

# WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH



When life knocks you for six, it takes a whole lot of resilience to pick yourself up again. We learn lessons from three women who hit a low point – then bounced back stronger than ever »

## MICHELLE BUCHANAN

Michelle Buchanan has been told 'no' so many times in her bid to turn her passion for numerology into a career, it's amazing she didn't give up and return to working in the corporate world. But that's the advantage of being certain you're on the right path – you persevere, and eventually you get there.

Numerologists believe we all have a special number which can help us find our strengths, predict our challenges and forecast what's ahead. Buchanan is the 'spiritual teacher' number 11; which is why she set out to teach the world about numerology. In the past five years she has successfully reached out to New Zealand audiences – she wrote a numerology and mind, body, spirit column for *Woman's Day* magazine for four years, and appeared regularly on TV show *Good Morning*. Now she's landed her biggest coup yet: an international book publishing deal with Hay House, global leaders in the lucrative self-help market. But the number 11 also forecasts a life with many difficult lessons to learn, and Buchanan certainly hasn't escaped that part of her destiny.

### BECOMING A BUSINESS

When NEXT meets the 44-year-old at her home in the Auckland suburb of Herne Bay, she's putting the finishing touches to *The Numerology Guidebook* and its accompanying set of numerology oracle cards, due for international release in December. The book is written as a how-to for those interested in using numerology to give them direction in life. Buchanan already has clients, mostly American-based, who use the information for everything from choosing a business name or wedding day (some dates are better than others for getting married) to figuring out a career path. It's a concept that falls into the self-empowerment category, and Buchanan is quick to separate herself from psychics and mediums.

"I'm not a fortune teller and I don't speak to dead people," she says firmly. "I'm more of an inspirational life coach-come-counsellor with added intuitive insight. I work with people who want to improve themselves and create a better life."

Although she grew up in west Auckland and describes herself as "a classic westie", Buchanan has the honey-blond locks and



'I didn't care how many I sold; I did it because I believed in them and creating them made me feel good'

fluffy designer dog you might expect of a woman living in this well-to-do area. She's quick to point out, however, that the house belongs to her parents. Numerology is her passion, but it hasn't made her rich – or at least, not yet. It's a career she has pursued because it has helped her through hard times, and she believes it can help others too.

Buchanan once wanted to be a professional musician, and it was this goal that inadvertently led her to numerology. When she was 21 she left a record label job in Auckland to become a singer/songwriter in LA. But while she was full of get-go, she was low on self-belief. Instead of landing a record deal, she was overcome with self-doubt. It wasn't until a friend in LA gifted her a numerology reading that she saw her talents, and her future, in a new light.

"I was struggling with anxiety issues, thinking 'why am I such a failure?'" Buchanan says. "Then I discovered I was an 11 Life Path – a rare number with much potential that must overcome many challenges, including lack of self-esteem. That reading inspired me to work on my self-confidence and make something of my life."

Several years later she returned to New Zealand to work as an account manager and delved into her newfound passion for numerology, giving readings to friends, acquaintances – even clients. But she didn't have the confidence to charge a fee, and refused payment when it was offered. During this time she married and had a son Ben, nine, and daughter Ava, six. In an inspired bid to conquer her self-esteem and body issues, Buchanan made use of her pregnancy weight gain to work as a plus-size model. "Instead of trying to hide my extra weight, I thought I might as well capitalise

on the situation," says Buchanan, who appeared in catalogues for Farmers, K & K and Postie Plus. "Modelling helped me to accept being a bigger size."

Following Ava's birth she became a full-time mum and did a 'law of attraction practitioner' correspondence course, which proved a turning point. The course gave her the nudge she needed to start charging for her services and make a career of numerology. Confidence doesn't guarantee success, however, and the next few years proved as testing as Buchanan's number 11 had predicted. In 2008 she pitched the idea of getting a numerology column published and was thrilled when someone said yes. But just before she signed on the dotted line, she was told they were using her idea but had hired someone who already had a profile. "It was hurtful, gutting and soul-destroying," Buchanan recalls. "But I picked myself up and thought 'if it had to happen that way, I accept that'."

### TRY AND TRY AGAIN

She responded to the let-down by stubbornly trying again; this time contacting NEXT editor Sarah Henry, who at the time was editor of *Woman's Day*. "I gave her a reading there and then, and she said 'you're hired'."

Buchanan says Henry's belief in her was the big break that made everything else possible. The following year she became the resident numerologist on *Good Morning* – but while her career was soaring, life at home was unravelling, and in 2009 she split from her husband of seven years. "Sadly, the more I followed my spiritual path, the more rapidly my marriage fell apart." Buchanan says she hasn't had anyone in her life since. "It's how the universe works. If you're not ready and

it's not the right time, no one's coming along."

By the time her marriage ended she had set her sights on having a book published. She had three proposals turned down, including a bizarre experience where she was strung along by a woman who feigned interest in the book to get an extensive personal reading – and in fact, no longer even worked for a publishing company. Then Buchanan learned about a writers' workshop in the US run by Hay House, which was founded by self-help guru Louise Hay, who wrote the bestseller *You Can Heal Your Life*. The workshop offered a prize of a book deal for whoever put together the best proposal, and Buchanan borrowed money from her parents to attend. She didn't win the book deal; however, she did win the runner-up prize – a one-month contract for a numerology show on Hay House Radio in the US. With her upbeat Kiwi charm, she proved popular and the show was extended to seven months. During this time she was inspired to make a set of numerology 'oracle cards' after discovering there were none on the market, and pitched the idea to a publisher.

"I was told: 'don't bother, you're not well known and they won't sell.'" She decided to make them anyway and self-publish if she had to. "I had full custody of my kids at that time. I figured, 'If I'm going to be the main caregiver, I need to create something that will set me and the kids up for life.' It cost me thousands, all of my life savings to get them printed, edited and designed. I didn't care how many I sold; I did it because I believed in them and creating them made me feel good."

But Buchanan hadn't given up. When she learned the head of Hay House in America would be visiting his Australian office, she emailed him about the cards and set up a meeting in Australia. She was in luck. "He said, 'We don't have anything like this, and we'd love to publish them. But we're also going to need a book!'"

With a grin, Buchanan says it still hasn't hit her she's going to have a book sold internationally by the world's largest self-help publisher, "but it will be a big wow when it happens". She adds that people often tell her she's lucky, but she doesn't believe in luck. "I attract good things because I'm passionate and I believe wonderful opportunities exist. And I back that up by taking action," she says. "Life can be hard sometimes, and bad things can happen to good people. But we're here to learn and grow – and we don't learn when we're sitting still."

## KIRSTEN TAYLOR

Ironically, it was a business failure and growing financial worry that set naturopath and SleepDrops inventor Kirsten Taylor on the path to pinch-yourself business success. The single mum lost everything when a business partnership soured and, living hand-to-mouth, the pressure was taking its toll. As she lay awake night after night worrying about the future, Taylor realised the solution to her problems may lie in a little glass bottle. As a naturopath, she had been formulating a sleep remedy for clients for years after realising that if they weren't sleeping, it was a struggle to treat them for other issues.

"I was getting feedback that the SleepDrops were really helping my clients to get a good night's sleep and they were waking up feeling good. Until that point I'd never really thought more about it," the 39-year-old says.

Her subsequent research revealed 47% of adults in the western world had issues with sleep, at which point she realised these magic drops could have a far bigger market. With renewed determination, Taylor bottled her SleepDrops – making the labels on her home printer – and took out an ad in the local paper, crossing her fingers that she'd make enough to pay for it. That day the phone rang 20 times – and the business was born. That was 2009, and in the four years since she has added more products to the range, including sleep remedies for babies. She also has three new products to come. In four short years the business has grown to an annual revenue of more than \$1 million and, with sales rocketing in New Zealand and abroad, Taylor expects that figure to be around \$5 million within 12 months.

### BILLS BILLS BILLS

It was a very different story when Taylor's work partnership failed and she was left with nothing. "It was right at the time when the world was heading into the global financial crisis. There were no jobs in my industry and I'm a single mother. Things were very bad and I needed government assistance. Everything I had I'd put into a business and it was gone."

Over the years, while she got back on her feet and developed her new business, Taylor and her son Jasper often went without, relying on the kindness of family and friends to get them through some rough times "when there wasn't a lot in the cupboard".

"There were times when I couldn't pay my bills and my friends lent me money. My son hasn't been able to have guitar lessons or do martial arts classes, so we've had to sacrifice. But I think I did a really good job of making him feel like everything was okay – that was important to me. I needed to be a rock regardless of what was happening," she says.

Taylor wasn't without a strong skill set – previous roles as a technical consultant and trainer for a top New Zealand natural remedy distribution company, a contract formulator of natural remedies, a webshop owner selling supplements to the Japanese market, and a practising naturopath, all helped her in developing and marketing her SleepDrops products.

### TAKING OFF

Until the end of last year SleepDrops sold directly to clients, but with increasing approaches from outside customers, retailers and distributors, Taylor launched the products into a limited number of pharmacies at the end of 2012 and the number of New Zealand stockists has risen to 650. The company is experiencing huge growth month-on-month >>



and sales are well ahead of Taylor's business growth forecasts for this year.

"I have a sales graph that goes like that," she says, gesturing upwards with her hand. "I've never given up faith this would work but it has definitely been hard and scary. Now it's starting to happen and there is a part of me just doing a jig because I'm so incredibly excited about the future."

## HELPING OTHERS

Dressed in a hot pink silk T-shirt and jeans, her straight blond hair tucked back from her face, Taylor looks relaxed and in control. Sitting at the dining table at her rented Auckland home, with views out across the harbour, she can hear the doorbell chime periodically as clients drop by to buy products directly from her and her staff.

It's clear Taylor lives and breathes the business, relishing the chance to connect with clients and help them with their specific sleep issues. Growing up with community-minded parents, she always saw herself doing something that would help others. She planned to become a lawyer but her first year of university left her disillusioned and she took the chance to travel, spending seven years away from New Zealand.

It was while working in Japan that Taylor's 20-something lifestyle started impacting her health, and a friend introduced her to vitamins, minerals, and supplements. The change to her mood, energy and health were profound and Taylor says she knew she'd found her way to help others.

"I had made a promise to myself I would keep travelling until I worked out what I wanted to do. It had to be something I really loved and could spend the rest of my life doing - naturopathy was definitely that thing for me." She came back to New Zealand to study to be a naturopath, medical herbalist and nutritionist, and in the midst of her initial three-year course she also had son Jasper, now 11.

As a woman, she says, New Zealand is a great place to do business, with support available to fledgling entrepreneurs who want to get an idea off the ground. As her business grows she would also like to set up a fund to help single mothers with good business ideas.

"I used to tell my Japanese friends I was going back to New Zealand to start my own business and they were quite amazed. But in New Zealand we can do anything. If you're really determined, prepared to work hard, have a good product or idea and you're prepared to back yourself, then people will back you."

And with SleepDrops poised to go global - and with a successful trial with Cathay Pacific pilots using SleepDrops during their scheduled sleep breaks during flights - she says the key to maintaining a work-life balance will be finding savvy strategic partners in each of the new markets.

"I want to be a mum and to go to soccer matches and take a week off each school holidays. I'm aware I have this massive thing that's going to happen with the business but if I am clever about it then I should be able to maintain my work-life balance."

Her advice to others is to crunch the numbers and to follow the advice of the countless entrepreneurship courses and books she has devoured over the years - 'find your niche' and make sure your business also 'feeds your soul'. Taylor says she knew her products were good and she never gave up, despite the challenges. "It is a huge leap of faith and not just once - it's a huge leap of faith every day.

"Don't get me wrong, this isn't all altruistic, I'm going to look quite good on the deck of my super yacht," she laughs.

"I want both - I want a super-amazing lifestyle and I want to only make products that will improve people's lives. If I make lots of money doing that, then that's awesome."



## CORINNA SLAMONS

In towering five-inch heels, Corinna Slamons carefully steps along a cobblestone path in Malibu, elegantly regaining her balance after each threatening hole.

Having just moved into a cute beachside cottage with husband Joe, she hasn't got around to unpacking her more practical shoes; instead she's been busy making calls to Donald Trump's office regarding an upcoming fundraiser.

Add in tales of hanging with Ashton Kutcher, proposing marriage via Sir Richard Branson and working with actor Eric Roberts, and the New Zealander has a dream life in Los Angeles.

## RECOGNISING THE SIGNS

But unbeknown to the locals peering on as she gets her picture taken, every hole she's conquering with her fearless stilettos represents a giant obstacle she's overcome en route to her milestone 40th.

It's hard to fathom how many hurdles Slamons has taken in her stride: she suffered post-natal depression, lost a loved one to suicide, and endured the breakdown of a difficult 10-year marriage, which left her penniless.

"The biggest thing I have learned is to trust your instincts - especially as a >>

woman,” she reflects. “Often once you get out of a bad situation you realise you’ve known all along it was no good for you.”

A teenage mum at 18 to her daughter Cheinnelle, then marrying builder Mark, it wasn’t until the birth of their son Jack at 22 that life started to fall apart. Motherhood became a battle when Jack was diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea – causing him to stop breathing through the night due to blocked airways.

“He was frequently in hospital and he had a monitor which set off an alarm two or three times a night when I would have to revive him. I was constantly worried the alarm would go off so never slept properly, which is difficult when you already have a four-year-old keeping you busy all

Richmastery and Presidential Inner Circle (PIC), an exclusive club granting members access to networking events with the likes of Bill Clinton and Sir Richard Branson. The idea came about because the pair wanted a greater network of business associates to learn from and liaise with.

The club took off thanks to Clinton appearing at the Auckland launch in 2006.

Using membership fees, they were able to continue getting access to business role models such as Branson and original *The Apprentice* winner Bill Rancic for their events.

As PIC grew, they relocated to LA and expanded the business, working on events which saw Slamons mingling with the likes

considered giving up and returning home but refused to let her situation destroy her Los Angeles life.

Borrowing money for a plane ticket, she flew to New Zealand, organised a work visa and returned to the States. She then reached out to people like Branson to write her professional testimonials to help her move forward with her career.

Through one of Branson’s charity events, she met war veteran Joe. The pair started spending time together and unexpectedly fell in love.

## CELEBRITY CUPID

Meanwhile, Slamons slowly got her work life back on track and now manages product placement for Legacy Entertainment, placing items like cars and computers in television shows such as *Two and A Half Men*. She is also executive producer on two films starring her close friend Eric Roberts, including *Don’t Shoot! I’m the Guitar Man*.

Add in a marketing job for a private jet company and a seat on the board of Face Forward (a charity providing reconstructive surgery and after-care for victims of domestic violence) and Slamons is one busy woman.

While she’s still rebuilding her wealth, she now defines success by being in a good state of mind, and values “precious times” more than money. With that in mind, when it came time to getting engaged, she wasn’t concerned about rings and instead asked Branson to send a proposal email to Joe on her behalf.

Married for two years now, the couple have just moved into an oceanside home and sent Jack, 17, off to college in Fresno, while 21-year-old Cheinnelle continues studying in New Zealand.

Slamons credits Joe for standing by her, emotionally and financially, through a divorce which would have sent most men running in the opposite direction.

“Our relationship kept flourishing and flourishing. Was I wary of marriage? Absolutely. It petrified me. Yes, it’s my third marriage but it felt right. Joe is a gentleman and we had a completely different chemistry and communication. I’m more vocal now.

“Having a marriage full of communication is wonderful.” □

## ‘Often once you get out of a bad situation you realise that you have known all along it was no good for you’

day,” Slamons recalls. “But I recognised the signs [of post-natal depression] and decided to take my life in my own hands. Mum took the kids for six weeks while I recovered – sleeping, eating healthier and forcing myself to walk every day even for 10 minutes.”

Deciding she needed to surround herself with positive people she also joined women’s networking groups, which helped her start to “hold my head high” again.

## RUBBING SHOULDERS

But meanwhile Mark, who was bipolar, was struggling through a dark depression which culminated in him ending his life when Jack was four.

Distraught emotionally and struggling financially, Slamons – who left school in fifth form and took hairdressing, modelling and supermarket jobs until Cheinnelle’s birth – found an admin job.

While keeping herself busy with work, she avoided falling back into depression, but in her vulnerable state dived straight into another relationship, with a businessman she prefers not to name.

Marrying on a Jamaican beach in 2001, the couple became business tycoons through their property education company

of “awesome and friendly” Ashton Kutcher, “charismatic” Branson and the “very funny” Sharon Stone.

However, behind the glitz the marriage was clearly not working, Slamons says. “I was very vulnerable when I got into the relationship and when you’re vulnerable you put on blinkers and ignore the warning signs. I’m not saying I was perfect but I look back at those years and I lost so much confidence.

She turned to plastic surgery for the answers to her dwindling self-esteem. “I had a facelift at 30 then two breast augmentations because I was so worried about how I looked.”

Her personality was also altering.

“My boundaries changed. You have to set boundaries of what you will and won’t accept from people, and as mine kept shifting I realised I wasn’t being myself. I have learned not to ignore those signs. You have to listen to yourself and your intuition.”

When Slamons finally did listen to her intuition and left, she walked away with just her clothes. She strongly advises women in business to keep some wealth separate when entering marriage.

With her children still completing schooling in New Zealand, Slamons