

AND THEN SUDDENLY I JUMPED!

Entrepreneurship, en•tre•pre•neur•ship
äntrəprə'ner, SHip/

noun: the activity of setting up a business and taking on financial risks in the hope of profit.

One day, a very well-intentioned financial advisor asked me about my “risk level.” I put on a wicked smile and replied, “My slippers have non-skid soles.” I think he quit his job later that day!

So yes, before I was an entrepreneur/risk taker, I was employed. I led a corporate life, first as an employee, then as a boss, enjoying a regular paycheck and a plethora of benefits. I went to the same office every day, where I was surrounded by a team of professionals, colleagues who were always available to resolve different issues — or stab someone in the back.

I never imagined becoming an entrepreneur, since I had never considered myself a risk-taker. However, now that I think about it, I did leave Lebanon when very few girls were leaving without their parents. I took on university degree programs and jobs in Canada without any real guidance.

I moved from city to city and changed lives many times over. I divorced, raised a child by myself with no family member around, and yet, the day I decided to launch my business, fear nearly paralyzed me. Where was my Phoenician DNA when I needed it?

Maybe my youth spent under the bombs had used up my ability to be bold and courageous. Is there a bravery quota?

And then one day ... I jumped!
Some of you might remember Coral Beach's icy cold swimming pool. Many swimmers tried the gradual entry strategy, but the most successful were those who just dove in.

So what does it take to dive into your own business? What kinds of qualities or chromosomes does one need to be able to jump into business? It really depends.

For some, it's instinct, flair, a great idea, an improvement on an old idea or an opportunity; for others, a crisis. My case was the latter. In the midst of the marital Titanic, I realized I was going to become a single mom overnight.

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The mountain always looks higher when you are at the bottom. Once you start climbing, not only does the job seem easier, but you might even enjoy the view.

I knew full well that assuming an upper-management position would mean never leaving the office before 8 p.m., with no one to pick up my 4 year old from school. Still, I rejected the idea of having a nanny replace both father and mother. I had to find a solution.

I had worked in communication, public relations and journalism for years, so offering those services would be natural. But how do I start? Do I write a business plan? Do I consult a professional? Do I spend time and money on logos, letterhead, brochures, a website, an office? Where do I invest first? How do I spend money wisely?

I designed and printed my first business card myself. It wasn't the prettiest, but it became my weapon everywhere I went.

Just like a prehistoric man, I went out hunting with it, killing prey to feed my business and my kid!

But wait, I was also a mother! Have you ever watched a circus performance where the acrobats keep adding difficulties, dangers and risks in horrendous, yet delicious suspense? Well, that's how the combination of motherhood and entrepreneurship feel!

As a solo parent, I had to juggle every day to handle both business and family life. Unlike a circus where the crowd cheers on, it's a solitary fight in a tough battlefield with very little help or encouragement. Your tools are your mental determination, your psychological strength, tricks, hacks, shortcuts, a good fitness level, a fine sense of humour, real friends and a loving family with the power to motivate you, even when there's an ocean that separates you from them.

Today, after 14 years, I can look back and say, “What a ride!” Clients come to me and stay with me. Interesting mandates land on my desk. I go from crisis management to strategic counselling to public speaking coaching to media relations, to social media advice, to content writing, all in one day. I jump from a pharmaceutical company to a preschool to a candymaker to a meat wholesaler to an apparel company. Topics are numerous and varied; the pace is crazy, but it goes well with my temperament.

Success is not born out of luck, but is rather the result of hard work. Constant, permanent and indefinite hard work!

Tips gleaned along the way

• Start simply, grow smartly.

Your first investment should be a business card, and make sure your service or product is clearly stated on it. Carry it on you at all times. I once signed a huge contract after cracking a joke with a lady in a supermarket's toilet paper alley. She was the CEO of a big company. I gave her my card and the rest was history.

• Surround yourself with nice professionals.

Skills are not enough; you want values, too. Nice suppliers, partners, colleagues and clients will make your business life a happy one. Don't take a project if the person coming with it seems horrible; you will regret it. Another mandate will come through; don't be afraid to say no.

• Discipline is key, especially at first when you sit at your desk and you have no customers yet.

Set up a routine and stick to it. Be at the office at 8 a.m. every day and avoid distractions. Your focus will feed your perseverance.

• Perfection is crucial!

You must deliver a perfect product and a perfect service. You want repeat business. You want word of mouth.

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• You are always “on.”

In virtual life and real life, what you say or do matters. A picture of you downing a vodka bottle at a club, a statement on Facebook about a politician or any other faux pas will affect your business.

• Ask questions, mingle, talk to people.

The regular waiter of your favourite restaurant is gone? Ask where he went. If it's a new place and you happen to be an excellent restaurant marketer, this is your chance!

• Mingle with CEOs, business owners and successful entrepreneurs.

Listen and learn. Organize monthly lunches with a group of them and share knowledge. Don't wait to be in their presence accidentally.

• Believe in yourself.

Trust that you can succeed, even when the voice in your head is saying the opposite. Fear and anxiety will be your enemies; turn them into friends. Embrace them, and turn their negative energy into a force that drives you to perform. Henry Ford said, “Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right.”

• Work hard right away.

When you feel the load is much bigger than you can handle and that time is your worst enemy,

take action right away. The mountain always looks higher when you are at the bottom. Once you start climbing, not only does the job seem easier, but you might even enjoy the view.

• Time, patience, blood, sweat and tears lead to success.

If you fail, no one, not even yourself, can blame you for not trying hard.

• Understand, know and feel.

Understand your industry; know your competition; “feel” your customers' needs at all times and evolve with them.

• Never overpromise or under deliver.

Deliver more than expected and before the deadline.

I don't believe in luck. I believe in hard work, creativity, flexibility, stamina, passion, positivity, integrity, humility and even fear.

Why would you jump in the first place if it wasn't to conquer your fear? And then conquering the rest is a breeze!



Photo by Gaëlle Vuillaume

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Fear and anxiety will be your enemies. Embrace them! Turn their negative energy into a force.

HOMIE

THE SOUL OF LEBANON

THE BRAND MASTER
**ALEXIS
NASARD**

FEATURED FAMILY
THE OSSEIRANS

FROM LOS ANGELES
**JOANNA
NACHEF**
1ST MAESTRA
OF THE MIDDLE EAST

ADA
ABOU FARHAT
ACTRESS OF DEFIANCE & ARTISTRY

AMBASSADOR
EDWARD GABRIEL
AMERICAN TASK FORCE FOR LEBANON PRESIDENT
AT THE FOREFRONT OF DIPLOMACY

IDRAAC'S
LABOR OF LOVE
FOR MENTAL HEALTH

HOME

MAGAZINE

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 BRIGHT
 LEBANON
 & LEBANESE
 OF THE WORLD**



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