Management

Young Business Entrepreneurs

Do you remember when you were a kid and you had a dream about doing your own business and making a lot of money? Maybe you even tried a lemonade stand. Many of us have sold magazines or cookies, others have dreamed about inventing something and selling it. I was reminded of these dreams from my childhood recently when I sat with a mother and her son who had already started to put his dream into practice at age 17. They asked me when is a person “too young” to go into business? I said let me give a very politically correct answer and tell you “that depends” then I want to relate to you a couple of stories.

I met a young lady at a National SCORE conference this month where outstanding business people from across this country were honored because of their unique success in business. Her name is Bridgeja' Baker.

Her story started with an emergency trip to the orthodontist that brought Bridgeja' face-to-face with her future passion; she had stumbled upon a bead store next door to the doctor's office that offered classes in creating handmade jewelry. Ten year old Bridgeja' immediately signed up and soon began selling her custom creations online, at festivals and events and for custom orders including wedding parties.

She started her business, Creative Jewelry by Bridgeja, to create one-of-a-kind, show-stopping pieces using sterling silver, gold, gemstones, pearls, and Swarovski crystals. At Bridgejas first show she earned over $1,100 selling her jewelry creations. It was at that moment that she dedicated herself to turning her hobby into a full-fledged business venture. With her mother Bridgette's help and thanks to SCORE Mentor Veronica Johnson's marketing and branding advice, Bridgeja' expanded her business into the successful enterprise it is today.

Now 14 years old and with nearly 35 beading classes under her belt, Bridgeja' has created a viable business garnering several awards honoring her innovative work as an entrepreneur as well as her dedication to philanthropy. A portion of the proceeds from her business is donated to community organizations each year, including the New Orleans Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Children's Hospitals, Unity of Greater New Orleans and Mother's Helpers. Creative Jewelry by Bridgeja' even received a letter from Michelle Obama saying she may be considered to design jewelry for the First Lady in the future.

Was she too young? Absolutely not because she had a passion about something she liked to do and then found help to guide her along the process. About 14% of the clients of SCORE mentors are under the age of 35. In fact, we are seeing that young business owners are extremely valuable to SCORE because they bring a unique experience plus they tend to be willing to give back to the business community. For example, the Chapter Chair for the Southeast Minnesota SCORE for next year is Brian Alwin. He is a young, active business owner, but he is giving his time to help other businesses.
Brian and business partner Kimberly both had jobs, but they still had that dream. They wanted to have their own business. They were young. They asked for help from SCORE and started to focus on a business plan. This husband and wife team also shared an idea about a common, unique problem that they had a passion about. They saw the heartache that families and their elderly parents were going through as mom and dad had to downsize their home and move into a smaller place, maybe even an elderly living facility. Most of us can relate to that or know of someone who is or has faced this issue. As young Rochester area entrepreneurs, they created a new business and called it A Smooth Move (the business name says it all). They help families through those tough times and literally do the move for them from start to finish. When their client comes to the new home, everything is in place just where they wanted it. It is ready to move in. It is their new home. This young team, Brian and Kimberly, are finding success in helping folks solve a unique need and have now created their second business location in Austin.

Let’s hear it for the young entrepreneurs! I foresee that the rising entrepreneurs of today will have a positive impact on the next wave of young professionals who enter into the workforce? As a former educator, I am hoping that entrepreneurial education may soon be part of the core curriculum, along with math and social studies. Our recent economic turmoil has inadvertently opened a door to innovation and opportunities.

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