



BREAKING



BARRIERS



TO SUCCESS



ENTREPRENEURIAL STORIES THAT INSPIRE GREAT IDEAS



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BE Authentic. TAKE Risks. DON'T BE Afraid.

Stephenie Foster

“As an entrepreneur I can take an idea & run with it on my own terms.”

Stephenie Foster
Co-Founder Smash Strategies
stepheniefoster.com

Photo taken by Oscar Parra at the Embassy of Luxembourg in Washington, DC at the "Journalists on the Front Line"



Smashing Barriers to Women's Leadership & Gender Equality

I am a lawyer, diplomat, author, and political strategist. But, throughout, I've also been an advocate for gender equality and women's leadership. I co-founded Smash Strategies, providing strategic advice to



ensure that investments by companies and institutions in women and girls are effective and transformational. And now, I am bringing a gender focus to foreign policy decision-making.

When did you first realize you wanted to be an entrepreneur?

I am not sure when that happened! I have been both an entrepreneur and worked in large organizations. What I like about being an entrepreneur is that you can take an idea and run with it on your own terms.

Describe one barrier that you've faced in your business and how did you overcome it.

One barrier is the view that focusing on women's leadership is a "nice to do," not a "must do." I have worked to overcome that barrier by using concrete examples of how gender equality and women's leadership lead to better outcomes, and how individual women make a difference.

As an example, this year, I started a social media series called "Women Making Waves" to highlight women of accomplishment in every field. It's been great to see the response!

What does "success" mean to you beyond revenue and growth?

Success means that people I work with – and people I speak with – come away with a better understanding of the critical importance of women's leadership and including diverse perspectives in their decision-making process. It also means that they do something with that understanding.

What marketing campaign had the biggest impact on your visibility?

Writing a book (or in my case two) has increased my visibility. I started out writing short articles, then longer ones. This gave me a

platform and credibility to talk about business strategies to increase women's leadership, as well as why gender equality leads to better outcomes. The books are also a great "calling card," and help to start conversations. The two book titles are: Take Action and Feminist Foreign Policy!

What's one barrier you want readers to stop believing is unbreakable?

Holding yourself back. As we saw at the 2026 Olympics, finding joy and pursuing your passion is the road to accomplishment, no matter who you are.

Looking back on your business journey, what advice would you give to your younger self?

Be authentic. Take risks. Don't be scared. 🦋

I am bringing a gender focus to foreign policy decision-making.

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