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# Out To Lunch With Local Entrepreneur, Ann Edwards

Ann Edwards is doing justice to a delicious dish of calves' liver and puy lentils at Reigate's premier French restaurant, La Barbe. Her fellow diners are tucking into impressive sea bass and monkfish recipes and an equally tasty apple and Camembert terrine. It's the perfect setting, with great food, friendly, attentive but unobtrusive service and a comfortable ambience – small wonder that the restaurant is celebrating its silver jubilee this month.

Ann expects good service and she also appreciates real food, especially when it is presented with passion. It's an attitude that epitomises her own approach to work and one that has helped her to carve out a high profile niche in the world of leadership and organisation development, working with some of the world's biggest companies, both in-house and as a consultant.

It is work she relishes. "To be a successful entrepreneur, you have to enjoy what you do," she explains. "My results are best measured in terms of a leader's increased effectiveness – that improves their contribution and makes a difference to the bottom line. I need to make a difference, and that happens best when someone becomes both more competent and confident in their ability to succeed."

With an early background in fashion retail management (she began her career at Peter Jones and Liberty), Ann moved up the corporate ladder via Ladbroke/Hilton Groups, ICL/Fujitsu, the BBC and global HR consultancy firm Towers Perrin, leading teams of up to 85 staff and working globally as well as nationally.

She now heads her own East Grinstead-based consultancy and can call on an extensive resource of affiliate partners across the world to fulfil clients' requirements. "I am a great networker and my team consists of successful leaders & technical experts, many who have been





colleagues, all of whom I like to work with and admire," she says.

Their specialist skills and methods are many and varied and are tailored to each client's needs. "Some clients are very specific and that can make things easier sometimes," she explains. "At other times, they just need someone to bounce ideas off."

"It can be more technical – they want help with putting a marketing strategy or business plan together, or they are successful entrepreneurs who want to move onto new things but need to sell their business to achieve the greatest value. Often though, what is presenting as the issue, isn't the real issue. Sometimes we have to go right back to the business strategy in order to make

changes in how the business is set up and organised in both its people and commercial processes."

One of Ann's philosophies is that effectiveness means looking after one's health, physically, mentally and spiritually, and she practises what she preaches. Cooking is one of her favourite ways to relax – "I love the creativity," she says – and she also enjoys yoga and pilates at her local golf and country club, spending time with her husband and son, and makes sure she finds time to socialise with friends.

Many of the companies that Ann has worked with are male-dominated. Indeed, at Ladbroke's, she was the first senior manager to take maternity leave. However,

she says her experiences sharpened her business sense and made her stronger. "I am a robust person and I've had few problems in expanding my career," she says. "I am assertive and aware of what I can and cannot influence. I have also had strong female role models, both within my family and in the commercial world."

It's hardly surprising then that Vanessa Redgrave, Germaine Greer and Janet Street-Porter rank highly on the list of people Ann admires. "They're intelligent and opinionated women and they make a difference," she says.

It's a fitting tribute and there is little doubt that Ann Edwards has now graduated to the strong female role model category herself.