

Hope in Progress



*27 Entrepreneurs
Who Inspired Me
During the Great Recession*

Christa Avampato

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Christa Avampato
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Dedication

For every person about to take the plunge into entrepreneurship - I hope these interviews give you the push you need because the world needs you.

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Introduction

On January 30, 2009, I began writing a column about entrepreneurship for Examiner.com. Several weeks before, I watched President Obama take the oath of office and watching him so gravely take on this awesome responsibility made me want to contribute to society in a larger way. Our economy existed in a state of freefall, and entrepreneurs and start-ups seemed poised to lose ground more quickly than larger companies. I wanted to help them by putting my writing skills to good use. I would interview them to get them some PR and they would teach me about their journeys as entrepreneurs.

Increasingly, I also felt that entrepreneurship could create a strong path for me. I used to work for a large toy retailer where I had a terrific boss. Bob and I are several generations apart and during one of our status meetings he told me about one of his sons who has always been his own boss. He was amazed by people of my generation because "when push comes to shove and you have to place a bet, 9 times out of 10 you'll bet on you, not on a company." I think about that conversation a lot and it was in that small moment that I began to think differently about being an entrepreneur. Bob shined a little sunlight on a new path that I had not considered previously.

With the economy in tough shape, I worried about taking the leap into my own business, even on a part-time basis. By writing this column and hearing the stories of entrepreneurs, I hoped to gain more courage and confidence to join their ranks. This column dovetailed perfectly with my New Year's Resolution in 2009: to be more hopeful and generate more hope for others. As part of that resolution, I decided to blog every day about something that gave me more hope for our world. Those posts are all available on my website: <http://christainnewyork.com>. I did end 2009 with more hope than I began it, and this column had a great deal to do with that.

15 months after I started with Examiner, I found myself with over 100 articles about entrepreneurs and the art-science of entrepreneurship. I helped to get these entrepreneurs some press coverage and they gave me the confidence to give it a go on my own. This column achieved everything I hoped it would, and then some.

This book contains the stories of 27 entrepreneurs whose stories I featured. I reached out to all of them because they had interesting, intriguing stories that I knew would resonate with readers. They inspired me, gave me wise counsel, and helped me to see that entrepreneurship can take shape in a great variety of ways. In short, they eradicated my fear of taking my career into my hands. They showed me that taking the leap into entrepreneurship was actually a far safer path than handing my career over to a company. And for that lesson, I am beyond grateful.

Michael Dorf, Founder of City Winery

I stopped by City Winery to meet Michael Dorf, founder of the Knitting Factory and KnitMedia. He left those ventures in 2002 and embarked on a new adventure that came to life as City Winery in December 2008. Dorf as he gave me a tour of the restaurant and winery, and talked to me about his passions for wine, the music of singer / songwriters, and creating a community, as well as his journey as an entrepreneur. He was exceedingly gracious and humble.

After exiting Knit Media, he spent time in Europe traveling with his brother and became intrigued by the science and art of wine and wine making. In 2006 he began work on a business plan to create a space where people could enjoy wine, gourmet food, great live music, and could also take classes on wine making. At City Winery, you can buy a barrel (or part of one) to make and bottle your own unique vintage. "These are all the things I enjoy, and I figured that there must be other people like me. I just wanted to create a space where I'd like to go," said Dorf.

The space is stunning, and it is clear that Dorf pays attention to every detail as well as to the overall feeling of the space. The street level floor is a wide-open space with warm wooden tones. It reminded me of being in Napa and Sonoma. Everything felt fresh and alive. We rounded the bar, passed the stage with the grand piano where artists like Joan Osborne perform, and headed to the back dining room where private parties can dine among the stainless steel fermenting vats. Sparkling, the vats are works of art. This is where the science of wine making is hard at work as the vats are keeping meticulous control over the fermenting process for the wine's first two and half weeks.

After passing the glass-polishing bar, we headed downstairs to the barrel room and the private dining room. It's an intoxicating experience - the scent in the barrel room lifted my spirits higher than they've been in months. Dorf's passion for wine making comes alive in this room. His knowledge of winemaking is staggering. He is dynamic and effusive as he talks about the cooper industry. This room is where the art of wine making works its magic. "Each of the barrels produces a wine that tastes different, even if two barrels are cut from the exact same tree. Where the wood is in the height of the tree effects the flavor it imparts on the wine," said Dorf.

Despite having the distinction of creating the center of New York's independent music scene, Dorf's ego seemed non-existent. From our first handshake, he was a down-to-earth, seriously nice guy. On our entire tour, I had yet to ask him a single question because he so generously shared his knowledge of and love for wine. The only question I had left was about becoming an entrepreneur - what drives him, and why, in this economy, would anyone consider striking out on his own to open a business?

"In this time of scarce resources - money, time - you have to do what you love. It's probably true for every entrepreneur, but especially for entrepreneurs in the hospitality industry. You have to focus on building something that embodies who you are, what you love, and where you'd like to spend your time. Anything else isn't worth it," said Dorf.

"Do you mind if I walk around and take some pictures?" I asked.

"Please - take pictures, email me with questions, and stay all night. We have a lot of great stuff going on here," said Dorf.

Quite an understatement. Dorf and his team have raised the bar on seeing live music (you can choose the exact location of your seat - unheard of in an intimate venue), enjoying an evening with friends, and participating in the art and science of winemaking. There isn't any place in New York like City Winery. Get there.

Jason Bauer, CEO and President of CRUMBS

I have a hard time thinking of any food I love more than cupcakes. When I'm happy, when I'm sad, morning, noon, and night. In New York City, the competition for the best cupcake bakery is fierce. For me, there is one clear winner: CRUMBS. I highly recommend the Devil Dog and the Blueberry Crumb.

If by some weird circumstance you don't like cupcakes, CRUMBS is still a place for you. They have a delicious variety of cookies, tarts, muffins, danish, cakes, and great coffee. CRUMBS can be found in New York, California, Connecticut, and New Jersey. Don't live in these states? No worries – CRUMBS also delivers by mail in 48 states. The company is expanding, and in these challenging economic times, that expansion speaks volumes about the strength of the CRUMBS brand and their top-quality products. I'm particularly happy about their expansion on the Upper West Side of Manhattan where I will now have a CRUMBS only two blocks from my apartment.

Jason and Mia Bauer started CRUMBS in 2003. I recently had the opportunity to interview Jason. He serves as the company's CEO and President.

Christa - With so many bakeries in the cities where CRUMBS operates, and the number of them that specialize in cupcakes, why did you decide to open CRUMBS and how did you formulate its points of differentiation from other bakeries?

Jason - Mia [my wife] and I founded CRUMBS Bake Shop in 2003. At that time there were very few (maybe 2-3) companies nationwide that were specializing in cupcakes. The cupcakes at that time were very traditional - vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, etc. - maybe with sprinkles or a flower. That was the extent of the cupcake category. We were the first to introduce various combinations of fillings, frosting and decorations. We created the "gourmet" cupcakes that today have become the standard in the industry. Today, there are hundreds of cupcake shops throughout the world that are doing similar styles of cupcakes that CRUMBS created.

Christa - Is this your first entrepreneurial venture?

Jason - It is Mia's first, but not mine. Prior to CRUMBS, I founded a company called Famous Fixins, which developed, manufactured, and distributed celebrity-licensed products such as Britney Spears bubble gum, NSYNC lip balm, and Derek Jeter Frosted Flakes. I sold that business in 2003 prior to starting CRUMBS with Mia.

Christa - What new developments will your customers experience in the next year?

Jason - CRUMBS will finish 2009 with approximately 25 stores and nationwide shipping at www.crumbs.com. In 2010, the plan is to bring CRUMBS to a few new markets such as Boston, DC, Philly and South Jersey. The concept and product will remain the same and CRUMBS will continue to be innovative in the category.

Christa - How has the current economic recession affected your business and how have you managed through this challenging environment?

Jason - Prior to the recession, CRUMBS business was growing at a rate of 40% of same store comps. [This is a metric used in retail that measures the growth of YOY sales on locations that have been open for at least one full year. It is a benchmark of a company's health. 40% is a very high figure.]

As of Oct. 2008, the growth rate slowed to approximately 20%. In these tough times, 20% is something we are very proud of. [It's also incredibly rare.] For better or worse, our customers eat our cupcakes during good times and bad. Whether it is celebrating a special event at home or work, or eating a cupcake to put you in a better mood, cupcakes have a way of making every day a better one. This is the very reason CRUMBS recently created the tag line "Serving Smiles Daily".

Christa - What advice do you have for others who are considering starting their own businesses, particularly in this economic environment?

Jason - Starting a business on your own is tough no matter what the economic conditions are. In today's environment, it's harder to obtain financing but consumers are still very willing to support brands and products they believe in and trust. Do not skimp on product quality even if it means tighter margins right now. The economy will get better and business will get stronger. Believe in your product or service and realize nothing comes easy.

Laura Paterson and Lorin Rokoff, Founders of Hot Blondies Bakery

I learned about Hot Blondies Bakery through Crain's. They were the headline business in a feature article about online bakeries. A friend of mine from business school is considering a similar avenue so I opened up the Crain's article to have a peek at what the company was up to. Laura Paterson's and Lorin Rokoff's story of making the leap from stable jobs to entrepreneurship was inspiring so I hopped over to their site. Their market positioning and branding is unique and fun – I like the edge they take with their baking and they clearly have the business savvy to match their sumptuous baked goods!

Christa - What kind of work did you do before starting Hot Blondies Bakery? Did that work help to inform your own start-up?

LR - Laura and I met working at the Museum of the Moving Image. Laura was in marketing and I was in development. Neither of us had any experience in the food industry beforehand. Laura's background is in branding and marketing and mine is in the nonprofit field.

LP - Lorin used to bring her baked goods into the office all the time and I was her biggest fan, especially of the blondies. I thought starting a company tying blondies, the baked goods, in with blondies, the girls, would be a sure fire hit. My experience in strategic marketing and brand development at Rockstar Games, where I spent seven years, has been extremely beneficial in how we've developed the brand of Hot Blondies Bakery.

LR - My experience at the nonprofit organization Hedge Funds Care, which was a start up when I began there, was a great help in teaching me various components of a start-up - legal, financial, management. However, no amount of training can prepare you for the food world. That has been a new and exciting learning curve for us and has kept us on our toes.

Christa - Was there a specific experience that made you realize you wanted to strike out on your own venture?

LP - Lorin and I are both creative people and we wanted to start a bakery that was different from all the rest. We saw a hole in the marketplace and decided that Hot Blondies Bakery was a perfect fit. New York City is saturated with bakeries specializing in cupcakes and most of them have that sweet, cutesy look and feel. Hot Blondies Bakery is not your average, traditional bakery. Our vibe is edgy, yet fun. From the outset, we knew we wanted to establish Hot Blondies Bakery as a unique, luxury baked goods brand specializing in blondies and brunettes online.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business?

LR - Of course! There is always a fear of failure when you put everything on the line. Besides the obvious financial risks, part of me was terrified that people were only giving me lip service all of these years and my baked goods were not as good as I thought they were. Luckily, that was not the case.

LP - It's always scary making a career change. Especially when you're putting your savings into

it. I'm a strong believer that you get what you give. Lorin and I are smart girls with an incredible work ethic, so we've never really doubted we'd be successful.

Christa - Did you keep your day jobs while getting Hot Blondies up and running? If so, how did you balance the two and when did you decide that you needed to and could focus on Hot Blondies full-time?

LR - We kept our day jobs in the beginning and were working basically every night and weekend. But I had to leave soon after we started because once the orders came in, the baking was too time-consuming. Then Laura followed soon after once the good word-of-mouth spread and our orders started increasing rapidly.

Christa - What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs, particularly in this tough economy?

LR - Stay positive! If you have a good product, and offer discounts, people will buy. Try to rethink ways of pitching your product to fit in with the economic environment. For example, a lot of corporations are cutting costs in gift giving for the holidays. We offer them less expensive but still luxurious product that they can send out to clients.

LP - Make sure you love what you're doing. Inevitably there will be ups and downs, but keep plugging away and good things will happen. It's also important to network. Connecting with people has really helped us expand our reach.

Danielle Di Vecchio, Founder of Biscotti di Vecchio

Danielle had been making sinfully delicious biscotti for years and giving them away as gifts. Her grandmother taught her to make these traditional Italian cookies, a staple of every Italian kitchen. (Coming from an Italian family myself, my grandmother always had chocolate and vanilla biscotti for us to nibble on. I distinctly remember their scent and place in her kitchen.) Family and friends encouraged Danielle to form a business based on her baking hobby.

Christa - You were an actress prior to and during the startup of your business. Did your experience as an actress help you in your start-up?

Danielle - My experience as an actress has been invaluable to me in starting the business and the business is a direct result of my acting career. All of my life's experiences to this point have helped me immeasurably with the business. And, of course, having friends in the entertainment business has helped me in getting my story out there. I have always been a creative person and have needed an outlet to express that creativity. Acting, like baking, is an immediate gratification kind of thing – the audience either loves you or they don't; they either like what you've made for them or they don't. I listen, watch, and learn.

A dear friend of mine recently pointed out to me that baking and acting are about connecting people and creating a shared experience. My products and approach to nurturing and growing the business are a reflection of the way in which I do that – the integrity of the products, the quality, the attention to detail, the packaging. It's very personal and intimate - as is acting.

Creating a product is similar to the trial and error approach of the process of acting. As an actor, making choices and taking chances are part of the creative process. When I'm creating a new biscotti variety, I have a pretty good idea of what I want to make and then through trial and error, testing and tasting, I eventually achieve my goal.

I love watching the expressions on the "taste testers" faces, hearing what they like and what they don't like. A couple years ago, I was reading about the new chocolate craze and the different combinations that were becoming popular with artisanal chocolatiers. So, I thought about combining chili pepper and chocolate and created Cayenne Cherry Chocolate Chunk biscotti - the overall customer favorite and most successful of my biscotti to date!

Christa - Was there a specific experience that made you realize you wanted to start your own business?

Danielle - I've always been very creative and independent. I love creating something and seeing what happens as it evolves. I've worked in theater, television, and film and have also worked in corporate America. I've taken away a lot from every job I've ever held.

After Christmas 2008, the economy was bleak but Biscotti di Vecchio had its best season ever. It was then that I realized that this could be a viable, full-time business. I have a wonderful repeat customer business and many wanted to know when I was going to offer them year-round and in

stores. So, I took a deep breath and made the commitment to take it to the next level.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business?

Danielle - Of course! There have been many moments of doubt and fear but I say bring it on! I love what I'm doing and I love my product and the moments of empowerment and success far outweigh the fear and doubt. I believe 100% in my product and what I'm doing and I can't wait to see how far this biscotti business will go.

Christa - What advice do you have for other entrepreneurs who are keeping another job while starting their own business?

Danielle - I've been switching gears daily for as long as I can remember. I would be working a full-time job, have 2 auditions in one day, and then a rehearsal at night. I'd make it work so that I kept my day job and did my best at the auditions and at the rehearsal.

It's all about passion. If you want something badly enough you are going to make it happen. Take risks. Step outside of your comfort zone. Nobody ever got an acting job by thinking about it or had a play produced that was completed and filed away in a drawer. You have to believe in yourself 100% and be your own best cheerleader. If you don't believe in your product, why would a stranger?

Christa - What are the top 3 things you did that made your business successful?

Danielle - Created a fantastic product, asked a lot of questions, and made a lot of mistakes.

Alex Lee, CEO of OXO

"The company is a design philosophy. It's about solving problems for every room in the house."

That statement began my recent conversation with Alex Lee, CEO of OXO. I heard Alex speak at the GEL 2008 conference last year. His presentation was one of my favorites and he shared his company's innovation process with us, as well as some of the submitted ideas that were non-starters and standout winners. Alex was funny, engaging, and brilliant. He was passionate when discussing the company though we learned very little about him and his career. I was curious about him and am grateful to Laurea de Ocampo at GEL for connecting me to Alex so I could interview him.

Naturally, part of our conversation concerned the economy. In this respect, Alex was very optimistic. "Look at the Wii - that example alone is proof that even in tough times a company can succeed if their product is new, thoughtful, and exciting. New products have always driven our growth at OXO, and I expect that trend to continue. Innovation is critical for us."

Innovation often requires a certain entrepreneurial spirit, and it is that cultural balance of keeping that small company feel while growing the business that is so delicate. Being a designer, Alex spoke extensively about the design of OXO's office space. "We have a wide open space where everyone gets a desk. No offices. I sit at a desk at one of end of a hallway. We have a lot of public space where people can talk face-to-face informally. Too often in companies people who work in the same office email each other. We try to limit that as much as we can by encouraging impromptu meetings to get questions answered."

I asked Alex about his life as an entrepreneur. Prior to going to business school, he worked as a designer for 8 years, and he loved the design world. He went to business school to enhance his design skills with business school. His focus on his strengths and interests has been paramount to his success. "I didn't do any on-campus recruiting during my second year at business school. I knew I wanted to work for a company that made products I was excited about in contract furniture, kitchen products, or audio equipment. I was interested in opportunities with companies that made \$50M or less per year."

Alex talked to me about a self-assessment class that he took at business school. "It really asked us to consider what makes us happy and was very helpful in helping me understand who I am and what I'm good at. I'm not a start-up entrepreneur; I have no interest in starting at zero and building a business from the ground up. I'm a different kind of entrepreneur - I want to work for a small company in the \$10M - \$50M range that is interested in growth. OXO gave me an opportunity to learn from Sam Farber (the founder of OXO) and then take over the business."

With that short explanation, Alex helped me change the way I see entrepreneurship. All this time, I had been considering what kind of business I had the interest and inclination to grow from the ground up. By example Alex taught me that there are plenty of ways to be entrepreneurial and make enormous contributions to a company that don't require going it alone and starting with nothing. As we begin to craft our own entrepreneurial adventures or extend them, Alex's story is one we should all consider. The possibilities and opportunities to create wholly unique careers

are truly endless.

Sam Odio, Founder of Divvyshot

I first found my way to Divvyshot through the Y Combinator site. Y Combinator is an investor in Divvyshot and after just a bit of exploration, it is very easy to see why Paul Graham, founder of Y Combinator, took an interest in the company. Sam Odio, founder of Divvyshot, identified three holes in the photo sharing market:

- 1.) Direct integration with the photographer's computer photo library
- 2.) Ability for multiple people to contribute to one photo album
- 3.) Maintenance of a photo's original resolution to preserve photo quality while sharing

Like many entrepreneurs, Sam examined things that frustrated him and crafted a solution. That solution is Divvyshot. I recently had the chance to interview Sam about his company, his entrepreneurial spirit, and his feelings about the current economy.

Christa - What inspired the creation of Divvyshot?

Sam - I had several experiences that made me realize photo sharing is fundamentally broken.

Experience 1 - My girlfriend's father lives in Florida and always wants full resolution copies of her photos. They're both pretty "techie" and have tried several different services (flickr, private peer-to-peer, etc). None of them allowed for the easy transfer of hi-resolution photos. She ended up mailing him CDs of her photos.

Experience 2 - I went to Costa Rica with three other friends. At the end of the trip each of us had about 1GB of photos. After we got back home, there was no easy way to get each other's photos. We tried transferring the photos over our local network - but Windows file sharing failed us. We eventually just passed around a USB drive. The entire process was cumbersome and took about an hour.

Experience 3 - Finally, I went on a cruise with my graduating class with UVA. There were 30 of us and when we took a group picture 30 cameras would come out. This didn't make sense to me - it was the same digital picture but had to be taken 30 times because everyone wanted their own copy. Unfortunately the person who took my group photo set my camera on "video." I got a 4 second shot of the camera panning down while the photographer tried to figure it out. I never ended up getting that group photo - even though low resolution copies of it tantalize me on Facebook.

These three experiences made me realize that there needs to be a way to easily sync hi-res photos between computers.

Christa - What does success at Divvyshot look like to you?

Sam - We call it a "sighting in the wild." My goal in life is to build something that changes people's lives on a large scale. I'll know I will have accomplished that when I walk into a coffee shop and see some random person using my product. It'll be a day I won't ever forget! I get an indescribable rush from people using a product I created. It's awesome to know somebody is using what you built right now and that it's making their life better in some small way.

Christa - How did you decide to make the jump and start your own business?

Sam - I was 17. I still remember that day. At the time I loved computers and was pretty good at fixing them. My brother (who's entrepreneurial) sat me down and convinced me to fix computers instead of getting a typical high school job. With his help I incorporated my first company - "OdioWorks, LLC" I had less than \$500 in the bank and spent my first week distributing fliers in parking lots and apartment complexes.

Since then the business has grossed over \$1.5MM and still supports me (and Divvyshot too!) I'm no longer involved in the day-to-day operations of OdioWorks, LLC, having since moved on to photo sharing.

Christa - Did you feel any fear when starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Sam - When running a business you're on an emotional roller coaster. You experience extreme highs and lows. I don't think fear was the emotion I felt - more like despair. I have been able to overcome it by preparing myself for the experience from the get-go. I've read about (and seen first hand) how hard entrepreneurship can be. I told myself the road would be long and it wouldn't be easy. Not expecting to be an "instant success" has helped tremendously. It's a marathon and I just haven't entertained the idea of giving up.

Christa - What advice would you give to people interested in starting their own businesses, particularly in the current economy?

Sam - This is a great time to start a business but a horrible time to find financing for it. If you can bootstrap yourself and survive for the next year or two on your business or savings - then my suggestion would be to go for it. You'll be perfectly poised to grow and gain market share as the economy recovers.

Divvyshot update:

Shortly after this column ran, Facebook acquired Divvyshot. Congrats to Sam and the team at Divvyshot for building such a fabulous product that will now be fully integrated with the most-used social networking site. Well done, Sam and team!

Hani, New York City's Sidewalk Artist

A few weeks ago, I was on my way up to Harlem to do some research for an after-school program I'm putting together. As I was walking up Broadway, I stopped to admire a painting that has been done on the sidewalk.

It depicted a smiling Barack Obama beside a very pensive Hillary Clinton. Scrawled next to the painting was a URL: <http://www.hanisidewalkart.com/>. I wrote down the site to look into at a later date.

Two weeks ago I moved into a new apartment, and the day after I moved in there was a large gathering of people in a circle across the street. I thought for sure someone was hurt, signing autographs, proselytizing, or break-dancing – all common things in New York that draw large sidewalk crowds. This time the crowd was gathered around Hani, painting Michael Jackson on the sidewalk.

This time, I went home immediately and looked up his website. I would have interviewed him right there on the spot, though I didn't want to disturb his creative flow. I emailed him and he wrote back that same evening to say he'd love to be featured. His story and work are fascinating and I am enthralled with his art, much of which is showcased on the website. I'm very happy to share his remarkable talent with all of you in this interview.

Christa - How did you get started as a sidewalk artist and why did you choose that medium?

Hani - I was in Italy when I first saw a girl drawing on the sidewalk. I was inspired. I kept thinking about it until I start doing it. I found myself there; I loved every aspect of it especially the medium because I always liked using my fingers to mix the paint, even when I used oils.

Christa - What's been the most satisfying aspect of your work as an artist?

Hani - The most satisfying aspect of my work as an artist is that I 'am doing what I want to do for a living. My independence. I chose my job and made it happen. The response and all the positive reactions and feedback that I get from people [is gratifying].

The inspiration that I exchange with people is also inspiring. Without it I could not have continued for all these years (25 years and counting!).

And finally I love the truthfulness and honesty of it all. The fact that the work speaks for itself.

Christa - What do you hope your work accomplishes?

Hani - What I hope my work accomplishes is to sustain me and my family. I hope it makes a difference in my life and hopefully other people's lives, inspiring and spreading good will. And I hope it helps me get closer to God.

Christa - What work will you be doing in the coming months that New Yorkers should be on the lookout for?

Hani - So as to what I will be doing in the coming months: I don't have anything specific other than to continue to work/ I am always searching for new ideas. I want to be able to touch people lives, minds, and hearts. That is always a struggle for me, I am never sure if what I'm doing is helpful until I start doing it, and that is the hardest part. The Start.

Christa - I noticed you've done a variety of commercial work: from Nickelodeon to Fendi. Has the current economy effected this portion of your business in any way?

Hani - Yes! The current economy affected my work in a big way. I think that art is the first thing to go and the last to come back. So, I am working as much as I can now trying to market my work. I am going through so much to try to reinvent myself.

Christa - How do you choose the subjects of your work and the locations of the art?

Hani - I look for an area that is highly frequented and hopefully a clean surface and a wide sidewalk away from any private property or business or any complaining managers. As for the subjects, it has to be something that I like visually, something that provokes interest to as many people as possible, inspiring and thought provoking.

Lots of times, people and friends come to me with ideas and suggestions, but I have to be convinced of course!

Christa - What advice do you have for other artists who are looking to get their own work out into the world?

Hani - Do exactly that: take it out to the world. Take it to the streets, directly to the people. There is lots of feedback out there, lots of critics which all artists and creative people need. Museums and galleries are not just indoors. They are also outdoors. You will never know whom you are going to meet. Everybody walks outside. You meet real people out there who become who they truly are when walking on the streets with everybody else.

Kristen Ernst, Founder of Life Path Living

I met Kristen Ernst on Owing Pink, a community of amazing women who encourage one another's dreams. It is one of the most supportive groups I have ever been a part of. Kristen stood out to me as someone special because she reached out to me after reading some of my blog posts that detailed some rough times I was going through. I had never heard from her before and yet she offered so much kindness and support, and she continued to check up on me weeks later. I clicked through to her profile and discovered her business, Life Path Living, and its merchandise line, Life Path Tees.

Kristen took her love for numerology and fashion and blended them together into a line of gorgeous tees and jewelry. On her site you can learn your life path number and check out the corresponding merchandise. I'm a 7 to a "tee" (please pardon the pun) - "the philosopher of life, a seeker, who needs time alone to process everything that happens around her, loyal and mysterious." Through Kristen's business I learned a lot about myself and what I need to do to be the best me I can be. I had to interview her to get her insights on entrepreneurship and how she started down the road to building a passionate life and career.

Christa - What led to your initial interest in numerology?

Kristen - Growing up I was continually searching for answers. I was into Astrology and knew all about my sun sign, but I didn't have the drive to learn about Astrological charts and planets in depth. I wanted to know more about who I was and why, but I wanted another avenue to explore; something that I could REALLY connect with and understand easily. At a party one night, I happened upon a book about Numerology and it just clicked. It fascinated me! Knowing that my birth date & birth name vibrated at a unique frequency with corresponding characteristics elated me! I made a new connection with myself that night through the vibration of numbers. From that day on, I looked at numbers very differently. I found myself adding up EVERYTHING from addresses to telephone numbers... wanting to know the energy behind the number vibration - and thus, my OCD with numbers was born! :)

Christa - How did you develop the idea to connect your love of numerology to a business?

Kristen - After many long conversations with my mom about how to make our lives more meaningful & live them with passionate hearts, and without doubt or fear, I decided to take the plunge and start a new business in 2008. I was struggling in 2007, personally (a "9" year & end of a cycle) and felt like I needed another creative outlet aside from what I was currently working on with my creative services business, One Girl's Art.

Learning so much about myself through numerology and how to incorporate it into my own life throughout the years, I knew that I had to share it with the world in a creative/artsy way. I knew that I was called to help others connect with themselves in a new way, so I took advantage of my art background and started designing tees with personal meaning (based on Life Path numbers - derived by adding the month, day and full year of birth & reducing to a single digit).

Christa - Why did you choose an online retail business?

Kristen - I chose an online retail business because it was the most cost-effective way of reaching the masses on a limited budget. I am a web/graphic designer as well, so it was easy for me to create graphics & build my own website.

Christa - Do you create all of the designs yourself?

Kristen - I create all of the tee shirt designs myself with the help of my trusty Apple computer. I came up with the initial ideas for the jewelry designs, but gave the artists free reign in incorporating their own ideas/styles. Two local Arizona artists & friends, Holiday Manning & Suzanne David-Vojnich, create the jewelry.

Christa - What was the scariest part of starting your own business?

Kristen - The scariest part of starting this business was fear of rejection. I over-analyzed EVERYTHING (as a 1 Life Path often does)! My work, creativity, ability - what REALLY looks good? ...Second-guessing what people will like; second-guessing my artistic ability; hoping that people don't think I'm a woo-woo, voodoo number freak.

Christa - What's given you the most satisfaction?

Kristen - That people actually don't think I'm a woo-woo, voodoo number freak! But really, the satisfaction comes from happy, fulfilled and energized customers & friends. It's so rewarding when I receive a call or e-mail from someone expressing what an amazing, unique product I have - that they really love & connect with their tee or jewelry piece. It is so satisfying for me to talk and connect with people about their numerology... It makes me the happiest girl in the world knowing that I had something to do with a person loving him/herself a teeny bit more because of what I do.

Christa - What advice do you have for other aspiring entrepreneurs?

Kristen - Don't give up. It's tough to put yourself out there for all the world to see, but when you have that burning inside, you just have to DO IT! And... remember to LIVE IN THE MOMENT when things start moving at warp speed. That is so important. Happiness is truly found in the journey...

Dr. Lissa Rankin, Founder of Owing Pink

Meet Lissa Rankin, an artist, writer, gynecologist, mother, and all-around bundle of positive energy. I met Lissa on Twitter, and once I read her brief bio I knew that I had to feature her in this column.

Lissa has made it her mission in life to help others get their mojo back, and particularly to empower women to do whatever and be whoever they want to be. To foster this mission, she created the company Owing Pink, a place where women can connect and support one another in their pursuits. Owing Pink offers classes, workshops, and mentoring to further these connections.

A courageous, empathic, inspirational role model, Lissa is exactly the kind of person this world needs more of.

Christa - Was there a specific experience or set of experiences that led you to found Owing Pink?

Lissa - The original manifestation of Owing Pink was born on my 35th birthday. A girlfriend of mine was seven months pregnant with a little girl, and her husband patted her belly and said, “My little girl is NEVER going to wear pink. Red, green, blue, purple- she’s going to be a feminist. She could be President.”

So there I was, dressed head to toe in PINK, and I said, “You tell your daughter she just has to OWN pink.” It spawned a whole series of art, which over the years evolved into a website and series of workshops committed to helping people get their mojo back and own their authentic self.

Because of my varied skills- medicine, art, writing- I yearned for a way to express a way to bring it all together. Just as we all crave wholeness and the ability to express all the facets that make us complete, I wanted to discover a way to combine my skills and encourage others to do the same.

Christa - You are set to have *Encaustic: A Guide to Creating Fine Art With Wax* published in 2010. What led you to create this book about this topic?

Lissa - I have been painting professionally and exhibiting my art since 2001, and my primary medium is encaustic, painting with pigmented beeswax. Although this medium has been around since ancient Greece, I learned everything the hard way. Once I mastered the technique, I was inspired to write a book so we didn’t all have to reinvent the wheel. I interviewed 70 artist who also work with wax and compiled a technical manual to guide artists through the luminous process.

Christa - You've been able to link a lot of your varied interests - medicine, art, writing, and entrepreneurship - together to build a rich and satisfying life. A lot of women put themselves in a box, or allow others to do so, and sometimes feel as if they can't explore something entirely new

because it's so different from what they've done in the past. What advice would you have for women on building a life full of varied interests?

Lissa - I met a lovely woman who said, "I'm 29- I'm supposed to BE something by now." What she meant is that she should be able to define herself with one word, but we are all many things. I call it Owing Your Slashes - as in doctor/artist/writer/mother/daughter/hiker/friend, etc. We all have many slashes, and yet no one identity defines us.

For a long time, I felt like I had to wear many hats. When I wore my doctor hat, I put on my white coat, got up on my pedestal, and talked down to people, because that's what I was trained to do- be professional. In my artist hat, I was expected to be dark and brooding and mysterious. As a mother, I thought I was supposed to stop cussing, dress more conservatively, and act like a mother. But about two years ago, I decided to release all those limitations put on me by myself and others. My new goal was to be ALL LISSA, ALL THE TIME!

I believe that the more we bring all of ourselves to all facets of our lives, the more whole we are, and as a result, the more we succeed. I would encourage others to really own their slashes, to embrace all aspects of their wholeness, and to think creatively about how to get out of the box and just be YOU.

Send your inner critic to time out, release the fear that accompanies trying something new, and surrender to God's plan for your life. When you let go of trying to control everything, it's amazing how the doors start to open.

For me, it took leaving medicine for two years to heal from a series of events I call my Perfect Storm. Doing so was like jumping off a cliff, I tell people I landed in the "lavender-scented river" and have felt like I'm in the flow ever since. The more I quit trying to swim upstream and simply go with the current, the easier my life becomes. I would encourage others to do the same. Set the intention for how you want your life to be, then trust the Universe, get out of your own way, and watch magic happen.

Christa - I am blown away by The Woman Inside Project. It's such a sensitive topic and you approach it with such grace and dignity. Where did the idea come from? Did you have a specific long-term vision in mind for the project? How did you approach your first few models and ask them to participate? What was their initial response?

Lissa - I conceived The Woman Inside Project when I was pregnant with my daughter and I had to tell a pregnant woman she had breast cancer. A friend had recently sent me a belly casting kit, to cast my pregnant belly with plaster. The belly cast was already on my mind when I had to tell this woman she needed a mastectomy. I was inspired to cast her - still pregnant - before her surgery.

After that, I approached other patients of mine about participating in this art project. They came to my home, where I would spend about an hour doing the casting. Then when I was done, I would show them the cast and say, "This is what the world sees of you. Now tell me about the

rest of you.” And they would all tell me the most amazing stories about the beauty that is within each of them. And each of these women is SO beautiful!

Everyone was remarkably agreeable when I asked them to participate. Initially, they were all patients who knew me, but then I started getting referrals from others. They tell me the process is very healing, to be touched, to be heard, to be part of something bigger that’s about empowering women and honoring their beauty. The project goes on tour, opening at Commonweal in Bolinas, CA, before traveling to Houston, the DC area, and Boston.

Christa - If you could encourage women all over the world to do one thing, what would that be?

Lissa - I would encourage women to Own Pink. To Own Pink is to live an authentic life, to take care of your body, to surrender to a spiritual power, to love unconditionally, to embrace others, and to be true to who you really are. I know that’s more than one thing. If I had to limit it to one, it would be that I believe it’s impossible to put too much love into the world. Love boundlessly.

Owning Pink Update:

Since this article ran, Lissa and the Owning Pink Posse have relaunched a gorgeous new site and have expanded Owning Pink to include workshops, coaching sessions, and the Owning Pink Center. Lissa has also wrote her book, *What’s Up Down There: Questions You’d Only Ask Your Gynecologist If She Was Your Best Friend* (St. Martin's Griffin).

Erica Heinz, Founder of Yogoer.com

For busy New York yogis, Yogoer.com is a dream service. In a couple of clicks, the site provides every nearby yoga, pilates, fitness, and dance studio. It's Mapquest for your well-being. The site also provides job postings for yoga instructors, profiles of studios and instructors, and a blog. To make it even easier to utilize the service, Yogoer.com is available as an iPhone app. You can also follow Yogoer on Twitter.

Last week I had the pleasure to interview Erica Heinz, a graphic designer, Huffington Post columnist, yoga instructor, and founder of Yogoer.com. I'm also excited to announce that I'm recording my yoga teacher training diary on Yogoer.com's blog. My thanks to Erica for the opportunity to connect with the community she's building on Yogoer.com.

Christa - What was your inspiration to start Yogoer?

Erica - While I was working full-time as a web designer, I often missed a yoga class by 10 or 15 minutes. And at small studios, the next one is 60 or 90 minutes later. So I'd think "There HAS to be another class around here somewhere" and start madly Googling. Finally, I wondered why there wasn't just a map of all the yoga studios in the city, so I built one.

Christa - How did you get interested in the practice of yoga?

Erica - In college, I took a "Yoga & Relaxation" class, where we learned how to de-stress and fall asleep on the floor. Very useful. But there was one day we did Fish pose, and my eyes filled with tears for no apparent reason! So I thought, whoa, there's something to this.

After college, I needed a substitute for crew. I'd rowed for seven semesters; it was the hardest sport I'd ever done. It's a repeated motion that eventually becomes pure muscle memory, and then it's just an exercise in will. So I was drawn to the 26-pose sequence of Bikram; it was the shortest sequence I could find. Then I heard Ashtanga was "better", so I tried that. And finally I wandered into Atmananda Yoga, where I eventually did my teacher training.

Christa - Did you know you always wanted to teach or did the desire to teach grow out of your own practice? How did you know when you were ready to teach?

Erica - I took the teacher training in order to train, not to teach. I realized that I would never learn the correct alignments piecemeal in group classes. And I really liked the sequence at Atmananda; it was the most fluid sequence I'd found. So literally an hour before their training started, I signed up. I'd been going 3 times a week for months; during the 6-month training I practiced every day. I went from zero to splits in six months, and obviously I knew the owner's class by heart; they asked me to teach.

I never feel ready [to teach]. It's such a huge responsibility when you look out at 20 individuals that you're going to lead through things they've maybe never done before. The challenges are different every time, even if you teach a set sequence. But I knew I had enough athletic training to keep people safe, and a steady practice to draw from, so finally I relaxed and just let it happen.

Christa - How has yoga influenced your work as a designer and how has your design work influenced your yoga?

Erica - When I started calling myself "a yoga teacher," it was the first time I really started taking care of myself physically, emotionally, and mentally. It was a title I wanted to live up to. That in turn made me a more relaxed, creative, stronger designer. Yoga has taught me to get out of my head, and follow my feelings. And my design work helps me visualize, communicate, and plan things a lot better.

Christa - Can you share information about your upcoming yoga book?

Erica - I'm designing a book called The Yoga Sequence for Sabina Stahl; she co-created the Atmananda Sequence with Jhon Tamayo. Her sequence is adjustable — you can combine several short sequences or do variations, based on the day. The first draft is done, and now we're looking for a publisher.

I'm also working on an eBook for Yogoer, based on some of the things I've written about on the blog and the Huffington Post. It's a work in progress, but aren't we all?

Cathy Gins, Founder of AromaWear

I had the pleasure of talking to Cathy Gins, Founder of AromaWear, this week. Cathy designs fully customizable aromatic jewelry that combines her 17 years of design experience at Avon with her work as a practitioner of Therapeutic Touch, Reconnection Healing, and Clinical Aromatherapy. Inside each piece is space for a small felt wick that is designed to be scented with therapeutic oil. The wicks pop in and out of the jewelry very easily, without causing any damage to the jewelry.

You can adjust the scent you want around you depending on your need at the time. Stressed? Try some lavender. Need to feel motivated? Peppermint or lemon will help. Feeling under the weather? Try eucalyptus cold relief or a blend called Thieves, which has antibacterial properties and was used by medical workers during the Plague. And all of these wicks can be packed into a convenient, pocket-sized traveling case.

It is immediately apparent upon meeting Cathy that she has great energy and is tremendously gifted at tapping into the energy of others. She began her career as a designer and then found that the further she advanced into executive roles in the design world, the less designing she actually did. She missed working with her hands. She started taking a sculpture class, but then through a pottery class she met someone involved in the practice of Therapeutic Touch. She was a little skeptical at first, though she went to a practitioner to help her resolve a health problem she was dealing with at the time. After experiencing the results first-hand, she decided to study Therapeutic Touch and eventually started a practice of her own.

In September 2007, she combined her talents in design and her Aromatherapy work to launch AromaWear. She wanted to give her clients a way to extend the benefits they were getting from their treatments once they left the session. AromaWear was the answer to that wish. Just a year and a half after she started her company, she won W Magazine's Rising Star Award in the Beauty Entrepreneur category. "Feeling good is a new fashion basic," said Cathy. "This is the first accessory-ceutical on the market."

Aside from her talents as a designer and as a wellness practitioner, I am inspired by Cathy's motivation for starting AromaWear. "I like to be in tune with the world. I pay close attention to what's happening around me and I like feeling a sense of connection. Starting AromaWear gave me the opportunity to help my clients tune into their own energy and talents. It's extremely gratifying work. It's wellness in a beautiful package that you can carry with you."

"So why did you make the jump?" I asked. "How did you know that it was time to go your own way and start your own business?"

"I have a vision for my company and I'm able to tell my story my own way now. I don't have to worry about getting a lot of other people on board with my idea in order to bring it to life. I can be as creative and as innovative as I want to be. The internet really gave me a vehicle to sell my product and connect with a community."

Cathy's business is completely on-trend. She's creating beautiful, classic jewelry, and incorporating our need and desire for portable wellness. It's so ingenious, so elegant, that I wonder why this company wasn't started sooner. Given Cathy's passion for her work, I wondered if she regretted working for big companies for so long. Her answer: a decisive "no".

"Big companies provide a lot of resources and the chance to collaborate with a wide variety of talented, motivated people. The trade-off for those benefits is design by committee and creative compromise. I learned so much during my corporate career and every piece was a valuable experience that helped me launch AromaWear. I'm really grateful for all of the opportunities I've had."

Gary Novosel, Founder of The Food Medic

The Food Medic is a website that provides information about good nutrition's ability to combat disease. On the site, Gary provides information on the health properties of specific foods and delicious recipes that are easy to prepare. Gary's journey is a wonderful lesson in the power of kismet and following your passion!

Christa - You had some very personal experiences that led you to start The Food Medic. There are many different kinds of companies that you could have started based on these experiences - how did you come up with this specific idea and how did you know it was the best way to make a positive impact in this field?

Gary - Great question and actually, my background is very diverse. I'm currently a Chief Technology Officer of a Credit Union. I've also worked for the US Bankruptcy court doing business turnarounds and helped recover a marketing firm. However, much of my experience is in technology and the computer industry and I have written six books on those topics.

During the dot-com bust I worked in three restaurants in the kitchen as a chef. I've always felt that food was my passion. After having a heart attack and being discharged with "zero" nutritional information from my caretakers, I put my computing, marketing, food, and writing experience to use to create an informational blog on food and nutrition as they relate to specific illness and disease. While others produced great blogs about food, they all lacked the focus on the relationship between nutrition and disease prevention. I think all my skills lined up to give me the best chance to get this one delivered to an appropriately targeted audience.

Christa - What does success of The Food Medic look like to you?

Gary - Success for FoodMedic is simple. If I can somehow help a single person prevent a disease or illness and live an extra day they wouldn't have received, it's a success. The secondary goal is to help people try and appreciate foods in ways they haven't thought of before.

Christa - Was there a specific experience that led you to consider creating the blog?

Gary - A friend of mine died of cancer. I cooked meals for his family for a time before he died and really learned how food tastes differently to someone on chemotherapy. That caused me to become a voracious researcher and learn as much as I could about how foods could nutritionally benefit him. As I told others about it, they shared similar concerns about friends and family. A blog became the natural outlet for me to reach a larger group of interested people.

Christa - What were your biggest learnings as you started the FoodMedic?

Gary - When I started my first business back in 1987, I didn't even know the basic questions to ask. I just started. Eventually, I learned that I didn't know a lot about a lot. It wasn't until later in life that fear and doubt started to creep in. Not because I didn't believe in my ideas and skills, but because I knew all the things that "could" happen to me. It was easier to start a business when I

wasn't educated about business. I just did it. I believe that worry and doubt are the biggest idea / business killers out there.

My advice is this, if you think your idea is sound and of value to others and if others tell you the same thing, then just start. Imagine a child running through a field of waist tall grass with the wind blowing through their hair. They run because it's fun. They don't think about the rocks that may trip them, holes they may fall in, snakes lying wait in the grass, or other hazards that may befall them that they can't see. Be like the child and just run and enjoy the experience. All these things are acceptable risks. You'll probably never see a snake and if so, it is extremely unlikely it will be poisonous. And odds are, you'll never trip on a rock or fall into a hole. Write down your list of fears; all of them. And then set it aside and start your business. You just have to start running and the fears become inconsequential.

Christa - A lot of people feel a sense of nervousness to start a business without being an "expert" in the field that their business idea is a part of. I think it's fantastic that you forged ahead and started a health site even though you work in the tech industry. Did you have any doubts about starting this business given that you are not a health professional, and if so, how did you overcome them?

Gary - That was actually my first thought. I wondered how in the world could I give advice about food AND nutrition. I'm not a nutritionist or a doctor by any stretch. I remembered articles I've read over the years about chocolate with titles such as "Chocolate Causes Obesity", "Chocolate, the Ultimate Antioxidant", and the best yet "Chocolate- Health Food for the Masses?". How could this all be true for chocolate?

Several articles on Cancer would point to the benefits of a treatment only to be refuted in another article by some other group of researchers. It became clear to me that doctors don't exactly know why some foods benefit certain diseases. And, most doctors only receive a handful of hours training on nutrition to begin with. So, much like me after my heart attack, I realized it was up to me to do my own research and make my own determinations about food and nutrition to make healthy decisions. I combined that realization with knowledge and information from nutritionists and dietitians. My goal then became to provide dietary information about my recipes and create attractive dishes that were easy to prepare and enjoyable to eat.

Christa - On FoodMedic, you thank Carrie Mark for inspiring and motivating you to start the site. Can you describe what she did to help you believe that you could get this going?

Gary - Carrie is a friend working on her Ph.D. in Special Education at KU. She told me about a food site she frequented that delivered really healthy recipes along with interesting stories and said I should start my own. She also incessantly reminds me of the quality of this other site and pushes me to improve FoodMedic. She is a raving fan and I appreciate her support very much.

Christa - What advice would you give aspiring entrepreneurs?

Gary - I feel people tend to over-think. I certainly do. Many struggle with their passion and figuring out what a passion is. Although I love working with technology, you will barely find a

technology book or magazine in my house. You will find about a hundred cooking magazines, tons of cookbooks, a \$65 Global spatula, and a stove that costs more than a used car...you get the picture. Everyone else would guess food is my passion, I just kept trying to figure out how to replace my salary so I could work with food, somehow, all the time.

We all miss the point at times, I think. We want instant gratification. We want to plant a corn seed today and eat our ears of corn tomorrow. A passion isn't work and we try so hard to make it that and we can't do it all instantly. Start with what you can do today even if it's reading a book or talking to someone that does what you think you want to do. Information is invaluable.

The second is to write down your goals. Put them individually on stickies on your wall or by your bed. And keep them simple. If one of them is world peace, one of your early goals may be to take a negotiation course. Start in easy-to-digest bites.

But the biggest advice I can give is when you screw up, that is, when an outcome occurs that isn't what you're looking for, learn to ask why. What was the root cause of the poor result? DO NOT ask, why did I screw this up? People for the most part don't go to work to make mistakes. Mistakes happen because a process lets people down. Fix the process and move on. One bad golf shot can either ruin a game completely or it can just be one bad shot. Let yours just be a bad shot and get on with the rest of the game.

Thanks so much to Gary for sharing his inspiring story and tips for all aspiring entrepreneurs. Gary has published a cookbook, The Food Medic Cookbook, which captures many of his delicious recipes and information about good nutrition's ability to combat disease. Order it at: http://www.tastebook.com/featured_tastebooks/191224-The-Food-Medic-Cookbook

Jerri Chou, Co-Founder of All Day Buffet

Meet Jerri Chou, Co-founder of All Day Buffet, an organization whose mission is "to change the world through creativity and business. We incubate, advise, and invest into for-profit/for-good companies."

Under the All Day Buffet umbrella, you'll find some kickin' business initiatives like The Feast Conference, an innovation event that will get your creative juices flowing like the Mississippi, By/Association, a mechanism to introduce remarkable people to one another, and their latest creation TBD, a free daily email newsletter that delivers a world-shaking idea and a collective action to improve our future. It's this latest venture that sparked my recent conversation with Jerri.

Christa - What inspired you to start TBD? How does it integrate with your other initiatives like All Day Buffet and Lovely Day?

Jerri - We started TBD because there has been an influx of information thanks to the web: facts, transparency, and options for doing good! Unfortunately, this is as much a problem as it is a blessing. The more information there is, the more choices there are, creating something called the 'paradox of choice', which leads to a paralysis in people's ability to actually take action. The future of information is about curation and filters. We saw this being successfully implemented in the for-profit world through successful newsletters like Daily Candy and Thrillist, but no one was applying this to the social innovation space. We started TBD to deliver the most relevant, action oriented campaigns and content directly to your inbox.

As far as integrating with our other ventures, All Day Buffet is the umbrella brand under which we do everything. TBD is the mass reach piece that allows us to bring this kind of thinking to the mainstream and to make innovative social solutions the new status quote. In relationship to Lovely Day, we'll be working with large brands and TBD offers a potential platform to create really relevant campaigns that inspire thousands to engage with the work of socially responsible companies and nonprofits.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Jerri - I wouldn't quite call it fear. I have worked on several startups and started many initiatives through All Day Buffet so another one was nothing new. We're very good at creating structure and brands that resonate with people. I've had practice at thinking things through and this space is very supportive, collaborative, and helpful. I would probably be more nervous if I didn't have many friends and supporters as sounding boards for ideas. Even then, what is there to be afraid of? If you fail, you can always start again.

The beautiful part about the start-up culture (especially in the US) is that failure is accepted and even lauded because you learn more every time you try something new, and even more every time you fail. If you don't fail, then that probably means you're just not trying at all. The only anxiety I have is making sure my work has the impact it set out to have.

Christa - What surprised you most about starting your own business?

Jerri - What always surprises me is how much work it actually is. Ideas are a dime a dozen and they always sound much easier than they are. It takes a lot of work and dedication to see something past launch and into viability. The thing about being an entrepreneur is having the will power to see it through, think long-term, and keep pounding the pavement and learning what you need to learn in order to make it work.

Christa - What are some of the most inspiring stories you've featured on TBD?

Jerri - Some of the most inspiring stories are those that are entrepreneurial. The 9th Ward Field of Dreams is one of my favorites. It's a nonprofit with a mission to build a \$1.85M state of the art track and field center in one of the areas of New Orleans that was hardest hit by Katrina -- the 9th Ward. The executive director, Brian, has overcome hurdle after hurdle. He's seen highs and lows but through his determination, miracles have also come through. You know what they say: luck is a combination of determination and preparedness.

To date, they've now raised \$1.5M. It's a story of daring to dream big and doing everything you can to realize a dream. It's inspired an entire community.

Christa - What advice would you give to others considering starting their own business, particularly in this economy?

Jerri - Go for it! Be smart about what you're doing, don't replicate efforts someone else is taking, make sure it's a good idea, that it's financially sound, and that this is really what you love and will fulfill your personal and professional goals. Getting advisers and peers to give you honest feedback is crucial - the key word here is 'honest'.

Ultimately, pushing the button boils down to your gut. If you're passionate about it and feel it's the right moment in time and that you're the right person to start your business, you should do it. Very few really great opportunities to affect change and make the world a better place grace us and they rarely (if ever) happen more than once. It's not something you should let pass by.

Take an honest look, but most likely, the worst that could happen is you fail and have to get another job. Even then, at least you tried and you will learn more about work, the world, and yourself than you ever would have otherwise.

Teju Ravilochan, Co-founder of The Unreasonable Institute

This week I had the opportunity to interview Teju Ravilochan, Connections Strategist and Co-Founder of The Unreasonable Institute. I found out about The Unreasonable Institute through Social Earth's Twitter feed and was intrigued by the name. Some of the people I admire most consider themselves unreasonable: they push boundaries and work toward building a world that is far better than the world as we know it today. They thrive on their creativity and imagination. Teju and the team at The Unreasonable Institute fit this bill perfectly. The Unreasonable Institute's mission to provide intensive training, effective collaboration, and expert guidance to Unreasonable social ventures gives entrepreneurs the momentum to take flight.

Christa - What inspired The Unreasonable Institute?

Teju - The Unreasonable Institute emerged from both inspiration and frustration. 4 years ago, Daniel Epstein, our President and Co-Founder, traveled to the Czech Republic to attend a global youth leadership program. Dan was thrilled to interact with "future leaders" from all over the world, but frustrated by the opportunity cost of the program. The program did not produce measurable impact nor lead to the development of viable solutions to the world's challenges. Determined to create a place where young people could learn "how to change the world", he decided to create a similar program in Boulder, Colorado (where we all attend/attended college). Along with partner Mike Forte, Dan brought 17 students together from 14 different countries (including Sierra Leone, Pakistan, and Colombia) in the summer of 2008 to study leadership, but still found he was unsatisfied with the outcomes. Suddenly, he realized the value of combining driven, young people from around the world with social entrepreneurship.

In the meanwhile, I was in India conducting research about effective NGO practices in addressing rural poverty and learned about the consistent failure of charity-based models to produce outcomes. I found that effective organizations viewed the poor more as customers and entrepreneurs, instead of recipients of charity (to borrow a line from one of my heroes, Paul Polak of International Development Enterprises and D-Rev: Design for the Other 90%). I brought this view back to the U.S., and Dan and I became incredibly excited about the potential for business to address social and environmental challenges. The concept behind the institute emerged from the intersection of our experiences, shared over cups of hot chai and breakfast scrambles.

The name for the organization came from George Bernard Shaw's assertion that "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man [and woman]." We read this quotation in the book *The Power of Unreasonable People* and secured permission from one of its authors, Pamela Hartigan (now director of the Skoll Centre), to use "Unreasonable" in our name. The Unreasonable Institute was born!

Christa - There are a lot of groups out there that support social entrepreneurs; many of them are your partners. What makes you different from groups like Social Edge or Acumen Fund?

Teju - We provide young social entrepreneurs with EVERYTHING. We pair them with mentors,

align them with seed capital, provide skills training, offer them free legal consulting, web hosting and development, access to premier research, and a global network of support. Additionally, we have very specific goals. We incubate social ventures that will:

- 1.) Effectively address a social or environmental challenge;
- 2.) Become financially self-sustaining (do not require external financing) within 1 year;
- 3.) Scale outside their country of origin within 3 years, effectively addressing a global issue on a global level;
- 4.) Be open for replication (“copylifted”) 4 years after launch;
- 5.) Meet the needs of at least 1 million people

Many organizations dedicated to enabling social entrepreneurs are grant agencies, foundations, or traditional non-profits. We hold ourselves to the same standards outlined above. Finally, our institute is developed by, directed by, and dedicated to young social entrepreneurs from all over the world between the ages of 20-30.

Christa - 2010 will be your first institute. What are your goals for the first summer institute? What do you hope to learn in the process? Will this be an annual program?

Teju - We are unbelievably excited to host our first summer institute next summer. Our major goal for the first institute is to rally some of the most brilliant, young social entrepreneurs we can find and "give them wings." More concrete goals include:

- 1.) 70% of the ventures incubated at the institute meet the objectives outlined above on time and 95% to meet them no more than a year later;
- 2.) 50% of the mentors at the institute serve on the boards and/or invest in at least one social venture (Unreasonable Venture) incubated at the institute;
- 3.) Financial sustainability for The Unreasonable Institute after the 2010 Summer Institute (i.e. no reliance upon external financing);
- 4.) Fundamentally, our goal is to demonstrate the power of bringing together young people with big ideas along with seasoned changemakers to create ventures that can effectively address the world's biggest problems in a way that is sustainable, scalable; and replicable.

Christa - What do you hope to learn through the 2010 Summer Institute?

Teju - We hope, first and foremost, to learn from our Fellows what is possible and what the world might look like if their ideas are successful. We honestly believe that the caliber of ideas we will attract to the Institute can paint a picture of a world we never before imagined. We hope to learn from mentors and from our Board (The Unreasonable Council) the concrete steps required to create this world.

We hope to learn a lot about the investment opportunities created by the ideas incubated at our Institute. How much profit will they be capable of generating? Will they be able to produce profits & dividends for shareholders while effectively addressing poverty or social injustice?

We hope to learn how our Fellows and the Institute at large can change the way we create change. Will traditional business recognize the vast, untapped markets available to them in under-served populations? Will traditional nonprofits appreciate the opportunity cost of their charity-based models? Will these institutions adapt in order to create systemic impact? What do we need to do to create this change?

We will take what we learn and apply to our future annual Summer Institutes.

Christa - Your site says that Unreasonable Institute supports social entrepreneurs ages 20-30. Do you support entrepreneurs outside that age range as well?

Teju - Our focus is 20-30 year old social entrepreneurs. There are barriers for entry for young social entrepreneurs in this age group and an Institute like ours fills a unique, under-served niche. We also believe that it is the members of this demographic who are on the verge of taking the reigns of the world's future and that we cannot afford to send them into the world unprepared to deal with increasingly urgent global threats like poverty, climate change, and the oppression of women.

Mike Del Ponte, Founder of Sparkseed

Jerri and Teju's optimism in action inspired me to continue seeking out social entrepreneurs who believe that the greatest positive impact on society can be made when we create opportunities for people to use their personal passions to do well and do good at the same time.

I virtually met Mike Del Ponte as a result of my interviews with Jerri and Teju. He emailed me to educate me about his initiative, Sparkseed, which invests in American college students who aspire to be tomorrow's social entrepreneurs. They have ideas to change the world, and Sparkseed helps them get there by providing a unique blend of services including pro-bono consulting, mentoring, and seed money.

Mike's ability to combine his business savvy with his passion for and personal experience with social entrepreneurship is a rare gift. "When I was at Yale I launched a social venture and soon found that I had to teach myself everything: how to form the corporation, how to recruit and manage a team, how to pitch to investors...I reinvented the wheel and wasted a lot of time...I noticed that almost all student innovators run into the same problem...I established Sparkseed to give young social entrepreneurs everything they need to fulfill their potential as change agents."

The Financial Times recently awarded Sparkseed with its prestigious Best Social Investment Strategy award. To date, Sparkseed has funded over 50 social enterprise projects from a wide variety of fields:

Elecar Inc.: Founded by Brown University student Andrew Antar, Elecar provides the missing piece to the electric car puzzle. By developing residential charging stations and an online payment system, Elecar is laying a cost-effective framework to facilitate the mass adoption of electric cars.

MaloTraders: Founded by Temple University student Mohamed Ali Niang, MaloTraders specializes in the processing, storing, and marketing of rice for small-scale farmers in Mali. By making local production more competitive on the international market, MaloTrade alleviates poverty.

Paper Feet: Founded by University of Michigan student Jimmy Tomczak, Paper Feet makes the world's thinnest and most flexible flip-flop out of recycled billboard vinyl. Every year, 10,000 tons of billboard vinyl ends up in landfills. Paper Feet is addressing this problem by rolling out a line of hip products all made from up-cycled waste.

Adam Rich, Co-founder of Thrillist

Looking for the latest great place to dine, shop, or relax with friends? Look no further than Thrillist, a free daily email with one fabulous suggestion after another that also promotes local business small businesses. I recently had the opportunity to connect with Adam Rich, one of the Co-founders, to get the inside scoop on their start-up. Many thanks to Flavie Bagnol, Director of Communications, for making the arrangements for this interview.

Christa - What inspired you to start Thrillist? How is Thrillist different from other city guides?

Adam - We started Thrillist because there were a ton of sites covering New York City, but neither my business partner nor I found any information we could trust. Because they were all so general in who they were targeting, there was no way of knowing if the restaurant they called “affordable and romantic” would seem so to me, my dad, or my great-aunt Joan. Where Thrillist sets itself apart is that we know exactly who we’re writing for, and we evaluate things accordingly. We position ourselves to be like the reader’s super-plugged-in friend or older brother, who knows what he likes, and doesn’t waste his time with anything he won’t like. And we’re funny.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Adam - We definitely felt some fear, but starting something with a friend you respect and trust means you can help each other through moments of doubt. Also it helped enormously that we knew a number of people in the media space, and knew they believed in our idea. A final step we took was to keep our concept very, very simple. Sticking to something we knew (being the target consumers ourselves) has real value. This helped reduce the number of question marks we faced going from the concept to the fully executed product.

Christa - What surprised you most about starting your own business?

Adam - In the start-up phase, everything felt very, very stressful and scary — but we fully expected that. The big surprise is when suddenly people you don’t know first-hand are familiar with what you’re doing. Given how hard we worked early on for every reader and every shred of press, it’s a continual astonishment when our momentum does some of the work for us.

Christa - What are some of your favorite New York City finds that you've featured on Thrillist?

Adam - A few that have personally changed my life are the Whisk and Ladle Secret Supper Club, La Chiva Party Bus, Zocdoc (basically an opentable for doctors and dentists in Manhattan), and of course the happy hour at Lure Fishbar. Get web addresses.

Christa - What advice would you give to others considering starting their own business, particularly in this economy?

Adam - I would give two pieces of seemingly conflicting advice:

1.) Execution is everything. All successful businesses are really a collection of a million little challenges and tasks, so it's critical to tackle each one with a relentless eye for perfection. Sometimes it just means working on something until you can honestly feel proud of the result, even if it's seemingly trivial.

2.) Don't hope for a break, just start doing it. A million people have ideas they'd "like to get started", so go and buy the domain, start writing, get something online, and get yourself in the game.

Interview with Brandon Kessler, Founder of ChallengePost

Everyone loves a good contest, especially when it's a contest that's organized, efficient, and dealing with cutting edge challenges that need to be solved. Enter ChallengePost, the conduit that makes contests accessible and fun, and delivers powerful, buzz-worthy results. With ChallengePost, competition truly is a game again.

Christa - What inspired you to start ChallengePost?

Brandon - ChallengePost is a website that allows individuals, corporations, and government agencies to challenge the public to do cool things. Right now we are running approximately 50 challenges, including one in New York called NYC BigApps, where Mayor Bloomberg challenged the public to create software applications to improve New York City.

I started ChallengePost after seeing the growing number of corporate and grassroots challenges, and the power of a challenge to identify new problems and get them solved. People responded to them not just for money, but for recognition, intellectual stimulation, the competitive spirit, and altruism. There wasn't a network that took advantage of these motivators, or allowed people to find out about similar challenges and show support for ones they liked.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Brandon - I've been an entrepreneur since I was 18, including throughout college. Being an entrepreneur is the only thing that makes me happy professionally. Frankly, I'd be miserable otherwise.

I think entrepreneurs generally see opportunity where others see only risk; we recognize risk, but try to mitigate it. And I think selfishly we don't mind the fact that others are afraid of risk -- it means we can keep the potential opportunity to ourselves and make a go of it.

Christa - What surprised you most about starting your own business?

Brandon - This is my fourth company, and each one brings surprises almost daily. One thing most people don't realize is that whatever your initial idea is almost always turns out to be different from what it ends up becoming. Good ideas are a dime a dozen. It's the execution of the idea and the willingness to 'follow the money' and pivot on a dime that matters.

Christa - What are some of your favorite success stories from the challenges that have been posted on the site?

Brandon - NYC BigApps has been a great success. Nearly \$4.25 million in software applications were created for an investment of only \$20,000 in prizes from the city. I'm also a big fan of a challenge which has \$11,000 pledged to anyone who can create encrypted mobile internet access which would stop countries like Iran from shutting off the Internet when they want to. And we also have a challenge to create a milk purity detector so that small milk producers in 3rd world countries will stop mixing milk with washing powder. I also love the

one to create high-performance prosthetic legs for under \$1,000. I would very much enjoy publishing some oil production challenges in Houston.

Christa - What advice would you give to others considering starting their own business, particularly in this economy?

Brandon - Go for it. If you can raise the money, or get a few clients to come with you, then you should do it. There are plenty of resources, including angel investor networks and advisors. Despite what I said earlier about fear, it's a great motivator and I think being in charge of your own destiny is the best way.

Russ Finkelstein, Author of *Idealist.org Handbook to Building a Better World*

This week I had the pleasure to interview Russ Finkelstein, Associate Director of Action Without Borders / Idealist.org. Russ was the driving force behind a valuable resource just published by the Penguin Group. *The Idealist.org Handbook to Building a Better World* is a book for anyone who wants to make a positive impact in the world. Whether you have never volunteered before or are a seasoned nonprofit professional, this book is filled with advice and guidance on the world of philanthropy. With info on areas ranging from board service to volunteer groups to in-kind donations, this book is a must-have for anyone interested in getting involved in service.

Christa - Where inspired you to write and publish this book now?

Russ - Helping people move from good intentions to action has always been at the heart of what Idealist.org seeks to achieve. As we have become better known we have simply heard more people saying that they had a desire to do good or have an impact, but were unsure of how to begin. We frequently have conversations with people who want to work at a nonprofit or are looking to commit their time, money or expertise to an organization, but feel overwhelmed. This book takes the place of the conversation we wish we could have with everyone about how they really can have an impact that feels worthwhile and sustainable.

Christa - What are your highest goals for the book in terms of public response?

Russ - I don't know that there will be some great way to measure that people are in fact doing more, but my great hope is that more people are finding ways to express their desire to make a difference in the world. Hopefully, those who read the book end up feeling that they know their options, and that whether they do something through their workplace, give money or serve on a nonprofit board that it feels like they are empowered and making a difference. I know that we also hope to get across that people don't have a right to tell you that there is a minimum to the # of issues you have to care about, time you should offer or money you contribute. These are personal choices and no one should be judging you based on those decisions.

Christa - What are some of your thoughts on how the current economy will effect the nonprofit sector in the long-run?

Russ - People seem to agree that the number of organizations is likely going to be reduced given the decrease in individuals donations and foundation and corporate support. The hope is that those who survive these economic struggles will come through this stronger and leaner for the future. Most leaders are concerned about the capacity of organizations to serve the increasing number of people who will need services from fewer and less well staffed organizations. I hope that the diminishing financial resources will mean that organizations will make more of an effort to engage skilled volunteers and local colleges and universities. I also think the uncertainty surrounding corporate America may entice more people to consider working in the nonprofit sector which is already an extremely competitive place to locate paid opportunities.

Bob Young, CEO of Lulu

As a writer, I am very interested in Lulu.com, a start-up that helps authors self-publish and promote their work. Gail Jordan, the Director of Publicity at Lulu, was kind enough to arrange an interview for me with Lulu's CEO, Bob Young. Gail summed up Lulu's mission very eloquently: "Lulu is a tremendous example of the entrepreneurship of our founder and CEO, Bob Young, as well as being a place where writers, who are often entrepreneurs themselves, are empowered to publish and profit from their work." An inspiring reason for being.

Christa - What inspired the creation of Lulu?

Bob - Two different things. One was that I wrote a book about Red Hat and Open Source software called "Under The Radar" and published it traditionally back in 1999. It sold over 20,000 copies at \$25 each. On total sales of over \$500,000.00 I earned a paltry \$2,311. It occurred to me that the Internet offered a way for authors to sell books and keep more of the profit to encourage them to write their next book.

The other inspiration was that I knew so many talented programmers, artists and writers who could not get a publisher to even return their phone calls. The publishers insisted the author's book or music or software program would not sell enough copies to justify the effort of publishing it.

But the Internet reduces all the costs of publishing to the point where you should be able to make money selling only a few, or even just one, of a specialized title. I've always admired how Ebay enables independent vendors to connect with individual consumers. We wanted to create a site to enable independent authors to connect with individual readers.

Christa - What does success at Lulu look like to you?

Bob - As a friend of mine never hesitates to remind me: books change lives. Lulu's success can be measured in our ability to make the world a better place one book at a time.

Christa - How do you differentiate your brand from competitors?

Bob - There are lots of online services that will print your book for you. The real benefit of Lulu are all the tools and techniques we've been building that help you find the people who need to read your book.

From helping you get your book out to all of the popular current marketplaces such as Ebay and Amazon, to helping the millions of users of social networks such as Facebook and Myspace recommend your book to their friends via our weRead.com book discovery tools, our focus is on helping Authors sell their books.

Christa - What's the most gratifying part about running Lulu?

Bob - Successful authors. We have literally helped several hundred thousand authors publish their books. These are books the existing book publishing industry did not think they could make money on so they would not publish them. But the author believed in their project. In turn, the readers are grateful that the author took the time to create a book the reader could not find on the shelves of their local book store.

Of course an increasing number of Lulu books are finding their way onto the shelves of your local bookstore, but that is another story.

Christa - How did you decide to make the jump and start your own business?

Bob - I'm genetically coded to start businesses. My father started businesses, his father did, my great-grandfather, a Scotsman who emigrated to Canada in the mid-19th century, even help start a successful bank.

For many, launching a business is a risky and brave thing to do. For someone with my genes it was the safe and logical thing to do. Much like a child growing up to be lawyer when both his parents were lawyers.

Christa - Did you feel any fear when starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Bob - Sure, but I couldn't help myself, see above.

Christa - Advice for people interested in starting their own businesses, particularly in the current economy?

Bob - [Jokingly] Please don't. I and my colleagues at Lulu (and every other business in America) don't need the additional competition. Trying to start and grow a new business is hard enough without every newly unemployed American trying to take your customers away from you! Seriously - most successful new business are begun in recessions. No point sitting on your couch moaning about how few jobs there are out there - get up and create one. Compared to sitting on your couch moaning about your fate, starting a new business, even one just selling books on Lulu, is a low-risk high-reward endeavor.

Spencer Fry, Business Guy of Carbonmade

Entrepreneurship reminds me of that old quote from Denis the Menace, “Be proud of yourself because sometimes you’re all you’ve got.” I find this especially true for entrepreneurs who are visual artists. This type of entrepreneur lays his soul bare for public consumption. And if he’s going to lay his soul bare, he better have an online portfolio that represents the true beauty of the work. Trouble is those portfolios have been historically expensive to create and maintain, and require a good deal of html knowledge or the cash to hire a team that is willing to do all of the manual work.

Enter Carbonmade, a visual artist’s best tool to get his visual art out into the world. No HTML required and loaded with features. I recently had the chance to ask Spencer Fry, Business Guy at Carbonmade, about their inspiration and being an entrepreneur in this economy.

Christa - What inspired you to start Carbonmade?

Spencer - Carbonmade was built four years ago by Dave Gorum as an easier way for him to update his portfolio. A few of his friends saw what he had made and asked if he could open it up to them as well. The first version didn’t even have a sign up page. He agreed and we built a sign up page for it and people began to stream in. We then started working on Carbonmade full-time in 2007 after it had kicked around for a few years as a side project. You could say that Carbonmade was simply built to fit Dave’s need for an easy way to manage and display his portfolio.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Spencer - There was no fear on our part because Carbonmade had been launched as a side project. We were running a design studio at the time, so our income came in through that. Then about two years into launching Carbonmade we were able to slow down client work and shift our attention to Carbonmade. Soon after that, we were able to cut off client work altogether and simply run Carbonmade as our full-time business. So the risk was minimal to none. Needless to say, our story is the exception to the rule.

Christa - What surprised you most about starting your own business?

Spencer - What surprised us most is how many creative people began using Carbonmade. Again, we had no idea that more than a handful of people would use it. It grew a cult following early on and now nearly every artist I speak to needs or wants a Carbonmade portfolio to show off their work. Even four years later, not a day goes by that we’re not surprised about our growth. However, we’ve come to terms with our growing popularity and have a lot in store for our community that will excite them even further.

Christa - Why should an artist use Carbonmade rather than build their own website?

Spencer - We feel that artists should be focused on producing their work and not have to worry about how it’s displayed. Carbonmade keeps the artists’ work at the forefront so as not to get in

the way of their work. We're basically a virtual representation of an old school "offline" portfolio. We provide the framework and you display your work inside of it. Also, a lot of artists don't know how to manage their own website and don't want to deal with the headache. We keep things running smoothly and provide easy tools for them.

Christa - What advice would you give to others considering starting their own business, particularly in this economy?

Spencer - There's no right or wrong time to start a company. You basically just need to launch something, see how it fares, and then go from there. There's a lot of self-motivation and determination involved – I actually wrote an article about that entitled "Are You An Entrepreneur?" in late November, 2009. I've launched several start-ups in my life and I've always felt that you just have to go with your gut. If you feel like there's a need out there, then you should build something for it right away, because it's likely that other people have the same feeling.

Scott Belsky, Founder and CEO of Behance

Behance aims to bring a bit of order to creative ventures so that ideas get off the drawing board and out into the world. From advisory services to an online store chock full of cool items, Behance creates products and services that keep creative people creating. I had the opportunity to sit down with Scott Belsky, Founder and CEO, to talk about the creativity that inspired Behance. Scott's book, [Making Ideas Happen: Overcoming the Obstacles Between Vision and Reality](#), was published by Portfolio / Penguin Books in April 2010.

Christa - What inspired you to start Behance?

Scott - I was most inspired by a sense of frustration. There is SO MUCH discussion in the creative world about inspiration and creativity, but very little discussion about organization and execution. The stuff that makes our lives interesting - the art, design, and original content - is all created by the creative professional community. But, unfortunately, creatives in particular face unique obstacles when it comes to actually making their ideas happen.

We created Behance with a very specific mission: To organize the creative world. We are not trying to increase creativity. On the contrary, we are trying to help creative leaders harness their own creativity and actually make ideas happen.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Scott - My fear was always about building the business fast enough to support the team. Once you convince brilliant minds to become colleagues - and depart normal careers to help make a grand idea happen - you bare a great burden. Building a team breeds a fear of failure that is beyond your own consequences.

Over the years, I have overcome this fear through transparency and constant communication with the team. We make tough decisions together, and we recognize the various compromises we make for long-term achievements.

Christa - What surprised you most about starting your own business?

Scott - I was most surprised by how many different approaches we could take to the same mission. In our pursuit to organize the creative world, we have launched a powerful online multi-media platform (<http://www.behance.net>), a paper product line (<http://www.creativesoutfitter.com>), an online application for task management (<http://www.actionmethod.com>), and a think tank and annual conference (<http://www.the99percent.com>). Some people might think this is crazy, but we believe that these four businesses are essential in our mission to organize the creative world. They all work together, and we have learned so much from the diversity of challenges faced across products.

Christa - What are some of Behance's greatest success stories?

Scott - Wow, there are quite a few success stories from members of Behance.net that have had

career-changing experiences!

Here are two of my favorites:

A Graffiti Light Team in Germany is Discovered by Sprint & Absolut

The first is Lichtfaktor, a team of "light graffiti artists" based in Cologne, Germany. They joined the Behance Network in October 2007 and published a portfolio of their work. It quickly gained traction around the web. <http://www.behance.net/LICHTFAKTOR> They reported to us that, about 8 months after joining, they were found on Behance and approached by an agency representing Sprint. They were ultimately commissioned to do a major project for Sprint's stores: <http://bit.ly/58myaS>; They were also found via Behance and hired to do additional work for Absolut Vodka and other brands like Speedo: <http://bit.ly/5Z8AS8>

A Brooklyn Photographer & India Illustrator Collaborate, Kanye West Discovers

Parris Whittingham (Brooklyn based wedding photographer) posted up a project called "Brooklyn Boys." Archan Nair (illustrator from India) found the photographs and asked to illustrate them. Parris and Archan then posted a collaborative project to Behance.net that caught the eye of Kanye West, who posted it on his blog (<http://bit.ly/5R2ZAG>). This started a chain reaction of press / coverage that helped both of their careers.

Many of the world's leading agencies and creative companies have told us that Behance.net is now their #1 source of new talent. We find these stories and testimonials extremely motivating - certainly a powerful form of non-financial reward that keeps us working hard to improve the network.

Christa - What advice would you give to others considering starting their own business, particularly in this economy?

Scott - Boldly pursue your genuine interests. No time better than now. Rather than think about quick schemes to build companies, take some serious steps towards what matters most to you and you'll find a golden opportunity waiting.

Amanda Steinberg, Founder of DailyWorth

“No one is going to fix financial inequity for women. We have to recognize our own self-worth, ask for higher salaries, invest more aggressively, and build our own wealth.” ~ Amanda Steinberg, DailyWorth Founder

Last week, I had the pleasure to speak with Amanda Steinberg, founder of DailyWorth, a daily email that gives women sound financial advice on a wide variety of topics. Amanda and her community of thousands who are currently receiving DailyWorth are building a movement.

"Women are chronically under-earning and under-saving. I woke up, 30 years old, and realized that even though I was earning a good living, I had nothing to show for it. A lot of women are in the same boat. DailyWorth was created to give women the tools to help them earn what they're worth and generate their own wealth through savings. I used to operate under the assumption that the more money I make, the more I have. What you have is what you save, not what you earn" said Steinberg.

Amanda shared some information with me about the other venture she runs, Soapbxx. Soapbxx "designs and builds superior Internet solutions for global enterprises, using the latest innovations in Web 2.0 technologies." Amanda has been entrepreneurial her entire professional career. She actively mentors the women who work for her and gives them bigger raises than what they typically ask for because she knows how valuable they are in the market. Everyone should be so lucky to have a boss like Amanda.

"They don't know what they're worth, and therefore don't ask for enough. Same with contractors. I often hire contractors for my projects, and female contractors consistently ask for a fraction of what male contractors ask for. Women are often willing to do contract work for 1/3 the price that their male competitors charge," says Amanda.

Even more than unfair compensation, the pet peeve that really gets Amanda going is the constant apologizing women do. "Women apologize for their questions and concerns, and discount their words before even articulating their thoughts and ideas. That has GOT to stop!" she says. "If we don't stand behind our ideas with confidence, then who will?"

Women are heeding DailyWorth's call to action. The site gets 20 new members every day and in 6 months has grown to 1000+ members. To date, DailyWorth has not spent a single dollar on marketing. It's all word of mouth and a grassroots effort. In the next 12 months, Amanda wants 100,000 members. Think that's a lofty goal? It is - and it's a perfect example for all of us. You want to achieve great things, you better set some great, lofty goals. Now. "Welcome to the movement."

Anthony Casalena, Founder of Squarespace

Online presence is the calling card of the business world today. If businesses, particularly small businesses and freelancers, don't have an authentic web presence, the chances of success are slim. There are a lot of companies out there who will offer web design and maintenance services for a pretty penny, and I've found that most are mediocre. Through Inc. Magazine, I learned about Squarespace, a New York-based software start-up that makes creating and managing an elegant online presence an intuitive process.

A few months ago, I had the opportunity to ask Anthony Casalena, Founder of Squarespace, about the company, the art and science of entrepreneurship, and the role of differentiation in building a successful start-up. His responses are articulate, thoughtful, and inspiring. After this interview, I'm a big-time fan, and I bet you will be, too. Read on.

Christa - What inspired you to start Squarespace? Did the business take off from the beginning or was the growth of the customer base gradual?

Anthony - I created Squarespace for the same reason that many developers write software -- I wanted to solve a problem for myself. In 2003 I sat down to update my personal website and didn't really find a compelling tool to help me do this. There were all of these disparate tools that seemed to solve very narrow problems -- there was an OK blogging tool, or an OK photo gallery tool, but nothing that did everything with a unified interface. I wanted something cleaner and more integrated.

After I had created the initial prototype for my site and launched it, I showed a couple of friends. One of them actually offered to buy the website from me in hopes of commercializing it; this is when I realized that I might have something really good on my hands.

Instead of selling the code, I spent a lot of time thinking about how I could make my personal site into a platform that could be used by others. I realized there was a huge need for a tool that would allow users to easily create and maintain feature-rich, multi-page websites in a user-friendly way. After all, if I faced this problem myself, there must have been a bunch of other people out there facing the same thing.

The result of this process was the initial version of Squarespace, released in January of 2004. Squarespace was founded to improve the user experience of website creation and we're still uncompromisingly focused on that goal today. 2008's release of version 5 of our software redefined the way that people can build websites and we're working on even more impressive features today within the current platform.

The trajectory of the business has always been steadily upwards. Because we are a paid service, we don't have the kind of customer adoption numbers that we would if we gave our software away for free. But, starting off with the very first customer, we've grown significantly every single year. Our growth rate as a company was good enough to land us in the 339th spot in last year's Inc 500 list of the fastest growing companies in the US.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Anthony - Fear or stress? I've definitely been stressed! For the first four years of the company's existence I was the sole employee, responsible for every line of software, every Google ad campaign, every server, and every support response. And for a while I was doing this while trying to finish college. Fortunately I've managed to build an exceptional team and my stress level is going down every year. I would definitely not recommend starting a tech company to the faint of heart.

I can't say that I've been afraid however. I can understand how entrepreneurs who have family responsibilities or who have to take on personal debt to start their companies could be afraid. I took significant personal risks to get Squarespace to where it is, but I was never afraid. When I was 23, the worst case scenario was that I'd have to get a real job! That would've been a huge disappointment but certainly not the end of the world.

Christa - What surprised you most about starting your own business?

Anthony - A few things:

- Time before takeoff. It can take an immensely long time for a business to become sustainable or really begin to take off. The perseverance required can be extremely trying at times. It took us years to reach a viable level of profitability.

- The criticality of idea auditing. Working on good ideas as a startup is not enough -- you must actively seek to work on great ones, and especially great ideas that differentiate your product. We throw out "good" or overdone ideas constantly, as we can only focus on a few particular tasks at once.

- How simple certain aspects of running a business are. When we were starting out -- I had just enough money to acquire a few customers a month off of Google AdWords. I remember asking the ones who didn't sign up why they left, and asking the ones who stayed why they decided to stay. This is a simple thing to do, but very important. Not everything in starting a business is complex -- the importance of simple, down to earth tasks should not be forgotten.

- The incorrectness of certain outside advice. When we were starting out, most services like Squarespace offered free accounts in order to gain market share -- and almost everyone looking at our business advised us to do the same. We did this for the first year of our service, and noticed that our "free" customers both diluted our brand, and served as a very poor funnel for conversion to paid accounts. We decided to cut the free users and focus intently on our customers with "skin in the game". This changed our business, and was one of the best things we've ever done. As an operator, you always have more data available than your advisors -- and that data can enable you to make ostensibly contrarian, but correct, choices.

- The importance of constraints. I started with almost no seed capital, which meant we could only reach a limited number of individuals every month and were forced into an organic growth path. While initially frustrating, this was a very good thing for us -- as it ensured our growth was

always honest. We literally couldn't make a mistake with our money, or we'd cease getting more of it. I don't think we would have acted the same way with a larger amount of seed capital.

Christa - What is the advantage of using Squarespace rather than developing a website independently on Blogger or WordPress?

Anthony - There are a couple of things that really differentiate our product:

Function. The fact that we've written absolutely all of the code ourselves means we have a really tight platform. We spend a massive amount of time on our interface and really try and get every little detail right. We're one of the only hosted publishing platforms that actually uses our own service for our own front website. Squarespace is powered by Squarespace. Since we're the ultimate users -- we're always using the platform ourselves and deeply care about improving it.

Design. We're constantly in a process of refining our interface and ensuring it doesn't fall out of date. We're really trying to get to a point where parts of our interface begin to feel timeless. We see some companies achieving this in industrial design, and we really want to bring this to the web.

Integration. We want to replace a bunch of random plugins, hacks, and other hard to maintain tools with a single unified, hosted platform. We really think this integration is critical. Squarespace has a really complete set of core modules that are usable right from the start.

Christa - What advice would you give to others considering starting their own business, particularly in this economy?

Anthony - Most of the energy required in starting a technology company is in the effort -- not the costs. There's never a good time to start a business -- in an up economy, you face increased competition and market noise, in a down one, you have to work harder for every sell and access to capital is limited. Some of our best growth months have been during the recession, as we're the sort of service that can really save you money versus more expensive solutions. If your business is about saving consumer money, you can definitely flourish bad situations. That said, 3 major points come to mind:

- *Solve your own problems.* Not only is it hard to understand problems intuitively that you've never had yourself, but unless you're really fixing something that bothers you, summoning the stamina to build a business to a successful point is going to be very difficult.

- *Throw out good ideas for great ones.* When starting out, you can only really do one thing at a time. Throw out all of the mediocre ideas and focus intently on the one best thing you can do with your time. Distractions will be your downfall -- and any automated process you can employ to take tasks entirely out of mind should be employed.

- *Try to grow naturally.* Not having investors for Squarespace was an excellent place to be. Not only did we not have the capital to shoot ourselves in the foot, but we also couldn't grow too fast for our own good. While this means your business will take longer to grow up, it will also be

more stable and you'll have much more control over your destiny. Too many voices in the beginning of the business can be a bad thing. Your focus needs to be on actually getting things in the hands of consumers and entering testing cycles -- not focusing on the short term metrics some investors may drive towards. Take the long term view.

David Priemer, Head of Product & Community Group of Rypple

A few months ago I came across an article on Rypple, a company that builds on-line collaboration tools. I was very impressed with the simplicity and elegance of their mission and interface. They identified that there was a hole in the market for a tool that could help people identify where and how they can improve their job performance. For those who are pro-active, believe in the process of continuous improvement, and dread formal performance review time, this tool is a godsend!

The process is simply stated on Rypple's landing page: "Ask a question to people you trust, get honest feedback, and use that feedback to improve your performance." For example, if you gave a presentation and want to know what people thought of it, you could post that question to your co-workers, get their feedback, and incorporate that feedback into your very next presentation. Rypple has an impressive client list – HP, Target, Google, eBay, Cisco, UBS, and L'Oreal.

The success of Rypple is not at all surprising – with so many people in large companies looking for continuous, constructive, and real-time feedback, Rypple fills a gap that has existed in the business world for far too long. And it creates happier, more fulfilled employees – a company's most valuable asset, particularly in an economic down-turn. Maybe Rypple can make the busted annual performance review process a thing of the past!

David Priemer, who heads up the Product & Community group at Rypple, responded to my initial contact with the company in record time, and this interview about his decision to join Rypple is the result of the emails we've exchanged over the last few months.

Christa - What was your inspiration for starting Rypple?

David - Rypple was started for a number of reasons but perhaps the most compelling was the overall lack of timely, specific, and actionable feedback in many workplaces today. Having worked in the workforce management space for many years, we saw a number of key drivers pointing to the need for this type of service:

- i) Many saw the annual performance review as a flawed process that wasn't achieving its core objective;
- ii) The proliferation of Gen Y's in the workforce creating a demand for frequent feedback;
- iii) The increased adoption of concepts such as "lean" and "agile" that promote incremental progress towards larger goals (i.e. getting constant feedback vs. once a year);

All of these factors pointed to a better solution for people to get rapid feedback on the topics that mattered most to them. Rypple was born!

Christa - What does the success of Rypple look like to you?

David - Our ultimate goal is to drive widespread adoption of a service that delivers tremendous value to users by getting them real, honest feedback and insights they are simply not able to get by any other means. Period.

While we offer both free and paid services for corporate customers, we want to build a service that's both simple & delightful to use, delivers real value, and one that doesn't rely on a company forcing its employees to use it in order to drive adoption.

If we can do those things and have people continuously tell us (as they do now) how much they enjoy using our service and how much it has helped them and their businesses, then we have been successful.

Christa - How did you decide to make the jump to a start-up?

David - The decision to start or join a new venture at a very early stage is a highly personal one. The common thread you find in those who take the plunge is what I would call the "entrepreneurial bug": that nagging sense in the back of your head that tells you that you have the chance to do something great, your way, and that's never been done before.

While in my case the urge to stay with an established company in a proven market was very strong, having been through a start-up before and experienced the excitement and entrepreneurial spirit that goes hand-in-hand with a new venture, I simply couldn't resist the bug.

That being said, desire is only part of the equation. To give yourself the best chance for success you need to be part of a truly A+ team: bright individuals that share your drive, enthusiasm, and commitment to both your success and that of the people you serve. I have all of that with the Rypple team.

Christa - Did you feel any fear when making the jump? If so, how did you overcome it?

David - Absolutely! While the desire to be part of a new and exciting venture was strong, leaving a great role at a great company in the middle of a global economic meltdown with a mortgage and family to support is enough to throw anyone for a loop.

My secret formula for dealing with the decision was seeking honest answers to these three questions:

- 1.) What's the worst thing than can happen if this venture fails and what does the upside looks like?
- 2.) Will taking this step help me build skills and knowledge needed to accelerate my career, regardless of the outcome?
- 3.) If I decide not to do it, will I regret it later?

To put it into perspective, suppose you were an elite athlete with dreams of Olympic gold. If you

knew how much sacrifice and training it would take to earn a shot at that medal you might immediately question if it's worth it. However, if your desire is strong enough, you'd find a way to overcome those fears.

In the end, the worst case scenario was palatable and the best case scenario, primarily in terms of achieving my personal objectives, was tremendous.

Christa - What advice do you have for people interested in starting their own businesses?

David - 1.) Do your homework: remember, there are lots of people out there with great ideas...some with the same one as you! Make sure you understand your product/service, market, and the conditions under which your business will flourish before you begin.

2.) Build a great team: few people can do it alone. Surround yourself with bright people who share your enthusiasm and bring the skills needed to make your business a success.

3.) Embrace uncertainty: the only certainty is change. Develop a bias for action, learn quickly from your mistakes, and be prepared to roll with the punches.

Christa - Who are the entrepreneurs you admire most? What about them inspires you?

David - I have a great deal of respect for entrepreneurs who do it "the right way". Examples that immediately come to mind are Dave Duffield and Seymour Schulich. Smart, charismatic leaders who build loyalty with their teams and achieve success through hard work and determination.

Phyllis Neill, Founder of WeMentor Social Media Marketing

Phyllis and I met almost a year ago via Twitter and we've been online pals ever since. After running her own business and working a full-time day job for nearly a year, she has taken the entrepreneurial plunge to focus on her company, WeMentor Social Media Marketing, full-time.

Christa - Phyllis, you did it! You took the leap of faith! How does it feel?

Phyllis - It feels incredibly liberating to be able to focus 100% of my time on my business. I've been working full-time plus running my business for close to a year, so I almost don't know what to do with myself!

Christa - What scares you the most about this change?

Phyllis - The instability of a paycheck. That's also a great motivating factor at the same time.

Christa - What made you realize you were ready to go out on your own full-time?

Phyllis - When I got to the point where I didn't yet have enough business to go full-time BUT I absolutely couldn't take on any more business without doing it full-time! The ultimate paradox.

Christa - What was your process leading up to leaving your job? What point had you gotten to in your own business where you realized you had to take this on full-time?

Phyllis - About six months ago, I went to see a financial advisor to get a "plan". I realized I'd have to get health insurance on my own, and I'd no longer have access to the life insurance and short-term/long-term disability insurance I had with my employer. In addition, I had a specific dollar amount in mind that I wanted to have tucked away into savings before I quit. So, they helped me figure out a way to plan for this, and then I worked the plan month in/month out. It's shocking how much you really can save once you can "smell" your ultimate goal right around the corner. I actually hit my goal several months early so I jumped even sooner than I had planned.

Christa - Advice to others who are teetering on the edge, just about ready to jump? What about those who are still nervous about taking the part-time entrepreneurial plunge?

Phyllis - I would say to make sure people are willing to pay for your services before you go out on your own. In my case, my business is setting up and executing social media strategies for businesses. In the beginning however, I was working on executive coaching for women – and the market just wouldn't sustain that business. Things slowly morphed into the business I have today, but it was good for me to find out that in a recession, people weren't paying to hire executive coaches. It's tough to start a business and work full-time all at the same time, but it's really the one conservative thing you can do before "taking the plunge"!

Laura Sandall, President of Gold Marketing Group

In 2001, Laura started the modern pop-up store concept when she and her team transformed a New York City apartment into a Target apartment, decorated entirely with Target merchandise. The next year, they went bigger and floated a giant barge down the Hudson River and docked it on the west side of Manhattan, full of Target merchandise for Target-crazy New Yorkers to gobble up.

After over 20 years at Target, wowing the public with innovative marketing and PR, Laura struck out on her own and assumed the helm at Gold Marketing Group. Her positive energy and courage will inspire you to strike out on your own, too. Hers is a playbook that will give you the encouragement you need to get going on your own idea.

Christa - What inspired you to start your own business? How was your prior work experience helpful to your new venture?

Laura - I was completely burned out on the corporate world. I had been in a corporate role for 20+ years and decided that I needed to try something different before it was too late. I had always admired and respected those who took the leap to leave a comfortable and risk-free role to go out and do something on their own. I decided that if others could do it, I could do it, too. My past experience was incredibly helpful to me as I was able to take everything I had learned, created, and executed at Target to other businesses.

Every day, I am able to take my experience of building one of the best brands in the country to other businesses – big or small. It is all relevant to any company wanting to use PR and Marketing to drive buzz, ultimately driving business. I was also quite fortunate that I had friends around me who had done this before and so many of them gave me encouragement and confidence that this was something that I could do. I ultimately partnered with a former vendor to take over Gold Marketing Group and re-invent it as my own. He had made his leap in his 20s so has been a great resource for understanding what it's like to run a small business.

Christa - Did you feel any fear in starting your own business? If so, how did you overcome it?

Laura - I absolutely felt fear. There are days now, even two years later, that I feel fear. Because I am the one who is responsible for keeping my business running, there is always the worry that I won't be able to make it next month, next year, next week! So much of the work I do is project-based which makes it even more of a roller coaster. However, that fear can also motivate me and drive me to work even harder at reaching out for new opportunities. It has enabled me to get more comfortable with sending an email or making a call to someone I may not have called in the past. It motivates me to keep reaching.

Christa - What surprised you most about starting your own business?

Laura - The biggest surprise to me was the empowerment I felt by having to do it all on my own. I came from a job where I had a very large team of people that helped me to run my business every day. I had someone who told me when to leave my office for a meeting! Once I

left that environment, I thought I would have a difficult time adjusting to having to “do it all.” In fact, the opposite occurred. As I started to do the little things, it helped to build my confidence in the fact that I actually CAN do it all. And, I learned other things along the way...such as the fact that there are a lot of other people out there who are also running their own small businesses – who can help you do the things for you that you can’t do. That was empowering to me.

Christa - How did you know when it was time to jump? Did you have certain goals you needed to hit before going out on your own?

Laura - I’m not sure I really knew when it was the right time. I will admit that I didn’t have goals I needed to hit before leaving Target...quite frankly, I had accomplished so much in my career and left at a time when we were at the top of our game. When I started to realize that I was spending so much time in meetings about topics that weren’t necessarily relevant to what I liked to do, I realized that it was time to move on. I wanted to get back to doing what I enjoyed – being out there meeting people, bringing partners together, building strategies and projects that would make a difference. Not sitting in a meeting talking about management review. Now, please don’t get me wrong...those meetings were necessary and important...it is just that I was burned out on that part of the job; I wanted to go back to doing what fed my energy level.

Christa - What advice would you give to others considering starting their own business, particularly in this economy?

Laura - I tell you...I had no idea when I left that the bottom would drop a few months later. My timing couldn’t have been worse...or maybe in a way, it couldn’t have been better. Being in a small business can be a benefit in a tough economical time. Companies may not be able to afford to hire a large agency with a lot of overhead. A business like mine that has a lean model – I bring people on board based on the project and/or the client – is what I like to call “recession chic.” We are a lot more affordable than the big guys. Yet, there are also a lot of companies that think events/PR and marketing are the first things that can be cut when the going gets rough – they’d rather invest their money in keeping people. That makes it difficult for the small guys.

My advice would be to be completely confident with your abilities and what it is that you can provide to your potential clients. If you’ve had success in your career at a large company, you can take that success and make it happen on your own as well. Another piece of advice that I was given and now I pass on to others is to know that there are highs and lows, good days and bad days...that goes with the territory. Always know that when you’re having a bad day, don’t worry about it. It will pass and the good day will come tomorrow. Stay optimistic.

Sonpreet Bhatia, Co-founder of My City Way

My City Way creates mobile phone apps that roll up 50+ hyper-local apps into a city-specific guide. Tailored for use by local residents and visitors alike, My City Way is a tour guide in your pocket.

From our first email, Sonpreet Bhatia, Co-founder of MyCityWay, impressed me with her passion and ability to see beyond what's already out there in the world. The mobile landscape is highly competitive with a constant stream of new competitors. Just when we think we've got our head wrapped around its potential, some entrepreneur mixes it up again with a new innovation. My City Way did just that in a big, useful way.

In February, Bhatia and Co-founders Puneet Mehta and Archana Patchirajan took home the prestigious Popular Choice and Investors' Choice Awards at the NYC BigApps Competition for the company's first app, NYC Way. Since then, the trio has launched a similar app in a host of other cities including San Francisco, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Boston, and London. My City Way has also been busy working away on new features to delight its customers including a reservation service, discounts and deals on local merchants, up-to-the-minute public transit info, wi-fi locations, even apartment and job listings.

My City Way's founders were focused on using technology to create something that would help local businesses manage through this difficult recession. They wanted to put something in the hands of tech savvy consumers that would direct consumer spending to local businesses, particularly those that don't have lavish marketing budgets.

Whether you believe in karma or the idea that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come, their ingenuity and drive paid off. With the success and rapid growth of My City Way, all three founders left their lucrative jobs on Wall Street earlier this year to focus on this startup. They never looked back and that keeps me looking forward, too.

Epilogue

So here we are, almost a year and a half since I wrote my first column on entrepreneurship for Examiner. I had hoped that interviewing entrepreneurs would give me more hope, increase my confidence in starting my own business, and provide the entrepreneurs with a venue to tell their stories. I thought completing the column would be a jumping-off point for exploring my entrepreneurial options. Instead, they inspired me so much that I took the leap much sooner than I expected.

In February 2010 I began my 200-hour yoga teacher certification classes at Sonic Yoga with the idea that yoga, a practice that has held my attention for over a decade, could serve as a basis for a new business. I didn't know what that business would look like when I began at Sonic, but I knew I would eventually find my way. The entrepreneurs featured in this book taught me that we can't find our way sitting on our coaches and dreaming; the only way to find The Way is to get out there, try a lot of things, and see what resonates with our hearts.

In May, I completed my training and started Compass Yoga, a private and semi-private yoga business whose mission is 3-fold:

- 1.) I donate 1/3 of class fees to nonprofits selected by students, giving students the tax-deduction. Yoga classes become more affordable for students and provide much-needed funding to nonprofits they support.
- 2.) Because I create the classes for individuals and small groups, they address the students' specific needs and goals. I schedule times and spaces that are most convenient for students, bringing them the yoga they need, exactly when and where they need it.
- 3.) Karmi's Angels is an initiative at Compass that helps newly-minted yoga teachers gain experience by arranging teaching assignments for them in under-served communities in New York City.

The entrepreneurs featured in this book taught me the key lessons that informed how to structure Compass Yoga:

- 1.) Take a look at the world, see what it needs, and match that need with a way that celebrates who you are and what you care about.
- 2.) All your experiences lead you to where you are right now, in this moment. Use them.
- 3.) Entrepreneurship is not an all-or-nothing game. Some entrepreneurs take a leap off the cliff and never look back, but a lot of entrepreneurs take another route. They keep their full-time job and build their own business the way they want to build it, not in a way that they have to build it to make their rent payment. Some buy their way into companies, some build a business through partnerships with other businesses. Not every entrepreneurship path is a meteoric rise. Some times, it's a slow and steady journey.

The common thread through all of their stories is the desire for freedom – to think and act at the nexus of our minds, hearts, and souls. Their ventures celebrate their individual dreams. More than anything, they are all able to appreciate where they are in the process of building their careers and their lives. At every step they find an opportunity for learning.

Thanks

It would be wholly unfair for me to close out this first book without thanking certain people who really made it possible through their support, encouragement, and input.

My family, particularly my mom, provides an endless supply of confidence in my work, whatever that work happens to be. When I was a kid I wanted to be everything from an astronaut to a paleontologist to a songwriter. My favorite line that my mom often says is, “you make your own fortune.” I think the entrepreneurs featured in this book would all agree with her.

My thanks to the following for all of their wise counsel on writing and life: Amy, Rob, Ken, Lon, Trevin, Blair, Richard, The Owing Pink Community (particularly Joy and Lissa), Brooke, Laura, Amanda, Col, Sara, my lovely Sonic yogis and yoginis, Bob G., Jeff, Dan, Brian, Sharni, Archan, Trish, Stephanie, Matthew, Alice, Stephen, Eric, Chris, Kelly, Alex, Ed, Liz, and Susan.

And of course I would be remiss without explicitly thanking the many entrepreneurs who spent time with me over the last year and a half. Their generosity, selflessness, and modesty gave me endless hours of material to consider and reconsider. I’m proud to join their ranks.

I am also grateful to the staff at Examiner.com who gave me the opportunity to showcase these entrepreneurs so that their wisdom could reach a global audience.

About the Author:

Christa Avampato is a product developer, freelance writer, and yoga instructor based in New York City. Find her online at <http://christainnewyork.com> and learn more about her business, Compass Yoga, at <http://compassyoga.com>. She welcomes any and all feedback on this book at christa.avampato@gmail.com.

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