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Differences and Strength for Women in Business

Louise Heasman, co-founder of women's networking group The Athena Network, has attacked comments made by Glenda Stone, co-chair of the women's enterprise taskforce in an interview with the Daily Telegraph last week.

Mrs Heasman states:

'The women's enterprise taskforce appears to be headed up by someone who doesn't understand the fundamental differences of how and why women operate their businesses differently, and frankly, that would make the women's enterprise taskforce a huge waste of public money'.

Ms Stone argued in The Telegraph that women should put 'profit before passion', exploit opportunities in less sexy sectors than selling 'handbags' and grow their businesses beyond mere 'hobbies' so that they contribute more to the country's wealth and Mrs Heasman believes that this attitude is doing women a great disservice.

'I frankly found Glenda Stone's comments patronising. Women and men run their businesses differently, but neither is the 'right' way of doing it. Women tend to have more challenges running businesses simply because they are usually the primary carers of their children and in most cases, are responsible for other aspects of their home-lives. However, women are just as capable of

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running a successful business as men are – there are thousands of examples - and they don't need criticism or shoehorning into a 1980s style of doing business, especially from someone whose role is to support them.'

"Until they start to understand the fundamental difference between women and men and start to support it, we are not going to have women building strong businesses.'

The Athena Network is a women's networking group which was established in 2005 and currently has 5,000 members. Mrs Heasman believes that female friendly networking groups are immensely beneficial to women in business.

'Women do need support," she says. "It is about being nice to women. It's difficult when you're juggling family life, a business, relationships, friends and family. Putting women into a supportive environment helps their confidence grow because they are surrounded by other women who are passionate about what they do and want to help each other grow their businesses does help.'

Mrs Heasman believes that if the task-force is to achieve anything positive, it should concentrate on restoring women's confidence in their abilities as many set up a business after a period out of the labour market raising children.

'Giving women the confidence to re-enter the working world after raising children really is the biggest challenge we face, and it is this that Glenda Stone and the women's enterprise taskforce needs to focus on.'

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