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Candice Georgiadis

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Female Founders: Heidi Steele of Surface Resources On The Five Things You Need To Thrive and Succeed as a Woman Founder

An Interview With Candice Georgiadis



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As *a part of our series about “Why We Need More Women Founders”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Heidi Steele.*

Heidi Steele is the founder of Surface Resources, a rising leader in sustainable solutions for design and construction professionals on a national scale, with roots in the Southwest and Intermountain Regions.

After a career as an architect and interior designer made clear the challenges of sourcing sustainable finishes, Heidi identified a gap in the market for an agency to provide material and methods expertise to AEC professionals for resilient flooring and tile solutions, amplifying the climate positive movement. Her past career in the design industry gives Heidi comprehensive insider’s knowledge and solidifies her reputation as a valuable resource.

Backed by a dedicated and experienced team (including Heidi’s sister Cindy), Surface Resources fulfills much needed dual roles by offering materials and mentoring for industry professionals on resilient surface and tile collections that bring innovation, reasonable pricing, outstanding material availability, and enduring beauty to customers — responsibly.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we dig in, our readers would like to get to know you a bit more. Can you tell us a bit about your “backstory”? What led you to this particular career path?

I am a serial entrepreneur. I've worked for myself far longer than I ever worked for anyone else. I've now owned seven businesses in total, and currently run two. Technically, the first business I ever owned began at age three, when I collected rocks and sold them door-to-door in my neighborhood. This business was strictly off-the-books, so I hope no one from the PRC or taxation and revenue departments are reading this article!

I founded [Surfaces Resources](#) after years of struggling to source sustainably-certified, high quality finish materials in the Southwest and Intermountain regions of the U.S. Therefore, our core mission is effortless sustainability. The collections we represent are produced by companies that continue to make global, climate-positive commitments as proven by their independent, third-party sustainability certifications. Setting an even higher standard, Surface Resources insists on representing innovative, high-performing resilient surface and tile collections that bring meaningful value with reasonable pricing, enduring beauty, and outstanding availability.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you began leading your company?

There have been so many interesting moments! My proudest day as the founder of Surface Resources was the day that I received a cold call from a brand called Mosa. They were looking for a new exclusive distribution partner in the Southwest and heard there was no better option than Surface Resources. Mosa produces the most high performing, aesthetically pleasing commercially-rated tiles in the world. They are the only tile manufacturer to have achieved Cradle to Cradle certification. This label is recognized for promoting the most stringent, international sustainability standards. What makes their tiles so beautiful and different comes down to manufacturing with 100% organic materials, created to an incredibly exacting standard. Every single unglazed, porcelain tile is unique, like a fingerprint, due to the random distribution of organic pigments on the tile face. Their glazed and unglazed field tile collections are backed by a full range of tile accessories giving every installation a tailored, precise look. It is truly an honor to partner with this brand.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

As a business owner, I will say that mistakes are not usually very funny. However, I think the funniest moments happen through brief miscommunications amongst our team. We're all working 100% remotely so occasionally two or more of us will have a full conversation without realizing we were talking about completely different projects or situations. Once the discrepancy is discovered, it provides a good chuckle as we all jump to the same page. It really proves just how important clear communication is to a business, especially with a 100% remote workforce.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

My husband is 100% integral to my success. I call him "Saint Dave." His unconditional support throughout my entrepreneurial journey has been unwavering — and this includes the two years we knew each other before we began dating. From the day we met at a weekly project meeting, he has been my rock, supporting me with intimidating decisions when I needed help clarifying the best path forward.

Ok, thank you for that. Let's now jump to the primary focus of our interview. According to [this EY report](#), only about 20 percent of funded companies have women founders. This reflects great historical progress, but it also shows that more work still has to be done to empower women to create companies. In your opinion and experience what is currently holding back women from founding companies?

I think lack of confidence is the biggest thing holding women back. The belief that you can make it happen is critical to becoming a business owner. I've always had a gambler's nature and I'm extremely ambitious, which outweighs any shortage of confidence I may feel from one day to the next.

Can you help articulate a few things that can be done as individuals, as a society, or by the government, to help overcome those obstacles?

One of the most important things you can do as a prospective entrepreneur is to surround yourself with people that outpace you in your chosen field. This creates a network of people who will motivate and educate you, proving that your ambitions can be achieved.

The second most important thing is to align yourself with business mentors who are successful entrepreneurs themselves. They will have been in the trenches and understand what you are going through. To find these mentors, keep your eyes and ears open, join professional organizations, and network, network, network.

This might be intuitive to you as a woman founder but I think it will be helpful to spell this out. Can you share a few reasons why more women should become founders?

We are experiencing a huge change in the workforce, transitioning from being in the office 100% of the time to a remote or hybrid model. Juggling a personal life with professional demands while working from home is a set of skills that I believe is very innate to women. While this isn't strictly true across the board, women are often more nurturing and emotionally resilient which often leads to a more successful workplace. Emotional support is so important for employees' mental health and overall wellbeing.

What are the “myths” that you would like to dispel about being a founder? Can you explain what you mean?

The myth that women can't have it all — work and family — deserves to be shattered. There are always sacrifices, but it is possible.

Is everyone cut out to be a founder? In your opinion, which specific traits increase the likelihood that a person will be a successful founder and what type of person should perhaps seek a “regular job” as an employee? Can you explain what you mean?

No, I don't believe that everyone is cut out to be a founder. Aside from confidence, emotional restraint is one of the most important traits a founder can have. If you cannot be in control of your emotions then you should not be in the founder's seat. Emotional restraint takes practice and is something that many people struggle with. It's obvious to me that if you can remove emotions from a charged situation, you will get to resolutions much more quickly.

Another important character trait is the ability to see both the big picture and the granular details. Some people can only see one or the other. A founder needs to know how to connect the two and balance them every day. This is what will move your company forward.

Ok super. Here is the main question of our interview. What are your “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Started” and why? (Please share a story or example for each.)

1. I wish someone would have told me how satisfying it would be, both personally and professionally, to create a successful business. The satisfaction is immeasurable because it's not just about one person — so many more people are added along the journey. It's an incredible opportunity to impact people and elevate the quality of their lives.
2. Continue paying attention to all of the details even after your business becomes successful. Failure happens when a founder takes their eye off the ball. If you become complacent and distribute your authority for overseeing the business, before you know it you will be disconnected and unaware that problems exist.
3. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of surrounding yourself with successful business mentors that genuinely wish to see you succeed.
4. Focus on being the change you wish to see in the world. If you are committed, confident and considerate in your mission, success will follow.
5. Find time for yourself and your personal passions. I myself love gardening, collecting art and traveling to different countries. You never know when or where inspiration might strike!

How have you used your success to make the world a better place?

As a founder, you are in a unique position to be the change that you want to see in the world. For me, the mission is effortless sustainability. I want to knock down every hurdle to amplifying the sustainability movement. Every day I work to disprove pervasive myths — that sustainable products are not available, are not durable, or are unaffordable. From the partners we choose to the collections we represent, all of our choices come down to refuting these arguments and proving to people that *sustainable is attainable*.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good for the greatest number of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger.

The movement I actively seek to advance every day is effortless sustainability. In the late 60s and early 70s, when we discovered that lead paint was toxic and harming infants, people immediately stopped buying cribs coated with lead paint. There is no reason we cannot bring about this same sweeping change within the sustainability movement. When you put two products side by side, one with sustainability credentials and one without, and both are the same price — why wouldn't you choose the sustainable option?

We are very blessed that some very prominent names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this if we tag them.

The number one person I would love to dine with is Frida Kahlo — although I might be too intimidated! She had confidence in spades. Despite the overwhelming setbacks in her life, she overcame all of them to become a legend and truly changed the world. Instead of falling into the shadow of being “Diego Rivera's wife”, she became *Frida Kahlo*. Many people, museums, and brand builders would proclaim she surpassed him.

I would also truly love to meet Michelle Obama. She elegantly balances her family and professional life while simultaneously working to change the world and I respect that. She is full of grace; everything about her is thoughtful and down-to-earth yet her goals are understood as a critical priority by many in today's culture.

Thank you for these fantastic insights. We greatly appreciate the time you spent on this.