



Cannabis and International Women's Day

International Women's Day (IWD), originally called International Working Women's Day, is celebrated on March 8 every year. Throughout the world, celebrations range from the general celebration of respect, appreciation, and love towards women for their economic, political and social achievements.

The earliest celebration held was as a Socialist political event in 1909 in New York City. Declared a national holiday in the Soviet Union in 1917, it spread to other nearby countries. Today it is celebrated in many Eastern countries.

In some regions, the day lost its political flavor and became simply an occasion for people to express their love for women in a way somewhat similar to a mixture of Mother's Day and Valentine's Day. In other regions, however, the political and human rights theme designated by the United Nations runs strong as political and social awareness of the struggles of women worldwide is brought out and examined in a hopeful manner. Some people celebrate the day by wearing purple ribbons.

Female Entrepreneurs in the Cannabis Industry

When you look at the cannabis industry, you will notice women entrepreneurs are making a tremendous impact and helping pave the way as we move towards becoming a larger industry. According to [Marijuana Business Daily](#), women account for 36% of all executives in the cannabis market. This exceeds the 22% national average for women in executive roles across all industries, according to Pew Research Center.

Direct Cannabis Network reached out to women entrepreneurs and leaders in the industry and asked them a variety of questions about gender equality, goals for future generations, and how men and women can work together to celebrate women who are reaching social, economic and political achievements.

Christie Strong, Marketing Communications Manager at Kiva Confections

DCN: What makes you passionate, personally, about achieving gender equality, and what is your professional "Pledge for Parity"?

CS: To me, achieving gender equality is the first step in our culture recognizing the equality and unity of all human beings. If we stopped looking for a 'weaker' sex, race, citizen, etc... we would start to see the unique strength and value of every individual. Women rising to their natural position of equal opportunity and power would restore a balance to the world that is hard to quantify. It would impact organizations from the greatest to the most minute spheres of influence, and transform the way we approach money, the environment, health care- everything.

DCN: What is the biggest challenge we face in reaching gender equality, and what are some of the key strategies to achieve this goal?

CS: I think the greatest challenge to achieving gender equality is awareness. We have the data that profitability and innovation increase when women are in senior leadership positions. We know that women have vast emotional intelligence, are team players, conflict resolvers, and highly effective communicators. The problem is- is this data reaching the right eyes and ears? If we can make companies understand that a homogenous management team is hurting their bottom line, then I believe we would see broader, faster changes happening.

Achieving gender equality first means addressing sexism and the subtle ways it's perpetuated in our culture. It means changing the way we communicate to young girls and teenage women, so they feel championed to achieve their goals. It requires that we invite and welcome diverse voices to the table and develop workplace cultures that support them staying and flourishing there.

DCN: How can working with men and boys help to celebrate and advance the social, economic, cultural, and political achievement of women?

CS: Women need allies who understand that diversity creates balance, understanding, and measurable success. Advancing women isn't about bypassing men- it's about creating a synergistic collaboration between men and women of all backgrounds because of the robust foundation that builds. To meet today's evolving challenges, we simply need all hands on deck. Men who understand this are going to feel far from threatened- they are going to feel partnered and supported in reaching our common goals, and they are going to become women's greatest advocates.

DCN: What main change would you like to see for young girls in the next generation?

CS: I would love for young girls to feel a sense of unlimited possibility for themselves. I work in an industry that didn't exist a few years ago- and that exemplifies the idea that even the wildest dreams can come true. The first step in achieving the impossible is believing that nothing is actually impossible. If we can create a space of openness and inclusion for young girls, then I believe we're going to see some radical innovations take place from future generations of women.

DCN: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

CS: I am the marketing manager for Kiva Confections, a six-year-old California-based company that is redefining cannabis edibles. Since joining the Kiva team I have become an ardent advocate for cannabis and its health benefits, and a knowledgeable resource for education on micro-dosing, edibles safety, and CBD. I am incredibly passionate about using the power of storytelling to advocate for the safe and effective use of this ancient medicine.

Melonie Kotchey, Co-Founder of Compassionate Certification Centers

DCN: What do you want everyone to know on International Women's Day?

MK: March 8th is a day of celebration for all, not only of the past hundred years, but of the future for women now, and to come.

DCN: What makes you passionate, personally, about reaching gender equality, and what is your professional “Pledge for Parity”?

MK: The right to work as a woman, earn the same pay as a man and take care of myself has always held my interest. Growing up, my mother was not allowed to work because my father thought her job was to stay home. When she broke free of my father’s ideals, she went back to school and got straight A’s. Watching her excel has meant a lot, and has shaped my own journey.

When I was 15, I moved out and lived on my own, even despite the difficulty of supporting myself while still going to high school and working full time. I was that independent and wanted to show myself that I could, and I did. Relying on yourself enables you to have a unique skill set that translates into all facets of life. When you don’t know any other way, you learn to live in a constant state of what some would call “fight or flight” which to me is now normal.

DCN: What is the biggest challenge we face in reaching gender equality, and what are some of the key strategies to achieve this goal?

MK: There will always be a “boys club” and we rarely if ever will be a part of it. I am always striving to be cognizant that we all have the same problems as other women. When we look in the mirror and see ourselves, in the end, we all bleed. I try not to judge, be kind, be forgiving, embrace what I am great at, and not worry about the rest. People whose belief systems are deeply entrenched in gender inequality will have the most challenges. When the majority of people are brought up to follow a certain system of ideals, oftentimes they never question or move on from those degrees of acceptance and comfort. One of the biggest challenges we face and also one of the most controversial is learning how to evolve outdated religions that encourage inequality. When you are born into practicing certain values, whether they are religious or otherwise, it is difficult for people to think outside of those values, to question them and change them.

DCN: How can working with men and boys help to celebrate and advance the social, economic, cultural, and political achievement of women?

MK: Men have differences that should be celebrated and appreciated. Gender equality does not mean that we are equal in every way, it simply means we have the capability regardless of sex, to strive and succeed regardless of how you measure success. I can not imagine going into a social, economic or cultural environment with the mindset that I am not equal. I truly believe it is a state of mind that working with everyone will change.

DCN: What main change would you like to see for young girls in the next generation?

MK: I would like to see parents stop enabling failure, especially in regards to the next generation of young girls. Having too much, not being told no, always getting a trophy, is far from reality. I want to see young girls encouraged to learn on their own more, and encouraged to find their own path, not follow a beaten one.

DCN: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

MK: I think I just did!
Growing up in a suburb of Pittsburgh, PA, my sister, parents and I lived off our small hobby farm. We grew up having to earn everything starting at nine or so and were responsible for

finding a way to fund our own book covers, clothing and sometimes food. Always looking for a way to make money, but help others, I formed a club of neighborhood kids and started a recycling business. We were featured in the local newspaper for making a dent in society. Recycling led us to fundraising and we picked organizations that we felt no one understood and that needed our help. This led us to helping the manatees and bats, both not popular animals. They were thought of as ugly and scary but we embraced them.

The cannabis market is very similar, it is federally illegal and at times challenging and ugly. If embraced, it can help many people. I am proud to be a part of the industry, where I can both earn a living and help others, it really doesn't get any better than that.

Additional Bio:

Melonie spent 15 years in sales and marketing for the healthcare industry, before starting Compassionate Certification Centers, a medical cannabis consulting company. The physician-led and owned organization is dedicated to creating a more inclusive and progressive healthcare dialogue, offering medical cannabis resources and diagnostic tools for providers. Beginning this year, the company will host annual medical cannabis conventions featuring innovative workshops and seminars with industry leaders, entrepreneurs, healthcare professionals, and policymakers.

Compassionate Certification Centers™ inaugural 2017 World Medical Cannabis Conference & Expo (WMCCEXpo) will take place, April 21 – 22, 2017, at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center, 1000 Fort Duquesne Boulevard, in Pittsburgh.

Shauntel Ludwig, VP of Operations for DaVinci Vaporizer

DCN: What makes you passionate, personally, about reaching gender equality, and what is your professional “Pledge for parity”

SL: This is something that affects me personally, nearly every day. Throughout my career, I have felt that as a woman there's a demand to stand out more and work harder to in order to earn the same recognition as a male counterpart would.

Being a woman in a leadership position, I want to be an example for women while proving the possibility that goals can be met with the right determination. This dedication is what fuels my pledge for parity while illuminating leadership career paths for all women.

DCN: What is the biggest challenge we face in reaching gender equality, and what are some of the key strategies to achieve this goal?

SL: The biggest challenge that I see is that most often men exhibit a level of unawareness of the bias. With campaigns such as the pledge for parity becoming more of a forefront in the workplace, the level of education necessary can be reached at a much faster pace.

DCN: How can working with men and boys help to celebrate and advance the social, economic, cultural, and political achievement of women?

SL: By working alongside with men and boys and getting into the trenches of the workload together, women can set the tone that we are not afraid to get our hands dirty to accomplish

milestones. With continuously producing a successful result in any given field, we essentially prove equality.

DCN: What main change would you like to see for young girls in the next generation?

SL: The biggest change, or the most impact, will come from shifting the belief in young women that they cannot achieve success in a certain profession because they think of it as male dominated. Additionally, I would hope that young women wouldn't carry the belief that they cannot achieve it all, especially when it comes to a balance of family and career.

DCN: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

SL: I'm the Vice President of Operations for DaVinci Vaporizer and mother to my beautiful son Reece. I have an MBA in International Management from the University of Missouri and have worked for small businesses, as well as fortune 500 companies over my professional career.

Elise McDonough, Edibles Editor High Times Magazine

DCN: What makes you passionate, personally, about reaching gender equality, and what is your professional "Pledge for Parity"?

SL: Equality is something that many women in the US take for granted, but it's important to passionately defend our civil rights and not become complacent. Realizing that the Federal government made cannabis illegal based on a racist propaganda campaign opens your eyes to the fact that regressive policies are enacted around the world based on the incorrect or biased information. Activists working to increase awareness about cannabis legalization realize that we now have a chance to build a new American industry from the ground up, allowing for more female and minority-owned small businesses that benefit their communities.

Professionally, I've shared the stories of female cannabis activists and entrepreneurs and highlighted their achievements, as well as making sure women are equally represented within our educational programming.

DCN: What is the biggest challenge we face in reaching gender equality, and what are some of the key strategies to achieve this goal?

SL: Honestly, the biggest challenge involves overcoming incorrect but deeply ingrained attitudes towards gender stereotypes and roles based on religious beliefs—the belief that somehow God designed women as inferior, and that "god" is a masculine entity. Constantly working for equality requires culturally confronting old ideas about appropriate roles for women in the world and pushing for policy that reaffirms secular government and the separation of church and state.

DCN: How can working with men and boys help to celebrate and advance the social, economic, cultural, and political achievement of women?

SL: Men who respect and value women are our greatest allies. Teaching boys that it's ok to be sensitive and show emotion is important, as well as pointing out how stereotypical expectations of gender roles hurt men as well as women. We are all one human race, and we are all stronger when we stand together for the greater good.

DCN: What main change would you like to see for young girls in the next generation?

SL: I'd like to see science-based sex education that not only focuses on biology and public health issues but also on how to conduct healthy relationships, including how to value, accept and love oneself as well. The Dutch have a wonderful program of sex ed that also teaches about relationships, and I think that education paired with access to birth control would be the best way to empower the next generation.

DCN: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

SL: I'm a 15 year veteran of High Times magazine and the author of The Official High Times Cannabis Cookbook and Marijuana for Everybody! Today I live in Los Angeles with my husband David Bienenstock and two dachshunds, after many years of living and working in New York and Santa Cruz. My mom Jennifer taught my two younger sisters and I how to be a strong woman, and she is my greatest inspiration.

Diane Czarkowski, Principal at Canna Advisors, LLC.

DCN: What do you want everyone to know on International Women's Day?

DC: Everyday is about looking ahead. We stand on the shoulders of others who have come before us with the mindset to change what we cannot accept. I have worked in many male-dominated industries, from high-tech sales to real estate, and now cannabis. It was not easy to ascend through the ranks, but I prevailed.

Women, minorities, and all marginalized groups need to know that there is always enormous potential to thrive. When we get stuck looking backwards, that's when we falter. When we stay ahead of the curve and look to the future, the opportunities are limitless.

DCN: What makes you passionate, personally, about reaching gender equality, and what is your professional "Pledge for Parity"?

DC: I was lucky enough early in my career to work for a company that was diverse and had exceptional female role models. One, in particular, took me under her wing and helped me grow into who I am today. As a mother and as a business owner, I am passionate about creating and supporting mentoring programs that encourage women to take the next step in their personal and professional careers.

I pledge that I will continue to mentor women inside and outside the cannabis industry so that they can achieve their entrepreneurial ambitions.

DCN: What is the biggest challenge we face in reaching gender equality, and what are some of the key strategies to achieve this goal?

DC: There is a saying that "Women are their own worst enemy" and I do believe that sometimes our biggest challenge is ourselves. Before entering the cannabis industry, I was reluctant, unsure, and afraid of the unknown. I needed the support of others to help me eventually take that step into a whole new industry and career. My husband (also my business partner), as well

as close friends and other women entrepreneurs never ceased to inspire and encourage me on this journey.

We need to never stop advocating for change, and we need to do this as a united group. The comfort of a support system is the difference between taking the plunge or staying on sidelines.

DCN: How can working with men and boys help to celebrate and advance the social, economic, cultural, and political achievement of women?

DC: The way our society is evolving, in some ways this is already occurring naturally. Children are growing up with working moms and stay at home dads, and seeing the sharing of roles and foundation of gender equality. Today we are witnessing major gender milestones, and we need to keep reaching for new milestones. Education is key to this advancement. We need women to be celebrated for their achievements in our schools, so that men and boys recognize early on what women bring to society – socially, economically, culturally, and politically. My son grew up in this environment and has found his passion in advocating against human trafficking and veteran and patient rights.

DCN: What main change would you like to see for young girls in the next generation?

DC: I would like to see more emphasis around being healthy inside and out and less emphasis on beauty and unhealthy sizes. At least they will know to discern when a woman is objectified in advertising and not let that influence her appearance.

DCN: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

DC: I am a Founding Partner of Canna Advisors, a cannabis consulting firm that I started with my husband, Jay Czarkowski.

Our firm's consulting services address a full spectrum of industry needs, including dispensary and cultivation license applications, facility design consulting, hiring practices and operational expertise.

For the past four years, we have been honored to lead the industry in advising. We have helped hundreds of investors and entrepreneurs start and grow their cannabis business in competitive and emerging markets with dozens of license wins in the US, as well as consulting projects in Canada, Puerto Rico, and Guam.

As a business owner, I make it a priority to give back, by supporting the cannabis community through educational endeavors. I am a founding member of the National Cannabis Industry Association, and have served many organizational roles, including the coordination of annual NCIA Gala events from 2012-14, and as a team leader for Lobby Days in Washington D.C. I am also proud to be a founding benefactor of Women Grow, a lifetime member and Selection Committee member of the ArcView Investment Group, a sustaining member of Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) and the Marijuana Policy Project (MPP). Last year, I was honored to receive Arcview's Outstanding Member award and be named one of the "50 Most Important Women in Cannabis" by Cannabis Business Executive.

Conclusion

We would like to thank everyone who helped collaborate on this article. We enjoyed sharing such great advice, information, and insight from this women entrepreneurs. We would like to end on this note, in order for us all to enable more female entrepreneurs to continue moving the cannabis industry and all other industries, we need to provide easier access to capital. In order for more women to achieve leadership roles, we all need to start looking within our own organization's are we providing the right tools through mentorship, best practices, and guidance to make sure we are helping women rise within. We need to be aware of the challenges women face in the business realm and address them.

Source: Direct Cannabis Network

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