

Glitter among the grey

Glamorous networker and Editorial Intelligence founder Julia Hobsbawm does lunch with *Cathy Wallace*

Julia Hobsbawm has a pair of sparkly silver Converse trainers in her oversized pink leather handbag, so she can slip out of her Jimmy Choos and rush across London once lunch with *PRWeek* at Soho House is over.

She is in a particular rush today, she explains, as her husband has had an operation on his knee, and this has left her to deal with the school run. So she has cancelled all appointments that are not a priority, and she is pondering whether or not to attend the *PRWeek* Power Book 2009 party later that same day. She does.

It is both ironic and appropriate that Hobsbawm, a glamorous and beautifully groomed 40-something who fulfils multiple roles as a businesswoman, wife, mother, stepmother, PR professor, author and consultant, has a work/life dilemma. She recently wrote *The See Saw*, a book on work/life balance, in which she is refreshingly honest about her own quest to 'get it right'.

'I'm a big advocate of "flexibilism"', she says. 'That is the idea of trying to work as little as possible from the office, if your job allows it.' Easy for Hobsbawm to say, perhaps. She did after all found her own business, Editorial Intelligence (EI), and her husband, when not laid up with a knee injury, works from home.

'It makes life so much easier,' she admits. But her backing of flexibility in the workplace makes her someone the female-heavy PR workforce can regard as leading by example, particularly when it comes to making difficult decisions. Hobsbawm gave up the PR agency she ran with Gordon

CV

- ◆ 2005 Launches Editorial Intelligence
- ◆ 2005 Founds Julia Hobsbawm Consulting
- ◆ 1992 Founds PR consultancy Julia Hobsbawm Associates, which later becomes Hobsbawm Macaulay Communications, then Hobsbawm Marketing and Communications
- ◆ 1991 High-value donor fundraiser, Labour Party
- ◆ 1989 Researcher, BBC's *Wogan Show*
- ◆ 1987 Head of publicity, Virago Press

Brown's wife Sarah, 'because being on call the whole time was not fitting in with the fact I had a growing family'.

That was not the sole reason, though. Hobsbawm wanted to focus on her idea for a media analysis and networking business - and four years ago, EI was born. 'I incubated the idea for ten years, and piloted it for three,' she says.

But not even this level of preparation could prevent EI from receiving 'a drubbing' in the early years. 'Our early strapline was "where PR meets journalism".' A number of journalists, including former *Today* programme editor Rod Liddle, were outraged at the idea of a formal relationship with 'the dark side'. But it takes more than Liddle to hold back the woman Edelman CEO Robert Phillips describes as 'a networking nodal point of greater power and influence than LinkedIn and Facebook combined, and much more fun to boot'.

EI survived, and has thrived. Hobsbawm counts Disney, Unilever, Edelman, Weber Shandwick and Fishburn Hedges among her clients. Part of the success of her business must be down to her ability to network and the fact the PR world adores her. 'I first met Julia at a fundraiser for Labour in the 1980s and she brought style and glamour to the grey political landscape,' says Weber Shandwick chief executive Colin Byrne. 'I love the woman.'

Hobsbawm has learned from branding EI a 'bridge'. She is keen to emphasise EI is a tool for PR agencies, keeping professionals up to date, and bringing together key journalists and PR professionals through networking clubs. There is also a capacity for bespoke research. 'Part of a trend I see

Flexible Hobsbawm juggles a busy lifestyle,

emerging in PR is mirroring what advertising is doing and having a planning and research function,' says Hobsbawm.

In fact, planning is what will keep PR afloat, in Hobsbawm's opinion. 'PR will survive but agencies have to embrace research, planning and strategy. PR is no longer about having a little black book of contacts. It is about saying we understand what is happening in the media, we have statistics to back up what we are saying, and we have the strategy to deliver.'

This includes the strategy to keep pace with the rapidly developing media landscape. 'When I started in PR hundreds of years ago, Channel 4 had not been launched,' says Hobsbawm. The media have changed dramatically in her 25 years



including running media analysis and networking business Editorial Intelligence, and looking after a thriving family

JULIA HOBSBAWM'S TURNING POINTS

What was your biggest career break?

Starting Editorial Intelligence in 2005 after a 20-year career in PR. We now organise more than 30 events a year, and run workshops with global media intelligence business Cision, where speakers include blogger Iain Dale, Ed Vaizey MP and Peter York.

Have you had a notable mentor?

My friend Jessica Morris of Jessica

Morris Consulting. She was head of media at Shelter in the 1990s when we worked together on a campaign. She has impeccable judgment and is someone off whom I bounce ideas.

What advice would you give to anyone climbing the career ladder?

Read, watch and learn all the time. Do not be too arrogant to deal with the small stuff. Believe in what you do and

the people for whom you work - or the chances are you are in the wrong job and the sooner you get out the better.

What do you prize in new recruits?

We recruit three main types of people - journalists, analysts and organisers. They need to have the right track record but also to feel as optimistic about what we are doing as we do, all day and every day.

Julia Hobsbawm will speak at *PRWeek's PR on the Edge* conference on 28 May. Go to prontheedge.com

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