

# CEO

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*South Africa's*

## Top Businesswomen

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Women Empowering the Economy

Special

*Edition*

# A mindset for **Success**

*It is leadership that drives the thinking, behaviour, activities and life of Suzanne Ravenall, CEO of IDCS Holdings, an outsourcing operations implementation company founded by Ravenall in 1997.*

**A**t a philosophical level, Ravenall believes that she has always had a fundamental belief in people-centric progress – associating with and developing not just best people, but great leaders. "At a personal level, I have an undying passion for making the real difference in all I do and say with those I am engaged with, and for demonstrating the 'walk the talk' approach," she notes. "At a professional level, as an entrepreneur I have a single-minded approach to focusing on creating value for customers, for developing people around me who share the same passion, and for giving and taking advice that makes the same amount of customer sense."

Ravenall also has a passion for communities, and has always engaged in projects where she and her organisation can make a difference in small but consistent and sustainable ways. "I believe in partnering with people who share these values and behaviours with me, and in so doing, I have managed and led many situations where diversity has been the basis of success and fulfilment in all we have achieved together," she says.

Ravenall feels that leaders lead from the essence of who they are as a person. "We need to have strong beliefs about matters of principle," she says. She is also emphatic that leaders should be credible – people are looking for leaders who are honest, forward-looking, competent and inspiring. Referring to Jim Collins in his

*Good to Great* seminar of 2001, Ravenall points out that great leaders should be ambitious first and foremost for their company, and not for themselves. She also mentions leaders being humble and being workmanlike in their diligence.

"I believe motivation comes from within, and that while you cannot force someone to be motivated, you can inspire them," says Ravenall. "The only way you can really get people to act differently is get them to change the way that they think. That then changes their behaviour, and that behaviour prompts a different action. Providing your team with a compelling vision is also crucial, as is rigorously communicating that vision clearly and regularly."

As an entrepreneur, Ravenall has never really seen herself as a woman in business – rather, a businessperson with challenges relating to people respecting her leadership construct and her relentless focus on the operational execution of plans. "People sometimes confuse my approach with being overly rigid, where in fact it is about what I believe, and have experienced as having made the real difference along the way."

When asked about the greatest lesson she has learned in business, Ravenall responds with the fact that she has never singled out one lesson except to continue learning. "Each day is about learning a different lesson," she explains. "If I don't come away from a day's work having learned at least three new things, I feel

By Cheryl van der Merwe

cheated, as if my day was wasted. Every single person that we meet along the way – whether in business or socially – can teach us something, if we just pay attention and are open to learning."

Ravenall was a finalist for the Business Women's Association's Businesswoman of the Year Award this year, and her advice for other women who want to be successful in business is simple – if you think you can do something, you can. "I refuse to see adversity," says Ravenall.

"Everything that gets thrown at you can be seen as a challenge, and every challenge can be turned into an opportunity. South Africa is blessed with some amazing women, who are incredible tough and have achieved so much, and they really are role models for all people trying to climb the corporate ladder."

According to Ravenall, life is all about choices, and it is getting yourself in the right frame of mind that will ensure your ultimate success. "We may have some limitations, but people need to realise that they really can do what they want to do," she notes.

"Once you decide what it is that you *really* want to do, you need to formulate a game plan. Once you have the plan, you need to execute against it. All three steps are equally important – mindset, plan, execution – without one of these steps, your success rate diminishes accordingly. Also, if where you are in the corporate environment is not working for you

because you are not getting to where you want to be, you need to take a long hard look at where you really want to be, and gear yourself to make the move. Every person has the opportunity to carve out their own career – everybody is in charge of their own destiny, and it is up to you to take charge of it in a positive way."

Having achieved success in her business in South Africa, Ravenall has her sights set on success in new areas, rather than simply concentrating on perpetuating her current success in her current

venture. "I want to take the company to the next level of growth through Africa into the rest of the world, and replicate our success here," she explains. "As an extension of a positive legacy of a CEO, I also want to move to the next level of fulfilment where I can make a real difference in attracting the right kinds of investment for companies and the communities that need it most, to create jobs with real profit potential – sustaining a balance between company and community activity."



Suzanne Ravenall,  
Chief Executive Officer