

# How Phillipa Geard recruited our moms

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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Five years ago, Phillipa Geard set out to prove that moms are still a valuable and highly skilled asset to the working world. Today, she is a successful entrepreneur, founder of RecruitMyMom and NSBC's National Woman in Business Champion for 2017.



This Entrepreneur Month, I chatted to her about the ups and downs of juggling life as a mom, boss and entrepreneur...

## ■ *Tell us a bit about yourself and RecruitMyMom...*

I am a wife to husband Anthony, mom to son Dominic (14) and daughter Sadie (12). My third child, according to Anthony, is RecruitMyMom (5 1/2). We live in the most beautiful place in the world, nestled between mountains and sea – Somerset West. When I turned 40, I started mountain biking and I started a new business – [RecruitMyMom.co.za](https://RecruitMyMom.co.za). I have no idea why – both were hard! I am very involved in my children's school life and am an active member of my local church, as well as being involved in various social outreach projects with my husband. I am entrepreneurial and have been involved in or owned two businesses before starting RecruitMyMom.

The idea for RecruitMyMom came during the period of my having relocated to the Western Cape. The moms at school, where I dropped my kids, would often say that they envied my ability to continue working flexibly. They, having similar stories to mine about successful careers in large local or international corporates, and then deciding to stop because of family needs, now wanted to return to work, but flexibly or part-time. It was because of these conversations that I wanted to start something to help moms find meaningful skilled work that is part-time or flexible without having to apologise for the fact that they want to integrate work and family.

RecruitMyMom offers an easy to use online recruitment platform and related recruitment services for a) skilled moms looking for meaningful part-time and flexible employment opportunities and b) employers looking for experienced skills for part-time and flexible jobs offered. RecruitMyMom currently operates throughout South Africa, placing permanent and contract employees in both office and virtual home-based roles. We believe we play a vital role within the recruitment industry having created a trusted platform that connects employers to this specific group of job-seekers having specific flexibility needs.

## ■ *What are some of the challenges you've faced getting started and how did you overcome them?*

When I started RecruitMyMom, I fully expected to be working part-time on my own managing my business. I never imagined that I would one day manage a team of staff who require systems to be in place to function optimally.

Hiring staff is a necessity forced upon you when your business grows and you can no longer do it all yourself. My first staff hire at RecruitMyMom was an assistant, and today she is one of my recruitment managers having been working with me since April 2013. Managing one staff member is quite different to managing a team. The greater challenge I faced is that all my staff works virtually from their homes, some in Gauteng and some in the Western Cape.

The first people management challenge I faced was that I struggled to say "no" to my staff without initially realising it. I would be under tremendous stress when facing any potential conflict situation with an employee. I overcame this when a professional personal profile was conducted on my staff and me. Immediately the profile picked up where my stress area was and through a process of discussions it was pointed out to me and enabled me to proactively work at becoming better at saying "no" and handling conflict well. I did this by always focusing on doing what is right, both for the person involved and ultimately RecruitMyMom.

A further challenge when managing a team of people is that they require systems to be in place so that they can function well. As an entrepreneur, one often starts alone and there are no systems. You are a jack-of-all-trades and you do everything. The minute you have a team of staff working systems become imperative to ensuring that :

1. a certain standard of customer service levels is met;
2. a consistent brand message is communicated at every stakeholder touch-point;
3. terms and conditions are well communicated;
4. required government statistical information-gathering is accurately captured;
5. leave and sick leave are well-managed and tracked; and
6. proper invoicing, contracts and record keeping is in place.

And so the list continues.

Putting systems in place in RecruitMyMom has been massively time-consuming but absolutely imperative to the ability of the company to handle growth. No one teaches you how to put systems in place. You have to figure it out based on your own knowledge and experience of how things work. It's taking everything you have in your head and putting it into an easily understood manual format. By putting systems in writing, everyone knows what is expected and what the standard looks like. Systems are not perfect and they need updating regularly, but having put the effort into getting them right has been well worth it. The staff knows what is expected of them and it has made managing the team and particularly new recruits a lot easier.

Finally, the challenge of managing a virtual workforce. I wanted to practice flexible remote working if that is what RecruitMyMom was to stand for. It didn't make sense to me that RecruitMyMom be a voice for flexible and part-time working in South Africa and then my staff be required to work in office from 9am to 5pm. So all my staff work part-time or full-time flexible from home-based offices.

Misunderstandings were one of the main challenges I needed to overcome in a virtual workspace. When one doesn't sit in the same office and see a person daily, emails and other electronic communication can create misunderstandings. I often talk to my staff about the need to "over-communicate" in a virtual environment. Never assume anything, always over-communicate and share as much detail as possible. It's something we all try to live by. I have also instilled a culture of less emails, more telephone. Rather we pick up the phone and have a quick chat than send an email. Telephone chats clear up any small issues quickly and keeps the relationships more personable.

Am I a perfect manager of my staff? Absolutely not! Have I overcome an enormous challenge in my entrepreneurial career in being able to manage a team of staff? Most definitely yes!

### **▣ *What are the best and worst things about being an entrepreneur?***

Some of the best things about being an entrepreneur are:

1. The fact that I have flexibility in my work day is the biggest benefit. I think this is why so many women start businesses, to allow them to work flexibly to integrate work and family.
2. I get to put my passion into action. Most of the successful entrepreneurs I meet started with a passion to make a difference somewhere. That difference is passion, and passion gets me through the tough days.
3. I get to see an idea grow into a reality. Despite the fact that so many business ideas fail, I think the mere fact that one has started something and can watch it grow, is incredibly rewarding.
4. You grow in more areas than you could ever imagine. Owning your own business stretches, grows and challenges you every day. There is no such thing as being stagnant; the learning curve is straight up and it's exciting.
5. I get to meet the most inspiring people. I have met and been introduced some very smart people while working at RecruitMyMom. They are people that I admire and most often they are more than willing to share their knowledge with me.
6. Being an online business, every now and then I can teach my kids stuff about technology that they can't teach me. I love that!

Some of the worst things are:

1. The work never stops. There is always more to do and one has to learn to close the office door and step away from work.
2. The buck stops with me. The responsibility when employing staff and engaging with clients and candidates alike is weighty. I want to do everything perfectly all the time and that's just not a reality.
3. The decision making is relentless. There is always big and small decisions to be made, even after empowering one's staff. That's the nature of the beast.
4. The legislation involved in owning one's own business, particularly a registered employment agency, is huge. Just trying to keep up with all the red tape to ensure one doesn't slip up takes a huge amount of energy and time.

### **▣ *What's the most valuable lesson you've learned so far?***

I think the most valuable lesson has been to learn to live with imperfection, and that mistakes are just that, mistakes. One has to learn and move on from them.

An equally valuable lesson is that you will always have critics and you really cannot satisfy everyone, so focus on your wins and keep moving forward.

### **▣ *The NSBC recently named you the National Woman in Business Champion for 2017 – what does this recognition mean to you?***

This recognition has been enormous, not just to me, but to my staff too. An award like this makes one stop and reflect on how far you have come. When you own your own business, the work never finishes and there is always more one can do. I find I am so busy looking forward I forget to look back and celebrate our progress. This award did that for me.

I am so grateful that the two awards won, the one for being a Top 20 Small Business in SA and National Woman in Business Champion for 2017 gives RecruitMyMom external credibility and recognises that we are doing a good job.

▣ ***Where do you see yourself in five years?***

I see myself still working at RecruitMyMom, but by then the awareness of RecruitMyMom amongst employers will be a lot further down the road.

I would like to see RecruitMyMom offering more services and we are starting to get calls to have a footprint outside of SA, that might happen by then.

▣ ***What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs just starting out?***

My advice to anyone starting their own business is surround yourself with people who believe in you, because there are many tough days when you doubt yourself, and those significant supporters will carry you through. Don't attempt this on your own.

Never be afraid to ask questions. People are so willing to help and you can learn far quicker with other people's help than doing it all on your own.

Lastly, get used to not sleeping well. The business is in your head 24/7 and everytime you wake up, it's the first thing you think about.

## ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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