



Woman of the Week: Seema Flower

Registered blind, and running a successful hair salon, award winning business woman Seema Flower talks to Hearst Empowering Women about why she won't let her disability hold her back

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Seema Flower, 46, from Stoke Poges, Buckinghamshire, is an award winning business woman and salon owner, a remarkable achievement given that she has Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) – a hereditary disease of the retina leading to the deterioration of the eye – and is registered blind as a result. Here, she talks to Hearst Empowering Women about coming to terms with her disability, being her own boss and why she will never take no for an answer.

You were only nine when you were diagnosed with RP – how has it affected your attitude to life?

Yes, I was diagnosed when I was a little girl and now I am registered blind. My sight got worse after having my daughter India, now seven, and getting my head around gradually losing my sight was something I had to do. I knew in my heart I had to get out and continue living my life, to make adjustments to make sure that I gave India the best life possible. It was a slow process, but my husband Andrew, 43, was with me every step of the way.

You're an incredibly determined woman, but have there been times when you haven't felt so confident – and how did you handle this?

Despite the hurdles, I always wanted to be my own boss, so twelve years ago I decided to set up my own business, a hair salon in Oxford Circus, ColourNation (ColourNation.com). It appealed to me as I know that having great hair can make every woman feel good about themselves. At the initial stage there was some skepticism from brands that supplied us with the products and services we use in the salon. But I was determined to make it a success and I am lucky to have a wonderful team who are brilliant at what they do.

How do you overcome the day-to-day challenges of running a business?

I'm responsible for the smooth running of the salon, work ethic, welfare of my staff, dealing with problems, researching the latest technical treatments and interviewing new staff. A salon is a people business so having the right team is critical. My team has been built up over the years and has a good caring attitude which benefits myself but also our approach to clients. My spatial awareness is very good and I know when people are near me. I use my intuition and can always sense how people are feeling and when something is wrong.

Has technology also helped you?

Technology has improved since we started in 2003 – I would never have believed that my iPhone would be so indispensable to me today. I use it for almost everything. The voiceover function allows me to listen to emails, texts and audio-books while I use the external Bluetooth keyboard to type emails, documents, texts – and whatsapp has helped me improve my team communications. I can't read print at all now so my phone really makes things more accessible.

It sounds like you have a wonderful support network – what's the most important life lesson you have learnt from another woman?

My older sister Sunita has always given support, encouragement and told me never to give up. If I ever had any doubts about starting my own business she was always there to pick me up and told me to stay strong.

What other brilliant pieces of advice have you been given?

Don't take no for an answer and don't give up trying!

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Tell us what success looks like for you?

Success is being happy, making sure the strategy is right, good communication and having fun along the way! One thing no body knows about me is that I watch 'The Inbetweeners' at night and laugh my head off!

That sounds like a great way to relax! What else helps you to unwind?

I listen to music, meditate and spend time with my daughter India. I also love being pampered (what woman doesn't?!) and the team at the salon are frequently styling my hair. I love it!

On the subject of love, tell us the one thing you know for sure about love...

The longer you're in love, the harder it gets. Commitment, caring and sharing with your partner is so important.

If you could go back in time and tell your teenage-self one thing, what would it be?

I would have come to terms with my disability.

What does empowerment mean to you?

Empowerment is independence, success, being able to make well-informed decisions and being in control of the situation. That is why it is so important for women and people with a disability not be discriminated against and to be treated equally.

What's your 'pay-it-forward' challenge?

I'm an ambassador for the charity RP Fighting Blindness – which raises funds and awareness for people around the world suffering from the same condition as me. So, I challenge women everywhere to donate a small amount via my Just Giving page: <https://www.justgiving.com/colournation>. Thank you!



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