

Alexandra Tselios

CEO and founder of The Big Smoke

Nick Perkins, Senior Associate at Ashurst, chats with **Alexandra Tselios**, CEO and founder of The Big Smoke, about her career as a media executive and her thoughts on International Women's Day.

Alexandra is an Australian entrepreneur, social commentator and business columnist. She is the founder and CEO of opinion site The Big Smoke and the Tselios Media Group. Tselios was noted in Business Insider for her entrepreneurship in Australia. Alexandra Tselios appears regularly on ABC TV including ABC's The Drum. She writes a business column in CEO magazine and appears regularly as a commentator on nationwide radio in Australia, including 2GB, 2UE and ABC. She has been published in The Huffington Post, The Australian, The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, News.com.au, The Daily Mail UK, Australian Financial Review, Business Insider, BRW, Management Today, mUMBRELLA, The Hoopla, Australasian Lawyer and Business First Magazine.

NICK PERKINS: Tell us about your role, and how your career led you here?

ALEXANDRA TSELIOS: I am the Founder and CEO of The Big Smoke Media Group. I dropped out of law school when I launched the company, and while my background was not in media whatsoever, I found that gap to be an incredibly useful and challenging starting line when bringing to market a new media company. Prior to my company launch, I had done a Master's in Business and managed a small team, but neither that education nor experience was able to prepare me for what I was attempting to build (fortunately I had no clue how tough it would be).

PERKINS: What's the best work-related advice you've ever received?

TSELIOS: My chairman Philippa Lewis said to me 'Be brave enough to believe you are entirely able to do this but always give your "gut" the last word. It's rarely wrong.' Many commercial decisions I've made I've done so by weighing up evidence and then relying on my gut. I would never say I always rely on my gut solely because our own biases tend to be an obstacle but if you can learn to be in tune with your gut and then also survey a commercial landscape critically, you have a higher probability of making successful decisions.

PERKINS: What's the greatest risk you've taken as a professional?

TSELIOS: Launching the company with no safety net, I was never conservative in my commercial approach and made every mistake possible, but survival and growth made the risks worth taking, encouraging me to continue

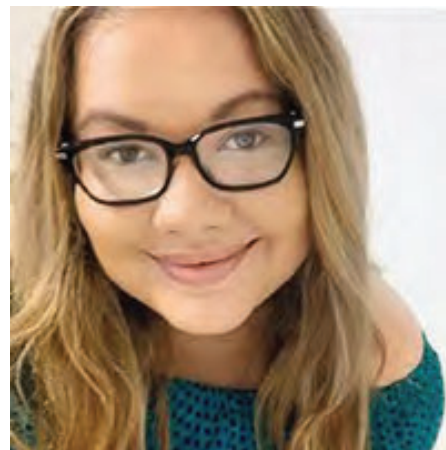
building the company into what it is today. I am also really fortunate regarding some of the risks I have taken in regards to hiring people. Not every risk paid off, but I have made some hires that were done based on the individual, not their experience which is a huge risk - but for a few of my key leaders who have grown into the C-suite, it was a risk that led to me engaging the people that could not only understand my vision but execute it.

PERKINS: What does International Women's Day mean to you?

TSELIOS: Broad reflection, for some of us we nurture the discipline of reflecting on personal achievements and individual lives, but rarely do we reflect on a large scale the influence women have had in this industry and how much opportunity there is. IWD prompts us to reflect broadly at the big picture. It is also really easy to feel quite alone, especially in the C-suite. IWD reminds us that we are not only intrinsically connected but that our collective experiences create a sense of belonging.

PERKINS: The 2021 International Women's Day campaign theme is #ChooseToChallenge. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

TSELIOS: It to me is simply a reminder we should be building a life of resilience - implementing this in our work and personal lives means challenging ourselves and the world around us through bold participation in the matters that add value to our lives and the world around us. Another element of the #ChoosetoChallenge theme is also



about ourselves in terms of how we perceive our success and failures. It's easy to get so caught up in the relentless pursuit of ambition that it's then possible to obsess over the losses so much that it overshadows what runs on the board have been achieved. I try to each year write a list of what I achieved the year prior, and it's a challenge for me, but reflecting on that and being ok with the tougher times has meant I have felt stronger around how I choose to move the dial, ultimately challenging my mindset.

PERKINS: Who is one woman in the industry whom you really admire, and why?

TSELIOS: One of my favourite women in media who I admire, while less known, is Sheila Nevins. She used to head up the documentary division of HBO and (at the age of 80!) was hired to lead the same division for MTV. Her ability to remain focused, relevant and challenging while refusing to allow age to matter is hugely exciting to me. I also grew up loving Lucille Ball, and while 'I love Lucy' was definitely one of my favourite shows, it was Lucille's ability to market her concepts and bring them to life during a period where it was rare for a woman to do so. Her career really took off in her 40s-50s, and she was the first woman to own a major studio - it is remarkable when considering the climate she achieved this in, and what prejudices she had to overcome.