

COVID-19: Interview with Jo Martin, Founder of 'One of many'

One of Many is the fastest growing global leadership community for women. The company trains, coaches and supports women around the world, empowering them to step up and lead the change they want to see without burning out. Maddyness spoke with Jo Martin, Founder of One of Many to understand how the company is coping during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the future holds.

Temps de lecture : minute

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One of Many was conceived in the uprush of creativity that often arrives at the birth of a new child - just when you have no time to do anything with the ideas!

I was spending many hours breastfeeding my son in a darkened room pondering the world he was being born into. I could see that great change was needed, and I felt intuitively that having more women in leadership was critical to unlocking these changes. But most of the women I knew were tearing around like headless chickens, with no spare time to step up into roles where they were needed - in politics, organisations or community.

Yet it felt critical that we did step up. We needed a new, more sustainable way to balance the strong call to lead, with the multiple calls on us as wives, sisters, daughters, friends, mothers...

And so 'One of many' was born, with the mission is to unleash the bold, grassroots leadership of women, empowering them to step up and lead

the change they want to see without burning out. To date, we've trained, coached and supported over 70,000 women around the world, and One of many is the fastest growing global leadership community for women.

[Maddyness] What is the biggest professional challenge for you today?

[Jo] COVID-19 meant we had to cancel our annual conference and the other face-to-face events we had scheduled for 2020. Without events to run I had no choice but to furlough 40% of the team.

However, I also had to rapidly pivot the business, create and launch new online offers and repurpose our existing training so it could be delivered virtually.

Doing all of this, with almost half the team on furlough, has been the single, biggest professional challenge I've ever faced. Mercifully all is unfolding beautifully and we've not had to lose a single team member.

What is the biggest personal challenge today?

I'm probably not alone in saying homeschooling and long summer holidays with no playschemes. I've noticed the energetic drain of the uncertainty of the global situation, partnered with a busy time at work, and stressed little people particularly challenging. It's been even more important than usual to pay attention to my key replenishment strategies.

Is remote working a new thing for you?

No. The whole One of many teamwork remotely, in fact, the last time I

worked in an office we only used mobile phones for calls and texts! One of many's approaches is based on balancing the calls of work and life, and I think you've got more chance of achieving balance if you're not spending 2 hours a day travelling to work.

How do you keep your employees happy? What do you do to successfully manage your mental resilience amid lockdown?

Dancing. Every team meeting, every One of many events - even now they're virtual - starts with a tune and a dance!

Managing mental resilience is core to the training, coaching and support One of many provides. I burnt out early in my career, so I'm attuned to the signs of stress and put a premium on self-care and time to replenish.

But despite this, I have found lockdown mentally exhausting. Juggling homeschooling with work has meant working unusual hours, and looking after the wellbeing of family in Australia has required more calls in the middle of the night, so I've had to adapt my usual patterns of work, play and rest.

We've really done our utmost to support our team to do the same. Looking after ourselves and our families has had to come first.

Normally I would be travelling to events and meetings at least two to three times a month, and I find a change of scene is a great lift and I've missed that. However, I'm lucky because where we live is surrounded by beautiful countryside and I made the most of the permitted exercise with family walks.

What would you say are the biggest difficulties that you experienced amid the COVID-19 pandemic?

Hands down the single biggest difficulty were our annual One Woman Conference. It was scheduled for 14-15th March and the 500+ tickets had sold out within hours of our booking page going live. The conference was also critical to our business. Every year, over 30% of our annual turnover came from sales made during the conference.

By early March I was increasingly nervous about putting over 500 women at risk by going ahead with an in-person event. And so, in spite of the terrifying potential business consequences, at 4.30 pm on Thursday 12 March - 36 hours before I was due to walk on stage - I took the difficult decision to postpone the live event. I didn't doubt it was the right thing to do, but there were times when I doubted whether our business would survive it.

In just 24 hours, we created a brand new, two day, live-streamed event: 'Clarity in Chaos'; offered it for free to disappointed delegates, our entire community and beyond; built a livestream studio in my house; and created an entirely new product range: an online coaching and training membership programme - Living the Change - to launch at the event.

Instead of the 500 women, we had been expecting live, over 2000 women registered for the event.

I'm incredibly proud of what we achieved in those 24 hours, but even now I look back on it and wonder how we pulled it off!

What changes have you made to keep your business running?

My goals and my vision haven't changed as a result of COVID-19 - in fact, I believe that we need a global paradigm shift now more than ever. But my strategy has completely changed.

We are still delivering incredible transformational events but for now, most of them are virtual. So far two of the four retreats at the heart of our offer have taken place online and we've attracted more participants than ever before.

We created an entirely new virtual membership product: Living the Change and launched it successfully. And now we're looking to the future and how to get the balance of virtual and in-person work right so that our community feels safe and gets the in-person connection they need.

What have you implemented to stay competitive?

I have had to become comfortable with a whole new way of training and delivering content. I now do weekly online 'Lunch and Learns' for my community; launch programmes online; hold retreats online and have created a whole new online programme: Living the Change is now an essential part of our offer and 530+ women have signed up to receive online training, coaching and support.

Our retreats are more popular than ever. Our 'BeFulfilled' career focussed retreat attracted 78 people in 2019. Over 151 women attended the online version in 2020.

And our community has grown rapidly during the pandemic. We have

nearly 7000 women in the BeOneGlobal Community - our online Facebook Group - up nearly 20% since 14 March when we postponed the conference.

Our focus for the next 12 months is to grow our new 'Living the Change' membership programme and to shift our highly successful coaching certification programme online.



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What advice would you give startup founders to keep managing costs and cash flow

efficiently during a crisis?

Like most other businesses, we revised our financial targets when the pandemic hit. And whilst we have not reached our original 2020 forecast we have smashed every single one of our revised targets. AND as a result of the changes we have made, we are more profitable, we are in a better cash position and we have significantly reduced the risks and dependencies in the business.

There are three things I would say to startup Founders in a time of crisis:

1. Diversify early and remove the dependencies in your business. Being so reliant on sales from our big annual conference put One of many in a vulnerable position. Our offer now, five months on, is more diverse, creative and profitable.
2. Maintain a healthy cash reserve if you can. Having a rainy day fund makes sense for every business and I advise most entrepreneurs to have a minimum of 3 (and preferably 6) months of running costs in reserves to help weather a storm.
3. Stay true to your vision. You may have to adapt how you deliver your work but your vision is what inspires you and your clients. It's the heart of your work, the thing that drives you and gets you out of bed in the morning.

What do you think of the support packages for startups offered by the government?

What have you been able to use?

Part of my mission is to give voice to women - not to 'represent' their views but to ask them for theirs and then use whatever platform I have to share those views.

During the crisis, we made our first ever submission to a Parliamentary Inquiry - the Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry into the Government's response to COVID-19. Their response - in answer to your question about the packages for startups - was pretty stark. Many of the women we spoke to simply didn't qualify for any Government support particularly the solopreneurs and smaller businesses. They felt abandoned, hopeless and bitterly disappointed that huge companies with significant cash reserves were being given extensive support whilst the entrepreneurs and micro-businesses that actually make up the backbone of the UK economy were let down.

Do you feel confident in your business post-COVID? Are there any changes in society/economy that you think will help you?

At present, I'm not sure when we'll be able to say that we are truly 'post-COVID'! Nonetheless, I feel confident about the future. We've adapted well - pivoted on a pinhead! - and as a result of creating our new virtual offering, we are able more easily to reach and serve women around the world. We know that the months ahead will be tough - for everyone but for women in particular.

The economic downturn will disproportionately affect them - as it always does - and we will continue to support them to manage whatever life throws at them and to step up into leadership in their lives and in the world, without overwhelm or burnout.



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