

Here's a taster of the first five chapters of 'Stoke Your Success'. If you like it – [buy the book in paper form or the full version as an e-book](#).

The people interviewed are listed below (in alphabetical order, not importance!) So there are extracts of five chapters from the full book and a taste of the interviewees' tips for others being successful too. You should realise that you too can be successful, like one or more of them. If they can do it....so can you, too – maybe in a different way or time of your life- but keep trying and you should get there!

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## **Our Tasters**

### **Dr Ruth Chambers**

Tell us about you growing up

“My father was from a very poor background, living in a tenement near Glasgow, and had had to fight his way up in the world, so he always felt that I should do the same. This meant that if I got 95% on my school report, he would want to know what happened to the other five per cent – I can’t have been trying hard enough! I never had expensive clothes, even though he became well-off (in the end, the managing director of a multinational company). So when I went for my University interview for medical school, I wore a skirt I’d made myself, and when I was at University I struggled financially because he believed I should do, as he had..... I think that maybe having to stand up to my father has given me resilience which has helped me throughout my career.

I remember at high school being put in the bottom set for English, because the teacher felt I wasn’t any good at the subject. But I just believed in my ability, and ignored her judgement, passing my English GCSE exams with the highest marks in the year of around 100 other pupils. You can’t rely on other people to recognise your qualities – it’s up to you to show people what you are capable of. At one point in my career, I realised that many decisions are made by dominating noisy people who are unaware of the quiet thinkers in a group, and don’t give them a chance to say what they think. It spurred me on to write down my thoughts, and I

became a regular writer for medical newspapers in my thirties, influencing more people than the extroverts, who often lack original ideas.

What are your tips for other people to be successful?

To bring about real change at scale usually means altering the culture of an organisation, and leading from within as well as more obviously from a senior position. Wherever possible, anticipate where the barriers will be, and circumvent them before they prevent your progress. Sometimes personal relationships built up with staff in the middle ranks of an organisation can help, because they can find ways round some of these problems, which, if not dealt with head-on could lead to the change and improvement being stalled. Find good news stories which people can understand and relate to. It is difficult to object to new ways of working when there are personal stories and case studies about the benefits.”

**Professor LIZ BARNES**

Ruth says:

I was interested in what sort of person takes on a University as Vice-Chancellor which is such a diverse organisation, with a mix of important business and educational elements needed to thrive in sustainable ways.

Follow your heart, or your instincts, as you will have a passion for it – no-one else can decide what’s right for you.

What are your tips for other people?

“It’s got to come from you. I don’t think other people can really tell you the direction to take, so follow your heart or your gut instincts.

Build your resilience. You have to be able to handle set backs.

Resilience is important because you do get knocked back. When you’re applying for a job ‘prepare for not getting it’ or rather learn how to handle that and deal with it. You’ve got to learn to maintain your confidence if you’ve been unsuccessful in an application for a job,

because ultimately it's not about you being any lesser a person, it's just that for that particular job you weren't necessarily the right fit.

Let people make their own mistakes. But just be there for them, and help them work it through.

Think about your work life balance. Actually, there's no such thing as work life balance. I think you kid yourself if you think you can be perfect mother/wife whilst also having a fairly demanding career..... I don't know how my husband has put up with me really for the 30 years that we've been married! The best story is probably when I got a phone call from him saying: 'What time will you be home?' And I was in Malaysia! He had actually cooked my tea – it was just like being ships that pass in the night. My husband's achieved too. I don't believe there's any such thing as a perfect marriage, you have to work at it too, both accept that you have your ups and downs....

Believe in yourself – but have a 'Plan B' ready if you do need it.

Don't kid yourself that you're anybody special, you're just somebody who's good at what you do. I feel very privileged to be in my role, and I think again you shouldn't forget that.....

Believe in yourself. But recognise that you may fail, and in your mind you've got to think: 'What would I do if it doesn't work?' and have your 'What ifs?' on standby."

## **JIRI BORSKY**

Ruth says:

I'm a huge admirer of Jiri's art work, and respect his success, having escaped to England from a communist regime, built a very happy family and developed his career to become such a well-known artist.

Tell us how you came to be such a successful artist

"I knew from the age of 14-15 years old that being an artist was my destiny. I had an inner feeling that it was what I had been put on the Earth for.

Feeling that art was his destiny gave him the self-confidence and resilience to ignore people who said he could not make a living by painting.

Talent is given, but a lot of people waste it. Initially I was discouraged by other people including my family, to pursue art, especially by my father. He told me that I'd never make any money from doing art, so go into architecture instead and I went to University. When I came to England, my University qualification stood me in good stead, because I could earn

money while I was settling down and preparing to become an artist. Even then people told me that there are very few people in Britain who can make money out of art.

Initially I had to do teaching, part-time, which I enjoyed at first, but it became routine, a necessity, so as soon as I started earning money in sufficient quantities from art in the early 1990s (when I was aged 45 years), I gave up teaching and I've never looked back. So my achievement was that I managed to sustain myself on whatever I earned initially as a local artist, and then a moderately successful national artist...

Tell us about your luck

You have to be prepared for your luck. When it comes, grab it. I've been lucky meeting people who offered me the chance to run a show of my art work in their own house. There were people in Cheltenham and Bristol and so on, who helped me enormously to start with. Some people have been very kind.

When I started selling my paintings, I got a studio nearby where I live. I was just walking the dog and noticed the empty house. I traced the owner and he said 'You can have it as a studio if you look after the house'. I was there 12 years. I paid for my own fuel and electricity, and cut the lawn and hedge. It was his investment and I baby-sat the house, and kept it occupied. Eventually he gave me six months notice which was very decent, and then I bought my own studio."

## EMMA BRIDGEWATER

Ruth says:

Emma Bridgewater pottery is everywhere, and has continued developing when the pottery industry was in decline. The annual Stoke-on-Trent Literary Festival held in Emma's factory, has brought a different dimension to Stoke, attracting famous authors and speakers to inspire local people.

How did you come to fall in love with Stoke-on-Trent?

"I think there's possibly a complete inverse, unexpected thing, which is that for me, when I first came to Stoke-on-Trent in 1984 I was deeply shocked by it. I had never been to a Midlands post-industrial city before and to actually see the effects that heavy industry has had after its departure, I felt very angry on behalf of the people who live here. Then I quickly discarded that perspective, because I discovered that what seemed to my naïve eyes to be a real wilderness was in fact an incredibly fertile ground.....

What are your tips for other people to be successful as you are?

Do your own thing. Somebody said to me ages ago: 'There's absolutely no point in wasting time trying to get affirmation about your work or business; you've got to believe in what you do, and do it..... I've totally lived by that, I mean that something that doesn't pay its way isn't worth it. In my commercial world, I don't want to be looked after if I can't make the business work.

I would say to people, the best thing you can possibly do is write your CV, and put it on one side and forget about it, and then research the companies you are interested in. When you've honed it down to the one you want to work for, research it a whole lot more, and then go and plague them until they give you a job. Because there's nothing more compelling for a business that's enterprising than someone who's spotted something that they are going to bring to it.....

Don't do something just because you think it's going to make money. You need to feel emotionally committed to it, or you'll run out of steam.

Don't adopt an idea just because you think it's going to make you money. That is wrong. If you don't feel emotionally strong about your project, you're going to run out of steam... Thriving here in Stoke-on-Trent makes us feel really rich with the pleasures and challenges that it brings. Finding the traditions here, and the local people who have extraordinary gifts and attitudes, kind of anchors me here and has fired up the project for me every day since coming here. Find the truth, the thing that you're really going to care about, and if you do, then you're never wasting your time. If you're doing something that you really know, and it's something that you really care about, it could be anything, whatever it is. That is pretty fundamental."

JOHN CAUDWELL

Ruth says:

I was impressed by John being an innovator at a young age, and developing Phones4U as such a successful business. Then I admired his passion in creating the Caudwell Children's charity and Caudwell LymeCo, where he has seen a need, taken an interest and invested heavily in the charity work.

Tell us about you growing up

"I first had the ambition to be successful when I was eight years old, and weirdly it wasn't just about being successful – it was about being philanthropic too. My vision was very simplistic, but at the same time very precocious. It was me driving round in a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce, handing out £5 notes to poor people. I'd no idea at that age what the business was or what success really meant, but I did know that if I was in a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce I must be someone important and super-successful.....

How did you move up on a more successful business track?

He set up Phones4U when he was a car salesman, after trying to buy a mobile phone, and found he could get a discount if he became a dealer.

I suppose the real story then is Phones4U, my mobile phone business, because that's where my real success came from. I created Phones4U because I wanted a phone for my business at the time which was in car sales. I figured that a mobile phone would really help me with the

business. So I priced one up, but it was immensely difficult in 1986 to find anybody who could sell you a mobile phone.....

Tell us about your commitment to Charities

I'm not really materialistic. I've got huge amounts of assets, but they don't really bother me. I'm far more interested in spiritualism, rather than materialism. It's why I am prepared during and after my lifetime to give most of my money away. I've pledged to give a minimum of 70% of my wealth away when I die, and I may increase that percentage further.

In the last year I've given about £15 million away. It's not easy to do because each cause has to be looked at really critically, and I have to know that my money is going to make a huge difference. I founded Caudwell Children; we've got a fantastic centre, a building which is mostly paid for by me.....

Tell us about your six critical success factors

The first four critical success factors are ambition, drive, passion and resilience. The fifth one is commercial intellect. ...that can help your small business grow bigger; but it can only grow to a certain size without the sixth success factor, which is leadership.....”