

If you're offering training services to businesses in Derbyshire, you know you've got a tough challenge on your plate. There's a lot of competition in an increasingly crowded market, and everyone is looking for key points of difference.

In Business spoke to entrepreneurs **Mark Wingfield** and **Sadi Mehmood**, who have carved distinctive niches for themselves.

When your business is everybody's business



Mark Wingfield

Prepare to defend yourself...

Have you ever felt threatened as you've gone about your business, or have your employees found themselves in situations where they felt vulnerable? Enter

Mark Wingfield, who must take the award for the most unusual business training idea this year – corporate self-defence.

Mark is a black belt with a business background – he has a blue chip corporate background with giants such as JCB and CAT – and he's fluent in German. Alongside his international sales and marketing consultancy, MW Sigma, based in Derby, he runs Max Self Defence, offering 'team-building with purpose'.

He says a little self-defence training can be an invaluable investment for employers, and a fun way of team building for staff.

"People are the most important asset in any business," says Mark. "Many firms run social events that help develop their teams, so we've developed this way of having great fun, strengthening team spirit and providing some safeguard for this valuable investment.

"If a company spends money to ensure its employees can defend themselves, whether

it's in a work context or in their own time, this cannot be judged as anything other than a commitment to its personnel.

"The good news is that the official statistics for violence against the person are down very slightly over the last few years in Derbyshire – but business professionals are unlikely to spend all their time in Derbyshire."

He foresees many areas for his growing business - where frontline personnel have to deal with the public, sometimes in emotionally charged situations – medical staff, for instance, or those involved in the justice system. Many a lawyer has to negotiate their way around less than savoury characters.

"It could be for anyone," says Mark. "An accountancy firm to nursing staff, small business owners to office managers - the key skills do not rely on fitness or strength, but technique. We also teach people to be more aware of their surroundings, and how to avoid getting into trouble in the first place."

Mark does not condone any company that puts its employees at risk - he makes a valuable point about the psychology of not getting into dangerous situations in the first place. He argues that simply by being more aware of one's surroundings, of how a situation is developing and simply being more confident, can make the difference between diffusing someone's anger or of it developing into physical violence.

"This is not about turning people into

black belts in a few hours. For instance, we don't recommend taking on anyone who is threatening you with a knife, but we do teach techniques to dramatically reduce the risk of a severe injury if you are cornered."

Mark has worked with a number of companies so far, and says it is genuinely good fun: "There's a serious point to what we're doing, but during the courses we spend half our time laughing."

Mark's five top tips for keeping yourself safe:

Be aware - Don't walk around in a daydream, or preoccupied with other business such as a mobile phone (a desirable item for muggers).

Learn a basic defensive stance to protect your face and upper body from a threat and be ready to respond

Be prepared to scream and shout to put off an attacker and raise help

Be ready to use reasonable force to protect yourself and others.

Run away from a situation as soon as possible – don't fight on if you don't have to.



You want my briefcase?

... Have it!

Getting under your skin



Sadi Mehmood

If you thought your company was 'culturally aware' and safe from prosecution, a talk with Noble Khan might change your mind.

"Many big companies pay lip service to racial awareness— their cultural diversity

programmes don't even scratch the surface." So says, Sadi Mehmood, and she should know because she has been undercover to check them out.

Sadi, a Muslim of Kashmiri descent, is rapidly gaining recognition for perhaps one of the best-timed business ventures around. Her company, Noble Khan, in Long Eaton, is the first cultural awareness centre to be awarded an ASET Centre Licence, and recently celebrated its official launch at the House of Lords, thanks to Lord Ahmed, a family friend.

The guest list was impressive, including representatives from Buckingham Palace, Royal Mail and Clarridges. Make no mistake: this business is heading for the big time.

Sadi Mehmood is a smart cookie – she has a degree in microbiology from Kings College, a Masters degree in Tropical Medicine from London School and has worked as head of European sales for biotech firm (and later head-hunted to work in the Netherlands as vice-president of a diagnostic company).

But it's her energy that convinces you she has what it takes – she speaks with the passion of someone who has been through adversity and has first hand experience of the issues of race.

Sadi says: "I don't like political correctness. It has grown and grown. At first, it was good, stopping intimidation and derogatory racial comments. Then it began to create hatred and

division, getting to a stage where people didn't want to work with you, were afraid to ask questions, refused to work as a team.

"I've watched people trying to impress Asian customers and completely screw things up – they put their clients and friends in embarrassing situations because of inappropriate sexual jokes.

"I've also seen how bad customer service mistaken for being racial or discriminative, when it was just poor training or bad service.

"I've spent a lot of time talking to people, Westerners and Asians, finding out what offends them and what doesn't. I took a job at a leading supermarket - where my husband also worked - going undercover. I was horrified at what I saw and discovered all manner of misunderstandings arising from religion, customs, prayers and rituals. For instance, people got fed up when my husband went to pray. They thought he was just having a good break! What he was actually doing was never properly explained."

And while she pulls no punches about what she describes as 'lip service' to cultural awareness, Sadi is equally vigorous in condemning those who exploit the system, using race legislation to take advantage of employers.

"It is possible for employers to protect themselves from this simply by ensuring their staff have proper training – that's where ASET accredited courses can be so helpful – evidence in a court if necessary."

Noble Khan offers three courses, all designed by Sadi. Her Asian culture course is designed to introduce Westerners to the many strands of Asian culture.

Her British Culture Course is for those new to the UK, showing them how to enjoy British life without losing their identity, dignity or self-respect – something Sadi's parents managed to achieve. And her Islamophobia course reveals the true face of Islam to anyone fearful of what they may see wrongly as a repressive, backward-looking, hateful faith.

It becomes apparent that there were many spurs to her starting her own business (with help from Erewash Partnership in 2004) – including encountering a white man talking about political correctness, thinking he was describing a Muslim when he was describing a Sikh.

"I pointed out his mistake and he said that he couldn't tell the difference between the two," she says. "The way my future career lay began to become clear; I knew how to tell the difference, knew how culture worked in every day occurrences, knew what offended Asians and why British people got confused about what offended them. I also understood why Asians often avoided integration. I could see where culture and religion were mixed up and how what was cultural was passed as religion.

"I sat down and looked at how I identified different Asian groups. I mapped the business advantages of knowing this. I wrote down what made me Asian, my values at work, school and home and what cultural elements in manners, customs and behaviour made us different according to our different cultural or religious group.

"I developed the idea of The Asian Culture Course, a fun, practical course compliant with the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003 that could also improve ales and customer service by developing the same kind of cultural awareness I myself had used to such good effect."

Noble Khan has received encouragement from the Prime Minister, the Home Office, The Cabinet Office, Prince Charles, Independent Police Complaints Commission, local schools, Derbyshire Chamber and several local companies and charities. And it looks set to grow through the licensing of courses to other centres.

It's all quite an achievement, especially considering Sadi has had to cope with divorce and bringing up her five-year-old son on her own – yet she still finds the energy to join in with his tae kwon doe classes.

One last thing: if you didn't know, and were thinking that Sadi looks familiar, yes, she is the younger sister of Saira Khan who shot to fame on BBC2's The Apprentice. However, it's highly unlikely Sadi will be seeking a job interview at Amstrad.

