

People Profiles:

MEET THE NETWORKERS

Meeting people and making work and lifestyle connections can be such a pivotal aspect of the expat experience in Hong Kong. Here, we chat with EL readers who devote time to networking organisations that help newcomers find their feet or further their career aspirations.

SHARON MCENEFF, BRITISH

Where are you from, and what brought you to Hong Kong?

I'm from Edinburgh and arrived in Hong Kong in October 2000. My boyfriend at the time closed down his event management company and decided to try and find work in HK as he used to live here during the school holidays. His brother lived here as well, so he had some support here while he looked around for work. I followed him eight months later.

What did networking look like when you arrived? How did women join social and business circles at that time?

When I arrived, it was basically going to the pub after work or meeting people through friends. You could also be part of the Chambers, which would have networking events.

Tell us about the networking organisation you're involved in today. What services does it offer? Who are typical members?

About six years ago, I joined Women Entrepreneurs Network, known as WEN. It's a non-profit support group started in the 1980s for women who own businesses in Hong Kong. WEN organises a range of events focusing on different topics critical to running a business, and it offers a platform for experienced business owners to share their entrepreneurial journey and business advice with less experienced business owners.

Our members are driven, established entrepreneurs running substantial businesses within a range of industries: education and training; coaching and consulting; health and wellbeing; manufacturing and exporting; home and lifestyle; and business support and more.



What's your role at WEN, and what does it entail from day to day?

In June, I took on the position of Chairwoman, which is a two-year role. I have the support of 11 other ladies on the board; between us all, we take on the running and planning of an event over the year. My role is to help promote the membership, sell advertising for our magazine, raise sponsorship, create partnerships and come up with ideas for new topics for our events.

How can people join?

Everyone who owns a business is welcome to join but we focus on businesses that are over three years old. We also welcome new business owners who can find events and mentorship opportunities tailored for them. We have introduced a membership, too, and for only \$600 a year you can receive a discount to our events. These range from "Lunch and Learn" Zoom calls to round-table events and networking drinks.

What advice would you give newcomers to Hong Kong in terms of networking?

I joined a sports club within the first week of arriving 23 years ago and today my circle of friends are all from this group. Many of them still live here and we still all keep in touch on a regular basis. Support groups like WEN are very similar, and they allow you to create great bonds with like-minded women.

Is Hong Kong a good place for a woman entrepreneur or business owner to succeed? What are some of the challenges?

Women tend not to reach out to their network to ask for help when help is needed. Having support groups around can help. Hong Kong has this network, but you do need to take the time to access it.

I've seen a few groups cropping up that support women entrepreneurs, which is great, as I think the biggest challenge is support and how you should be doing things better.



What are you excited about for WEN for the rest of this year and beyond?

As the new Chairwoman, I'm excited about introducing a mentorship programme, and some events that involve getting to know each other's businesses more so we can help promote and support each other – as well as social networking activities such as junk trips. Last year, we ran a very successful gala lunch and will continue this while also announcing a Leading Female Entrepreneur award for a woman who has been in business for a minimum of three years and with sales of more than \$1 million each year.

WEN is still making sure we run events to educate and support entrepreneurs by helping show them solutions to potential problems they might face.

What are a few things you like to do in Hong Kong when you're not working?

I love playing netball, hiking and photography. I have been "Brown Owl" for the Girl Guides in Discovery Bay for the last five years and have been helping Brownies (ages seven to 11) in developing their skills and interests. I think I generally enjoy supporting females and helping them strengthen whatever potential they have.

Quick questions about Hong Kong: what is your favourite ...

Local food? Po Toi (Ming Kee Restaurant) is my absolute favourite; it's the best seafood, and I've had the pleasure of going there from my first weekend of arriving in Hong Kong.

Bar? There are so many to choose from but The Globe has long been a go-to, especially when I worked right next door in my first six years here. And right around the corner, The Quinary does the best gin drinks!

Nature spot? The top of Tiger's Head in Discovery Bay is always one of my favourite places to go, especially when the weather is good. Any mountain will do though!

Thing to do with visitors? Junk trips are usually top of my list; nothing beats taking in the skyline of Hong Kong in the evening or a day on the water amongst the many islands we have.

Nearby holiday destination? Bangkok has been my favourite; I've had so many hockey and netball weekends there with fellow players and it's always been the absolute highlight of my year.