

Women of Substance: Jane Wurwand

by Stacey Soble (as seen in *salontoday.com*)

Jane Wurwand

Founder and Owner, Dermalogica, Inc., and The International Dermal Institute

Licenses:

British Association of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology, ITEC, California Estheticians License, Post-secondary Teachers License

Affiliations:

Clinton Global Initiative member, UCLA School of Management board member, NAWBO/LA member, Step Up Luminary Member

As a teenager, Jane Wurwand worked at a salon in her native United Kingdom as a “Saturday Girl,” an entry-level apprentice that sweeps hair trimmings and sorts through and sterilizes hair-pins. But she fell in love with the business, and when she discovered skincare, she found the career path she would blaze. Today, Wurwand’s Dermalogica line is sold in more than 80 countries and her International Dermal Institute offers curriculum in 40 global locations. In 2011, Wurwand expanded her vision beyond skincare by establishing joinFITE (Financial Independence Through Entrepreneurship) to extend microloans to women in need around the world to help them establish businesses that can provide for themselves and their families.

Who was your mentor?

“I have been very lucky to have had great teachers along the way, beginning with my own mother. My mother was widowed very young with four daughters, and never remarried – never even dated! Her sole focus was on creating the best possible life for me and my three sisters. She told me from the beginning: “Learn how to do something.” And she meant actually DO something, since she herself was a Registered Nurse. I have learned a great deal from professionals in our industry as well. One of these was Eve Taylor, who truly created modern aromatherapy. Another was Ken England, industry great and Redken superstar who taught me, “Never believe your own publicity – you probably wrote it yourself.” I also believe in the Buddhist concept of “Beginner’s Mind.” In this sense, every person and every situation is your teacher. Every day, just let your mind go blank, and start fresh. Without a lot of baggage. It’s amazing how much your creative process opens up when you don’t preface everything with a lot of presumptions.”

As a woman, what barriers, if any, did you come across during your professional growth?

“The skin care industry is nearly 100 percent a woman’s arena. This makes it very different from hair care, where many salon owners and hairdressers are men. I feel that women working with other women is very powerful. As women, we respond to human touch in uniquely feminine ways,

from a brain-chemistry standpoint. This can form the basis for powerful social bonds, and even political sisterhood.

“That said, I absolutely ran up against the old-boys-network chauvinism and patriarchal discrimination from men when I moved from simply practicing skin care treatments to becoming a manufacturer – for instance, when I was working my way through the list of available compounding labs in Los Angeles in order to launch my new product line, all of the chemists were much older men – I think they viewed me as a girl with a cute accent, who knew nothing.

Without exception, these male chemists told me that the concept for my line was impossible to formulate. I wanted to make a skin care product which did not contain S.D. Alcohol, Petroleum or Mineral Oil, artificial dyes, artificial perfumes, Lanolin - all of which were standard ingredients in every skin care brand on shelves at the time.

“They all said it couldn’t be done. That was 25 years ago. Today, Dermalogica is the #1 most requested professional skin care brand in the world. And our VP of R&D is Dr. Diana Howard – a woman.”

What would you consider your greatest professional break?

“Coming to the United States in 1983. More dreams come true here than anywhere else on the planet and I still consider it the greatest gift I have ever received. There have been many landmark moments, but I think that the opening of our very first concept space, our Dermalogica flagship store in Santa Monica, still feels like a major turning-point. It’s not so much about someone giving us a break, as feeling that it represents a moment of our becoming, of arriving, for Dermalogica, the brand. Our creative team truly created magic in the planning and implementation of the space. It’s an incredibly fertile space – even the treatment rooms are shaped like eggs, or cocoons! The flagship is where we “incubated” ideas which changed our business, such as the Skin Bar®, where people can casually sample products, the gleaming, white stucco treatment “pods,” which put treatment front and center instead of in the “back of the house,” and stations for Face Mapping®, which is a complimentary, and targeted skin analysis given by a professional skin therapist. No wonder the space collected all sorts of design and architecture business kudos. It utterly redefined the professional skin care setting. Now I have a creative office upstairs, on the floor above the flagship store – it’s a charming old white brick building from the 1920s, which is rare in Los Angeles. I still feel my heart skip a beat when I walk up to the door.”

What’s the best business advice anyone ever gave you?

“Don’t try to please everybody.” This sounds obvious, but many brands lose their footing because they lose sight of who their key consumer is. Sometimes this happens out of greed, wanting to diversify and gobble up other segments which seem lucrative. Other times, it’s simply misguided. Someone gets what seems like a good idea, and BOOM, a jewelry design brand is suddenly in

the business of baking designer cupcakes. Not to say that this never works. But Dermalogica's success reflects the wisdom of a narrow focus. I love a good red lipstick, but I'll let somebody else make it.

What is the business achievement you are most proud of?

"The fact that our brand is universally respected for the company's commitment to education, and specifically to putting women to work. Because I was raised by a very strong, independent, hard-working mother, the driving undercurrent of Dermalogica has always been to empower women financially and professionally. We do this by giving skin therapists the tools they need to succeed, both in terms of education and in terms of marketing support when they carry our brand. For the past 28 years, we've trained over 100,000 skin therapists worldwide, 25,000 of whom own their own skin care centers or spas. And, we've recently expanded our vision to reach beyond the skin care profession, through microlending. In January, 2011, through the Dermalogica Foundation, we created our global philanthropic women's initiative called joinFITE – Financial Independence Through Entrepreneurship. You'll find it at www.joinFITE.org. The goal here is to extend microloans to women in need around the world, in all sorts of work, so that they may provide for themselves and their families. The goal is to help a minimum of 25,000 women to start or grow a business in the next two years, and the response so far has just been thrilling! Since our launch we have helped fund over 5,000 women. A milestone for joinFITE is when I had the opportunity to meet with President Bill Clinton at the 2010 Clinton Global Initiative in New York City and pledge Dermalogica's commitment to help a minimum of 25,000 women worldwide to start or grown a business. Additionally, on March 8, 2011, the 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day, I had the opportunity to provide a keynote address at the United Nations and share the joinFITE commitment. On that same day, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon mentioned in his opening speech how organizations like joinFITE are helping to make a difference in the lives of women all around the world. This was a huge moment for me and it made us all very proud of the work we are doing."

What's the best business book you've ever read?

"HALF THE SKY: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide, by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn is the most important book on my list, and it will be for a long time. This husband-wife duo are the first married couple to win a Pulitzer Prize for journalism, and Nick later won a second Pulitzer for his ongoing work for The New York Times. Strictly speaking, it's not a business book, as in, how to keep employees from stealing office supplies or that kind of thing. It's a book about global economics, and how the righting of the ship – the salvaging of the world economy – depends upon empowering girls and women in terms of education and opportunity. As the authors say, women are not the problem, we are the solution. Nick has been a huge champion of joinFITE since we launched, and we are so grateful to have his support. A book which is also very important to me is Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands by Kevin Roberts, CEO Worldwide of Saatchi & Saatchi. This book explores what makes people just lose

their minds over a brand – it really is an irrational, chemical explosion in the brand, like falling madly in love.”

What do you hope to achieve in the next five years?

“I hope to work with fellow entrepreneurs, and also with women who are powerful decision-makers in executive roles in the corporate world, to set a greater precedent for championing apprentices in every profession.

Apprenticeship is more of a reality in the work-force in the UK and Europe. It’s more than just basic training. It’s the sharing of expertise, and also the shaping and guiding of a young person with developing skills onto a path which may be fruitful. I’d like to see every business make apprenticeship programs a key priority, starting in 2012. In addition to benefitting the individual apprentice, it’s also obviously the best way for companies to build and nurture a skilled work-force, versus placing an ad on Monster.com! I adore the American spirit of independence and pioneering and risk-taking. I always say that the success of Dermalogica would not have been possible anywhere but the USA – the attitude here is fierce and fearless, and I love it. And I would also say that people who are just getting started in a career path can blaze their trails even more fiercely when they’ve learned a thing or two at the right hand of a master. Some basic mistakes are preventable. Also, apprenticing puts you in touch with vast networks of people who can be part of your success. Networking through your actual practice and work is much more effective than going to a cocktail party and trying to slip someone your business-card.