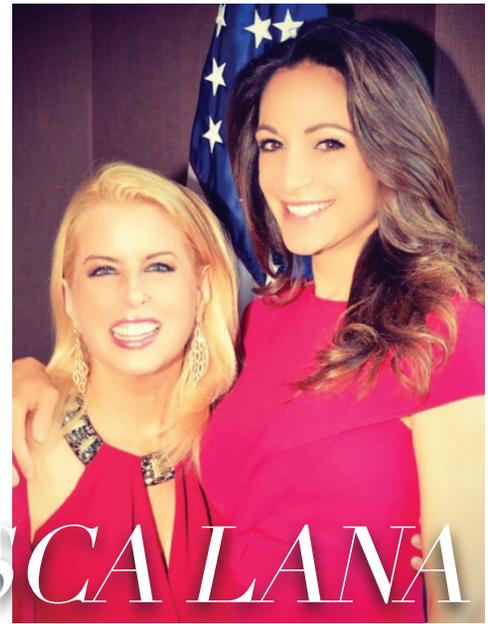


ICONS & INVESTORS



FRANCESCA LANA

If Malcolm Gladwell had a poster girl for the “connectors” he famously described in his best-selling book *The Tipping Point*, it might just be Francesca Lana. The London-based entrepreneur and mother-to-be is well-known among friends and colleagues for bringing people together; sometimes through a quick email exchange or other times, through the dinner parties she organizes with a meticulousness and passion that would make the grandest of dames proud.

Being a connector is inherent to Francesca, who splits her time between New York and London. It’s a natural skill that has served her well as an entrepreneur and international real estate adviser. It’s also inspired the development of her latest venture, NetworkHer, an organization that seeks to connect professional women around the world.

Emmy-winning journalist Rita Cosby sat down with Francesca at The Carlyle, the luxurious Upper East Side NYC hotel, to talk about NetworkHer, her new role as a mother, and some favorite spots in New York and elsewhere. The two power women met two years ago at a private dinner party on Memorial Day Weekend, appropriately organized by Francesca, to honor our veterans and their families as she is dedicated to many great philanthropic causes.

RITA: Tell me how you got your start in business?

FRANCESCA: When I moved to London from Rome in 2012, I met a successful real estate agent, Grant, through the process of finding my apartment. I began introducing Grant to friends who were interested in buying properties or investing money

in real estate, and we quickly became business partners. I quickly realized I had a true passion for real estate – and further developed my appreciation for architecture from around the world. After a two-year partnership, I started my own real estate company, ERA International.

This was my first foray as an entrepreneur and I was able to make this leap, which can be overwhelming, because I trusted in my ability to connect people, and knew this skill would serve me well in bringing buyers and sellers together.

As the founder of ERA, I advise international clients, from more than 30 countries, on real estate purchases. Most of my clients are time-strapped and my mission is to facilitate their search, negotiate the best price for them and manage the buying process so it is seamless for them.

RITA: You recently launched NetworkHer, which has grown out of your great affinity for bringing people together and for supporting women. Can you take me back on how NetworkHer came about?

FRANCESCA: I travel a lot for work and it can be quite isolating. Three years ago, while on a brief stay in London, in order to reconnect with friends, I started organizing dinners for women in London, and asking them to invite their broader networks to join in. Based on the amazing response to those dinners, and the incredible relationships that developed from them, I decided it would be great to formally organize this to reach a broader group of like-minded women.

From my experiences and extensive conversations



with many diverse women, I realized that there is a tremendous need and desire for support amongst women. Even the most self-reliant woman can benefit from the support of other women. I love collaboration and believe one woman's success can only help another's. I have been blessed with a very wide network, filled with vibrant and dynamic ladies, and I wanted to build the same global community of support that I have been able to develop for myself.

My co-founders, Jackie Cuyvers and Lika Dossybieva, have different backgrounds than mine, but we all have the same goal: to build a powerful and inspiring network of brilliant women. On our small, but powerful team, we have corporate leaders and successful entrepreneurs, social media experts and business consultants.

RITA: What are your long-term plans for NetworkHer? This sounds so exciting and boundless.

FRANCESCA: We've heard so much about the importance of women "leaning in" over the past few years, but often leaning in, can require support from other women. NetworkHer is creating a global community of professional women who can give each other a real boost, so to speak, in their respective professional goals. For example, we know many women would like guidance on how to become a board member, how to set up a foundation, or how to prepare for their first TV interview. Through the NetworkHer community, women are supporting women. We consider ourselves unique because our members are quite accomplished in their various fields.

Even at this early stage, we have members from more than ten countries. We are planning a series

of regular events in New York, London and online, including two annual conferences. We are building business and personal development workshops around topics such as how to develop a personal brand and how to become a smart angel investor. We are also establishing partnerships with significant charitable organizations.

RITA: This is fantastic. So... how can I join NetworkHer?

FRANCESCA: We would love to have you join, Rita! Your work in journalism has inspired so many women! You can learn more about our network and organization at our website NetworkHer.org.

RITA: I know firsthand you are active in various charities, but how did you become interested in promoting women? It's something we often hear spoken of, yet in reality, it doesn't always happen.

FRANCESCA: My mother works in politics in Rome, where I was born. Politics is male-dominated in Italy, much like in the United States. But, that has never deterred my mother. In fact, she has always invited her fellow female colleagues to our home so they could get to know each other and grow to support each other, too. Over the years, I've witnessed how these women have created a powerful female network and the successes, big and small, that they have been able to effect. Seeing my own mother's role in shaping a strong women's network, has in part inspired NetworkHer and its endless possibilities.

I am also very proud to work with three other organizations: the Robert F. Agostinelli Foundation, which supports American war veterans; the Kirsten Haglund Foundation, which helps men and women seeking treatment from eating disorders, and Techo, which works with young volunteers to fight poverty in Latin America.

RITA: You've turned your skill for connecting into a business... and way to give back. What is your advice to others for making meaningful connections to enhance their personal or professional network?

FRANCESCA: I think everyone has something interesting to share or teach us. Show your genu-

ine interest in what people do and what interests them. Be an active listener. When you listen closely, you remember small details about a person and they will appreciate you for doing so. And, always start with a strong handshake!

RITA: You are juggling a lot these days and you are about to become a mother this summer. How do you find that balance, which we all strive for?

FRANCESCA: My passions and my optimistic outlook on life often lead me to my endeavors... so work is never really "work." And that helps me from feeling overwhelmed by what I do. I also try to leverage what I do well, rather than doing things that don't come naturally. My friendships, professional relationships and travel are rewarding personally and have helped me grow professionally as well, for which I'm immensely grateful.

Now that I'm about to become a mother, I know that I'll be balancing the hardest job in the world with my professional life. Like all new moms, I'll have to find the right balance for me, but I hope my work in business and in supporting women will inspire my daughter, just like my mother's work has with me!

RITA: When you're not thinking about new business ventures, what do you enjoy most about New York?

FRANCESCA: Well, as I'm Italian, I love the food in New York. My favorite haunts are Sette Mezzo and Kappo Masa, and I adore the green mille crêpes at Lady M's. I've had quite the sweet tooth during pregnancy!

I adore being able to spend time with my close friends in New York, going for walks in different parts of the city, which is the best way to discover new shops and restaurants. New York is a great place to indulge my love of the arts and every year I attend the Metropolitan Opera and the New York City Ballet. This is near and dear to my heart as I was a classically trained ballerina starting at the age of three. Even back then, I was fast on my feet!

When I need a quiet moment, I love visiting the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer to pray and thank God for the many blessings I've received. I feel so fortunate now being able to give back to others based on what I've learned on my incredible journey. I look forward to helping other women find their life's mission so they too will discover great joy in inspiring and connecting others. ♦