we often have to



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stick with our plan to make sure we are continuing to meet our goals.

It was almost as though she was standing in place, nothing appeared to be getting done as she didn't even know where to start. Her normal way of identifying things to get done was to write lists. The list had gotten to be around 50 items that she had to accomplish with probably more that she had forgotten. Knowing that she had to do a lot of those things and really could not completely delegate them or ignore them, she applied this rule and picked out the top 10 things and worked out a plan to accomplish them. Placing less emphasis on the others but continuing to have a plan to complete them either through delegation or holding off till some of the other things were off her plate then placing them higher up on that list.

This not only helped Wendy feel better and more accomplished but allowed her to complete things more rapidly.

We find sometimes that things that end up on our list are just fillers, things that if given the time. Will fall off naturally. If we find ourselves working on things that are not meaningful and spending valuable time when we could be working on something that will be more impactful we feel like we have failed.

The 80/20 rule can apply to your life as well. If you review what you do on a daily basis we bet you will see how this is impacting your life. You spend a higher percentage of your phone calls with a small percentage of your contacts, you spend the biggest chunk of your money on a few things such as mortgage, car payment and you spend your time with a small percentage of people you know and so on. Why can't we all apply this to our core competencies and passions and make our work just as organized?

In a business sense, finding the 80/20 ratios is vital for maximizing performance. You will need to find the products or services that generate the most income/success and drop the rest that only provide marginal results. This way you

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can pick up more of what is benefiting you in your endeavors and get rid of those that are not supporting you. We can use this principle to continue to work on the core skills and leave the other tasks to others that are not as vital to your work. Work hardest on those things that are working hardest for you and your goals and achievements.

In utilizing these principles, you can start to breakdown and analyze your life and your work to see how best to have it all, and be successful at it. Be sure to ask yourself each time you begin focusing on something whether or not it will be in your top 20%.

## 8. **"First impressions are not always correct."**

You know that old saying, "never judge a book by its cover" well there is a great truth in it. At the core of every person that is substance. But you have to be willing to invest in the relationship, in order find it. In the movie, Elle's worst enemy, Vivienne Kensington, eventually became one of her best friends at Harvard. Why because Vivienne and Elle found commonality even though they were different.

What gets tricky is that most people believe that you have "30" seconds to make an impression on another person. In fact, new research is actually saying that it is more like "4" seconds to make the impression and then a total of "30" seconds for it to become ingrained in the other person as an opinion.

Although this may be truth in scientific study, life in community shows us a slightly different reality, particularly among us women. In most cases, we do get an additional chance to make an impression.

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There are those times though, when others already formulate a preconceived belief about us from their own perspective.

Neuroscience research completed at New York University, led by Daniela Schiller reveals that impressions are formulated in the posterior cingular cortex and that the amygdala computes the sensory information that leads to the formulation of first impression. Meaning that information is sorted based upon its personal and subjective importance to you. Therefore, if you want to make a good impression on a person, give them a reason to like, trust and to value you.

So then how do we fix a bad first impression? Depending upon the value of the relationship to you, you ASK for feedback and based upon it, take action to correct the misperceptions and build upon that. All relationships take work, but not all relationships are workable or desirable.

## **9. Fight for what you believe in. Just learn about timing.**

Women, use your intuition, guided by your values and principles, as well as beliefs. Some of these are innate and other learned. But the trick is to anticipate timing.

In the movie, Elle won her court case defending Brooke Wyndham, not because she followed the best defense, but because she followed her gut, which told her that Brooke was innocent and that there was more to her story. Even when all evidence pointed to Brooke's guilt, Elle stuck her ground.

Now in this example things turned out well, but in real life there are other factors to consider, which can ruin a career, cause a relationship or a business to fail—Timing.

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Timing is critical. Do you stand your ground even at the risk of losing? Perhaps, but it depends upon what is at stake of being lost and whether or not that loss makes sense in that particular moment. What should not be a factor is Fear, but all too often we do not put our hand up to speak, because we fear confrontation.

Key - make sure the battle is worth the fight and know the potential outcomes and be okay with all of them. Or find a more opportunistic time to voice your opinion when the stakes are not as high. Keep these points in mind and you will be able to navigate interactions with others well.

Being right is not always as important as being present, and perhaps right at another time.

## **10. Failure is an important part of the plan.**

I'm sure you have heard this before, but we learn more from failure than success. The movie character, Elle certainly demonstrated that to us in a big way. She failed well and in no less than at Harvard.

The most important takeaway from failure, is that when done right, it is the building block for resilience. There will undoubtedly be several failures endured during life. These can either defeat you or strengthen you, so let's choose the latter.

Here are some handy ways to think opportunistically when reflecting on failure:

- A. Self-talk is very impactful, filter out the negativity and find the silver lining and reaffirm it to yourself through positive self-talk
- B. Mistakes are great for learning what not to do next time - refinement
- C. Marginalize mistakes. Don't marginalize yourself because of mistakes

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- D. Make a mistake rather than do nothing at all
- E. Use failure to fuel your next breakthrough
- F. Take the mistake and leverage it to gain mentoring
- G. When you fall, get up and do it better the next time

## **11. Leverage your “soft and fluffy” skills.**

In legally blonde, Elle thrives on creating a vibrant environment wherever she goes. As head of the Delta Nu Sorority, Elle lives with her sorority sisters and head’s many events, organizations, and social gatherings. She seeks connections with those around her and doesn’t leap to judgement. The movie displays how Elle uses the abilities she has naturally in order to be successful. She reads people well and knows how to make people open up.

Not only is Elle open to new experiences, she also brings her personal street smarts to the court room. She doesn’t drop her old way of thinking just to appear professional. Instead, Elle adapts her wit to the situation even when people scoff at her and think she’s not thinking. She has a great talent for forging friendships and proves her loyalty and adamant attitude.

We can all take Elle’s advice and use a little of our soft and fluffy skills to get ahead in our business and life. In many ways, our soft and fluffy skills are part of the uniqueness of our USP, and they encompass our attitudes, habits and how we interact with other people. They are much less tangible than hard or technical skills and unlike hard skills they are harder to learn. But not impossible!



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