Meet Inspiring EIT Community Women Leaders and Entrepreneurs

Isabel Hoffmann
CEO of Tellspec and member of EIT Food Rising Food Stars

Tell us a bit about yourself and your connection to the EIT Community.
I am a mathematician and serial entrepreneur. We were invited to be part of the EIT Food community in August 2016 and today we are part of the Rising Food Stars. We are proud to say we currently work with three other EIT Food partners on an EIT Food funded project to improve trust in the fishery chain by offering mentoring tools to better control fish quality and authenticity.

Tell us about Tellspec and how you came up with the idea.
I’ve been an entrepreneur for over 20 years, building companies on three continents. In 2011, my daughter became very ill and I made it my mission to identify the cause of her mysterious illness and help her get better. We finally discovered that she is very allergic to penicillin and sensitive to many foods. I began searching for a product to help me manage her food intake and, from this experience, Tellspec was born.

Have you had to overcome many extra obstacles as a female entrepreneur?
Yes, many times I had to overcome these gender obstacles, but you learn to deal with these things and focus on choosing your battles and on the long-term outcomes.

You have already founded an impressive 8 companies in your career. What is the best thing about running your own company?
I think the best thing about running a company is to be able to freely innovate and take charge of the direction and strategy to execute your innovation. Execution in this way gives you tremendous satisfaction both personally and business-wise.

What is the most important advice you would give to young women following in your footsteps?
When I go for long walks or bike rides I often see graffiti on the street that says “tou est possible”. I really identify with that. Everything is possible with hard work, focus and imagination.

Currently, some people talk about there being a ‘gender gap’ among entrepreneurs. Do you think this is true?
Yes, absolutely there is a gender gap, but I no longer lose sleep over it. It will take many generations to change but I do see an improvement. My family was a misogynistic one, and so was very disfunctional. This really had an impact on me by creating a deeply rooted desire to see change. This inner drive to change the world to a better place is my top quality as an entrepreneur.

Who are three inspirational women in your field and why?
Rachel Carson, Simone de Beauvoir, and Sylvia Earle

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