

Cutting edge

Shalene Shaer, 39, hairdresser, marketing director and co-owner of Tanaz Hair, Body and Nails

My recipe for life is perseverance. I wouldn't be where I am today if I hadn't pressed through difficult times.

I believe in managing people as individuals. It's important that we respect and understand each other.

I left school when I was 16 and my parents suggested I go into hairdressing. Once I was working I realised that I loved working with hair and people and making them feel good about themselves. Creativity came first; business came later.

The best advice I've ever received was to never close doors in life. Thirteen years ago I was working as a stylist and wanted to leave. My current business partner, Richard, called me in and gave me the advice. I was made a manager three days later and it set my business life on a new path.

I have learnt to trust my business instincts as well as my personal ones. When I started out Richard trusted my abilities more than I trusted myself. That's why he has always been my mentor.

I love the fact that men are interested in looking after themselves these days. We recently started Tanaz Man and I've noticed men don't need permission to spend money on grooming and looking good. They're free from the issues women impose on themselves.

FIND YOUR OPTIMAL CUSTOMER

One of the many aspects of a thriving business is finding the optimal customer: the ideal customer for your product or service. Standard Bank's Business Banking segment director, Melt van der Spuy, has this advice for us:

* To get the greatest number of potential customers, you must find a gap (for your service/product) in the market.

* Customers must be able to afford and be willing to pay for your service or product.

* An optimal customer is one who will return repeatedly.

Melt also says it is important for you to understand what your customers want and what your competitors are doing. Customers must get value while you get the relevant return. Lastly, your product or service needs to adapt to stay relevant to changing times and consumers' needs.

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The best decision I ever made was to have children.

Having my twin boys, Liaam and Teghan, has enriched me in so many ways. It's been hard to juggle motherhood and a career but it has also had a positive effect on my work.

The hardest lesson I've learnt is to stay true to myself.

I went through a time when I made bad choices. I've come to realise that bad choices make you who you are because you learn from them.

I love the vibrancy of art and colour. I'm not an artist in terms of painting or drawing, but cutting hair is an art form for me.

Success is a matter of opportunity, hard work and being in the right place at the right time.

Chatting to my clients gives me more than an MBA ever could.

I give them the opportunity to treat themselves and in return I'm inspired when they share stories about their lives with me.

I wish more South Africans would look on the bright side.

We are so quick to criticise what is wrong with the country, but don't always work at and recognise the miracle of the transition we've made over the past 11 years.

I pay attention to details. Being a good hairdresser means I have to listen to my clients carefully, understand their needs and be precise about what I give them.

Travelling is my university of life. Seeing how other cultures work teaches me the most valuable life lessons.

Even though my sons are identical twins, they are individuals and I'm looking forward to the journey with them. It is my responsibility to teach them a good value system and one day they will have to measure what success is for them in their own terms, not mine. ■





Marie Claire and Standard Bank are proud to announce a new accolade for SA businesswomen - the Incredible Woman of the Year. Our 12 finalists have all turned their passion into their business and created jobs for others in the process. Meet our fifth finalist

win YOUR VOTE COUNTS

Each month, *Marie Claire* and Standard Bank will nominate an incredible woman who has started her own business. Some might be a one-woman team, others now head up a small empire. Our mission is to acknowledge these 'entrepreneurs with an edge' and, by highlighting their businesses, we hope we can encourage thousands of other women to do the same. At the end of the series, we would like you - our readers - to vote for your favourite. Your votes will help determine the winner and, by voting, you'll also stand a chance of winning R20 000 cash! The winner will be announced at a glittering awards ceremony in June 2007.

NOMINATE A FRIEND'S BUSINESS AND WIN R10 000 EACH FROM STANDARD BANK

In addition, you have the chance to participate and win by nominating a friend's business. All you have to do is write 50 words about why you think her business (either existing or planned) is a winner. You could be attending the star-studded awards ceremony with her and you could each win R10 000! E-mail your nomination to standardbank@assocmags.co.za. See page 135 for competition rules.