

Gaby Gramm talks resilience, perseverance and coping with challenging situations

 By Robin Fredericks

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Gaby Gramm, managing director and owner of LuxTravelEx - a company offering marketing and operational solutions to the sub-Saharan Africa hospitality industry - is a seasoned industry player with 24 hands-on experience within the luxury hotel sector, working on a number of consulting projects that have garnered invaluable experience for her as an independent consultant globally.



Gaby Gramm



Here, Gramm lets us in on her EHL School of Hospitality - Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) schooling, what it's like being a woman marketer and what the Southern Africa's luxury hospitality industry can do to improve.

What does a day in your life look like?

I consult to properties so this will mean that there are days where I am with the clients, at their properties or otherwise work from my home office, mainly email work.

Can you tell us more about yourself? What made you choose a career in tourism and hospitality?

My parents had friends who were in the industry and this always appealed to me. I then went on the waiting list of EHL which was about five years at the time. I have never regretted the move into this labour and time-consuming industry because it built me as a person.

How did your studies at EHL influence you and your career path?

Associated to EHL and who I studied with, also had an influence on where I ended up. Firstly, I worked for an EHL Alumni for five years in Biarritz and then a study friend of mine moved to South Africa, which was my introduction to this beautiful country, and I moved there 23 years ago.

“ No glass ceiling was ever shattered by submission and self-doubt. ”

What made you decide to start LuxTravelEx? What has this experience taught you?

I launched my company after completion of an Executive MBA at the University of Cape Town in 2012. It gave me the confidence to make the jump from being employed to work for myself.

It has been difficult at times, especially in the beginning when I needed to build a client base and when the moment arrived where I needed to decide if I take staff on or continue to work on a smaller scale without the responsibility of salaries. I opted for the second and have not regretted the smaller setup.

As a business owner, what are some of the challenges that you have faced and how have you overcome them?

As above mentioned, there comes a moment when one can either spread the business and take on staff or one decides to remain small. In my case, I realised that it was important to my clients that they want my expertise and personal involvement

rather than some outsourcing to staff or another operator.

■ ***What about the work you do excites and/or inspires you? Especially with regards to marketing luxury hospitality and travel trade products?***

Working with products in Southern Africa means that we need to sell the destination first and foremost; this for both the luxury sector and the more basic products. Working in Africa has its challenges but has always excited me and made me feel very proud to live on this continent.

■ ***Who has been your biggest inspiration?***

There have been several people along the way who have influenced and built me. It's mostly people who have been very humble about their own successes, never took themselves too seriously and have taken pleasure in growing and mentoring people around them.

■ ***What is it like being a woman marketer within tourism and hospitality?***

Today, it is exciting because there are so many women out there operating in our industry and giving us all a valuable network of like-minded female marketers.

■ ***What could the industry do to improve?***

Probably like in every industry, work on consistent communication within the various stakeholders, such as tourism boards, the department of tourism and products, as well as end consumers. This is particularly important in challenging times.

■ ***What is your message for Women's Month?***

No glass ceiling was ever shattered by submission and self-doubt. As women, we unfortunately sometimes need to prove a bit more but this, in the end, gives us so much more life experience.

■ ***Any words of wisdom to those considering a career in luxury travel and hospitality?***

In today's working world our industry is considered as hard without instant gratification. This might be true, but one is part of the most interesting global network. Also, through our work with people and the long hours, we develop resilience, perseverance and the ability to cope with any challenging situation.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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