

The Principals of Business

Elizabeth Perelstein



Founder and CEO, School Choice International

In 1997, the seemingly simple act of choosing her children's schools in a foreign country overwhelmed Elizabeth Perelstein. Today, School Choice International, Inc., the White Plains-based business the Rye resident founded to help parents like herself, is a multi-million-dollar company with 100 consultants in 50 locations around the world.

The woman who made this journey from stumped to successful graduated from Brandeis with a BA in American Studies and a teaching certificate. She taught nursery school for a while before shifting into educational administration. Along the way, she married Michael Perelstein, then an international businessman who, in 1997, was suddenly relocated to London. "I had two children who were in fourth and sixth grades," she says. She secured good placements for her kids in London and she realized that what she'd figured out about the

school-selection process would be helpful for others. School Choice International, founded in 1997, took off "by word-of-mouth." When Perelstein's family moved back to the U.S. in 1999, she brought the headquarters with them to Westchester (she left a small team in the UK as well). Today, the company has 20 employees in the county and has broadened its scope, working with clients from Fortune 100 executives to families looking into boarding schools to parents looking for the best special education for their children. Perelstein herself has made it into Fortune—on its 2010 list of the 10 Most Powerful Women Entrepreneurs. And, even though fewer than 5 percent of women entrepreneurs make it to \$1 million in revenue, Perelstein is on track to hit \$3 million this year, up from \$2 million last year.

"I think being keenly aware of my weaknesses is a great strength," Perelstein says of entrepreneurship. "When I didn't know how to do something, I would hire a consultant or a staff member. I was never afraid to spend money to grow my business." In 2006, she also co-founded the British International School of New York. And being a woman, she says, has been crucial to her success. "Men have an old boys' network, but women set up a lot of organizations to help themselves and each other." To that end, she makes sure to mentor lots of women. "That's what I do to give back. I couldn't have gotten here without others mentoring me."

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