

Following our theme of 'Making the most of me', our latest Business over Breakfast event was '**The Accidental Entrepreneur**' presented by Sinead FitzGerald and Orla Gallagher from Claritas Consulting, who presented some fascinating and valuable insights into their journey from being gainfully employed to 'making the jump' and managing and growing a start-up enterprise.

They presented some really interesting statistics, for example did you know that one in ten people run or own their own business in Ireland? Or that it was an Irish Economist who first coined the phrase entrepreneur? Or that we rank third highest in EU terms when we look at the rate of entrepreneurship in Ireland? Also, in terms of the gender breakdown, there are almost three times as many males as females who will start up their own businesses, which is on a par with the international statistics. Some reasons about why this might be the case were explored.

Sinead, an experienced business consultant, formed Claritas with two former colleagues, Aidan Pettit and James Doyle, about four years ago. She had begun the process of looking for a position with a firm that shared her beliefs and values and began to realise that there was a niche market for a small and effective team who would work with clients to add value to their businesses. She talked about the huge responsibility in becoming an employer, ensuring that their company was in a position to offer development opportunities in line with the expectations of their employees.

Sinead talked about the transition from being a very good consultant to running a successful business, which involved wearing many hats; in addition to being a consultant there was now a requirement to have some knowledge of HR, marketing, and the financial end of the business. She cautioned on the temptation of concentrating too heavily on the consultancy side of the business to the exclusion of the business considerations. This can be very tempting for budding entrepreneurs as it keeps them firmly in their comfort zones.

Orla Gallagher then spoke about building the business and how the support that they have received, particularly from women, has been particularly encouraging. "Women are great for getting us in front of the right people, and we can take it from there", she says, driving home the importance of networks such as WIBF. The key to success involves knowing your client's business and through that, having an awareness of the challenges that they face. The other crucial element is listening to the client, asking probing questions and letting the client talk. There is often value for the client in simply asking them the right question and beginning the problem solving process.

And finally, some tips for budding entrepreneurs:

- Manage your boundaries; know what you can and can't do
- Believe in yourself
- Be honest; know your strengths and weaknesses
- Extend your comfort zone
- Seek the support of a great mentor
- Don't sweat the stuff that's been done before – accept any help that's available to you
- See mistakes as a teacher
- Success comes from action

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt: "You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

Claritas Consulting Ltd is a boutique business consultancy, offering independent specialist advice and support to small, mid-sized and large organisations across a wide variety of market sectors, including financial services, banking, telecommunications, charities etc. They work with clients to successfully manage the change process, by satisfying the drivers for change, to enhance the performance of the client company. www.claritasconsulting.com