

LAYLAH

40 years old

Laylah El Ishtar - Image Lab

www.laylah.com.br



LAYLAH'S PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AS A PERSONAL STYLIST

began when she was 15. Before facing the challenge of investing in entrepreneurship in a more structured way, Laylah already worked in this sector both as an employee and on her own. While she was married, she did not see work as a potential means for autonomy, but rather as an important addition to family income. When she divorced her husband, she began to change her mind. During this painful time, Laylah began to chart a path of personal and professional independence. She decided to change her expectations about romantic relationships, always prioritising her freedom and wellbeing. Professionally, Laylah's years of experience as a personal stylist conferred skills and consistency to her career. She already had an aptitude for business and was about to discover how to use it for her own empowerment.

DEVELOPING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY

Laylah joined Micro Rainbow Brazil's second entrepreneurship class in May 2016, just as she started to expand her personal stylist consulting business, *Laylah El Ishtar - Image Lab*. When she started the course, she was not yet aware of her entrepreneurial potential:

“I did not see myself as an entrepreneur, I thought I was a survivor”.

The course made her reassess her professional goals and provided her with tools to better manage her business.

As she applied course content in practice, Laylah developed her identity as an entrepreneur, drawing up a business plan that would ensure financial autonomy and business growth. She developed a contingency plan to keep her business stable despite Brazil's economic crisis. It was hard for Laylah to confront her management mistakes, although these were instrumental in helping her acquire a realistic and objective view of her business.

In addition to improving business management, the financial lessons Laylah learned through the course were important in organising her personal finances. She is less satisfied with her current income than she was before taking the course, but this is because her ambitions are much greater than

they were previously. She realised that her business could enable her to pursue dreams that once seemed impossible. Her awareness as a consumer has also changed, and now she manages her earnings and expenses better: *“Now I know that I can take a trip if I want to. I can plan and save for it”.*

FEMINIST RESISTANCE

Laylah secured new job opportunities after completing the course, such as coordinating the makeup team at the Rio Olympics. She felt empowered as a trans person to resist and confront discrimination based on gender identity. Her perception of the situations where she suffers prejudice has also become clearer. Laylah was already a feminist and LGBT activist, and reflecting on the various forms of prejudice that permeate her daily life made her increasingly aware of her role in transforming society. She can now see homo/transphobia and machismo more clearly, fiercely fighting against all its forms, even when the target is someone else. Using urban spaces such as shopping malls, streets and public transport remains a challenge, but she does not let looks of disapproval limit her freedom.

Laylah has frequently suffered prejudice in both public and private spaces because of her gender identity. As a practitioner of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions, Laylah did not feel welcome in a space that was



once very important to her. As a militant, she attempted to engage in this debate internally, but without success. She chose to distance herself from the religion in the face of others' unwillingness to discuss the subject. This was an extremely difficult decision, but Laylah's faith goes beyond religious institutions. Laylah demands more than tolerance - she demands to be fully accepted, in all settings. She stresses:

"I decided that I do not need religion anymore, I continue with my faith, I continue with my belief, but I can't, I can't be only tolerated".

Her financial and professional autonomy ensure that Laylah does not experience in her daily life the discrimination that many trans people face in the workplace, but the prejudice has not disappeared. Although she feels respected by clients and other personal style professionals, she realises that establishing partnerships with courses and companies in the beauty sector is more difficult for her. Nonetheless, she keeps on going, facing this as yet another challenge that will not disrupt her journey.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FREEDOM

Although Laylah did not suffer discrimination while working for others, she sees prejudice as a major obstacle to trans labour market inclusion. In her militancy, she advocates for financial autonomy as a crucial tool for improving trans women's quality of life. She also promotes entrepreneurship as a good alternative to achieve this goal. The greatest obstacle for an entrepreneur is being afraid to take risks. On this subject, Laylah cautions:

"You need to have the courage to break with the role that society determines for trans women".

And this is a battle worth fighting. When we look at Laylah's story today, we see that entrepreneurship fits perfectly with her journey. Being an entrepreneur gives her much greater autonomy over her professional life. Nothing is more fitting for a woman who takes control and responsibility for her future than to face the adventure of entrepreneurship with courage. Laylah chose the path of freedom and full acceptance of who she is. She did this in all spheres of her life: love, faith, and work. ■