

**BUSINESS SENSE
& SENSIBILITY**

BUSINESS SUCCESS AGAINST ALL ODDS

by Felicia Brown

According to many reports, Black women are the fastest-growing segment of entrepreneurs, turning side hustles into main hustles, transitioning from hobbies to full-fledged businesses, and moving from home offices to storefronts. In 2021, businesses owned by Black women surged to 20.2%, outpacing other Black-owned businesses and women founders overall. According to the Small Business Administration, lending to Black women opening businesses has doubled.

Let's be clear: This success is not accidental. Black women have been leading in business for years, often without recognition, as evidenced by the lack of access to capital. However, it is the responsibility of our community to wave the flag, recognize, and applaud their determination and steadfast commitment to their "why."

In my work, I've had the pleasure of meeting many Black women founders who serve as inspirations and motivations to me and to others aspiring to take the leap. Below are just a few of them who are leading in their industries and helping others do the same.

Thriving in a male-dominated industry, **Theresa Harrison** founded **George Street Services** after

a thirty-year career in business. Not long after retirement, in need of something new, she launched her company, which creates solutions in information management and cyberspace technology. During her journey, she realized that other Black women were struggling to gain access to customers and contracts and were facing various challenges in growing their businesses. As an early member of the BOW Collective (an organization of successful Black women who work together to bring awareness, business opportunities, and capital resources to entrepreneurs), she resolved to mentor other Black businesswomen on how to scale and succeed. Theresa is committed to helping other women in business and to promoting her values: Give yourself grace, wake up every day open to learning, and don't lose sleep over mistakes.

Triumph over tragedy is the story of founder **Shellie Layne**, a real estate broker who experienced the 2005 housing market crash, went through a challenging divorce, and suddenly became a single mother. She soon found it difficult to meet large expenses, such as getting her HVAC and other appliances repaired. She had to figure out how to fix things on a limited income. While working for the *Birmingham Times*, she had an aha! moment based on comments and questions from other women going through similar experiences. She shifted from writing about home repairs to



**SHELLIE
LAYNE**

life repairs, using tools as a metaphor to help women facing life challenges. Consequently, **Women Under Construction** was born—an organization focused on empowering women and helping them change their lives by acquiring tools and skills used for home repairs, essentially transitioning from being stuck to unstoppable. Shellie's non-profit has grown as supporters have seen the change happening in those she serves.



"Problems just require solutions" is the motto of **Sheilisa McNeal**, creator and founder/CEO of **Fria, LLC**. In need of comfort from hot flashes, she created a cooling, hydro-powered bracelet to relieve discomfort women often experience during menopause. After visiting India and meeting an expert in green cooling technology, she took a leap of faith and used her own funds to launch her business. Since then, she has been successful in securing grants and promoting her creation. Her purpose is twofold: to offer relief to women and to remove the stigma of menopause by raising awareness. Sheilisa offers workshops and seminars on anti-ageism and how to discuss menopause in the workplace. In the future, she hopes to offer unisex options targeting people with active lifestyles.



Following a failed business, a broken relationship, and struggles with low self-esteem, **Precious Williams** contemplated what to do next. After deep introspection, she decided she wanted a second shot at entrepreneurship. With only \$400, she launched the **Perfect Pitch Group** to help founders raise capital, increase awareness, and take their businesses to the next level. She teaches them how to pitch, present, and communicate the why and how of their ventures. Since then, she has become an author, speaker, national elevator pitch champion, mentor, and the recipient of numerous awards. While Precious has an impressive résumé, her upward path has not been without challenges. Her story is one of resilience and inspiration—despite her circumstances, she got creative and began to forge her own path to success.

Being in business is never a straight line. The journey will be rife with challenges, setbacks, and detours. But there will also be successes and accomplishments along the way. What do these founders have in common? Resilience, persistence, and a belief in what's possible. As the adage goes, *"No one said it would be easy, but it is possible!"* Are you ready to take the leap?