

## New female entrepreneurs face a range of challenges

In the second part of a special series looking at Singapore's burgeoning start-up scene, Carmen Yuen of Vertex Ventures gives a personal assessment of some of the potential stumbling blocks faced by wannabe female entrepreneurs.

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SINGAPORE: How many women have contemplated starting a company? What has held us back? After all, the life of any founder is tough but I believe it is tougher for female entrepreneurs.

Why is this?

Part of it may be down to some cold, hard realities about the start-up scene and how that influences perceptions.

A recent article by Shivvy Jervis in the Guardian noted that startups founded by men are 86 per cent more likely to be funded by Venture Capitalists (VCs) and 59 per cent more likely to be



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funded by angel investors compared with their female-founded startups. This is despite startup teams, in some cases, with at least one woman founder performing 63 per cent better than an all-male founding team. One of the reasons is that there aren't enough women in the VC leadership scene to lend investment support or be an advocate for female backed startups.

Awareness of this could be one of the reasons why more women don't take the plunge.

In Singapore, some progress is being made. A quick poll by Female Founders indicated that seven Singapore-based VCs/Angels have funded 27 startups with female founders – two of them have more than 50 per cent of their Singapore-based portfolio founded by females. Those two are Vertex Ventures and LionRock Capital, which have funded the startups based on their business propositions.

There are other potential stumbling blocks for many wannabe female entrepreneurs – aside from issues on the funding front, many women have multiple domestic challenges, being partner/mother/daughter-in-law all rolled into one. Who do kids run to when they have a toothache? Who checks on them when they run a fever at night?

There will be some who outsource to family members, nannies or helpers, but that's not always possible. And even if assistance is available, female entrepreneurs have many plates they need to keep spinning.

I recall having a recent meeting with Mouna Aouri, the founder of Woomentum, which aims to offer help to women entrepreneurs and female-founded startups.

As a very disciplined founder, Mouna has her routine of exercising in the morning before dropping her child off at school. On the morning of our meeting, the routine continued. However, shortly after leaving her child's school, she was called back as her daughter fell ill. We had arranged for the meeting some weeks before, and Mouna respected the time allocated for that. Yet at the same time her heart was heavy with the condition of her child, and the logistical challenge ahead of picking her daughter up, arranging childcare, and making it safely to our meeting.

How does one maintain a cool mind in such a situation? It requires quick thinking. Perhaps women are often bombarded with multiple demands, hence we have subconsciously developed a mental workflow for emergency situations. No doubt, this perpetuates the myth that women are better multi-taskers than men.

In Mouna's case, she was able to quickly have her husband relieve her of the child-minding duties, at least for the morning, to allow her to meet with me. She also had the right frame of mind to hail a taxi instead of stressing behind the wheel. For Mouna, it's the balance that really mattered.

In the case of [Tracy Wong](#), we ought to also consider that one of the reasons she was able to step into the startup world, despite knowing the challenges, was having a supportive husband who shares the child rearing duties.



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High performing women don't exist in a vacuum, after all.

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<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/singapore/new-female-entrepreneurs/2589560.html>