

MADE IN THE UAE

COMPILED BY DANIELLE SMITH

TIPS AND TRICKS FROM THE UAE'S MOST SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS



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KRUSH BRANDS
Brands you love, from a company that cares.

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FOREWORD

DANIELLE SMITH

Dear reader,

With enormous pleasure I present to you this book. I had the honour to sit with some of the most inspiring and successful entrepreneurs that reside in the great city of Dubai.

I am at my happiest when I am helping others succeed, thrive and pursue their goals and dreams. For many that is during their journey of entrepreneurship. I feel that there is no better way to inspire and motivate the budding entrepreneurs of Dubai than reading about those that have taken the leap of faith before you and built successful businesses here in the UAE.

Every interview is unique and yet there is so much commonality in terms of needing to have a vision and belief in yourself and your business. Many of the entrepreneurs in this book found it just as scary to start their businesses as it would be for you.

The real difference is that there are dreamers and there are doers. And every single person in this book is a doer and have got my utmost respect and admiration

I am humbled by every entrepreneur that made the time to sit with me, to share a bit of their story and to give back to the community here in Dubai.

I am sure that you will enjoy the interviews as much as I did creating them and I am sure they will inspire and touch you.

Last but not least, every single person in the book confirms how Dubai is such an entrepreneurial business hub with a perfect business climate that allows us to thrive.

Hence I would like to dedicate this book to the wonderful city of Dubai and its residents, to you my client and to my 2 young daughters Elodie & Josephine who I hope will also follow their heart in life and get inspired by reading these stories one day.

It was meant as an inspiration but it turned out more as a homage to the entrepreneurs who have built these businesses and Dubai, the most wonderful and beautiful city we live in.

All the interviews, apart from Rashid Al Ghurair's have been conducted between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, before the Covid crisis happened. Now more than ever people need inspiration and resilience. So even though we did not specifically speak with most about navigating through a pandemic, I believe the lessons given are as relevant today and the wisdom of these battle hardened souls is truly timeless.

Thank you,

Danielle Smith

*Executive Coach, Life Coach, Career Coach
Dubai*



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Photocredit: Al Ghurair

RASHID AL GHURAIR

MENA ENERGY & CAFU

Could you tell me a bit more about yourself?

I am 38 years old, I was born in Abu Dhabi in 1983. My father is a businessman and we belong to a family business, my grandfather was an owner of six ships, which he used to go to pearl diving in the 30's. It was a booming business till the beginning of 1940 when World War 2 impacted many things. At that time there was a crisis in that industry and the price of pearls collapsed.

My father was born in 1930, he was 10 years old when he saw all this happening. The 40s, the 50s was a very tough time for them.

In the 60s, as the first oil discoveries happened in the UAE there was again an economic boom in this region. There was a lot of money coming in, but a very small local population and an undeveloped country.

As a family, we were very close to the ruling family. We have a lot of intermarriages between our family and the ruling family in this region. My father and my uncles, saw the amount of income coming in that could be spent on infrastructure, could be spent on developing the economy.

They started to establish sense of the businesses they wanted to get into. So they started the bank that is now known as Mashreq Bank in 1967 this was before the UAE was even formed in 1971.

I grew up close to my father and often observed what he was doing, what the economy was doing. I have to say, even though I have seen a lot of business, he was a unique businessman in this city.

My father had a big influence on me, in 1999 I graduated from high school and he sent me to Boston for University with a group of my brothers. I always thought that I would run a part of the family business but actually my family said to go and find yourself a job outside first! Once you have proven yourself and have developed your skills then you come to work with the family. Thus, there is little entitlement within our family perhaps contrary to external perceptions. I was left with a feeling whereby I realised it does not matter what my father has done, I must do my own thing. I will shape my own future.

So after working outside for several years in 2007, I came back to the family business and in 2009 I started my own business; Mena Energy and then in 2018 Cafu.

All these years later, how has Covid affected your business?

The whole Covid situation and lockdown makes a person very humble. These kinds of forces show that you are a small, tiny piece in this whole big universe. Even though it initially affected us negatively, eventually Covid has been good for our business. We used the situation to improve and expand our services. The contactless service has been very popular, and we were able to support other businesses in Dubai. We launched our car wash, which has also got a sanitisation piece, which has again become very popular. Today we are taking Cafu from Dubai to the rest of the world.

The new services such as the car wash, was that as a result of necessary innovation because of Covid or was that something on the agenda already?

We always thought about adding more verticals onto our core service, we always wanted to innovate how people would wash their cars, but during Covid we added sanitisation and expanded more into B2B services.

Innovation was crucial for you during Covid what else do you think is crucial to survive in a situation like this?

One of my virtues has always been that I never blame the external environment. I never look at it negatively. I always see an opportunity within any set of circumstances. I'm always grateful and have the belief that whatever happens is for the better

of myself, for the better of my family and for the better of the world.

I would say; never blame something which is external and do not focus on what you cannot influence, as you cannot do anything about it. Focus on what you do have control over. I should focus my mind, my energy, my resources to find opportunities within that environment. Our business consists of 50 percent B2B and 50 percent of B2C. During the lockdown, our consumers were not able to drive so our B2C volume dropped by almost 80 percent. When the lockdown happened, we pivoted quickly to focus on the B2B side because we knew that B2B would still be in operation, even more so given the volume of deliveries now required. We thought, the delivery companies would be the ones who we should talk to first because their staff's time had become very valuable.

So we went there and we sold them our convenient, time saving and money saving solution. Kibsons is a good example of a client. They were transporting food, vegetables into homes. They have a fleet of 100 trucks. So we went in to their parks and fuelled them so they could deliver as much as possible.

When we started coming out of the lockdown in June, we started figuring things out, we presumed that people are going to lose their jobs. At that time our model was based on a delivery charge and

subscription payments. So we thought, you know, what could be more valuable today than to give people time back. We removed additional charges for the fuelling service and charge only petrol pump price.

We wanted to be a force for good and help to stop the spread of Covid. During this crisis people wanted to save their money, they cannot afford luxury items and premium prices for convenience. So we shifted our business model from a premium service to much more accessible mass market product. To make this pivot we obviously had to make sure that our systems were ready to handle the increased volume which we are now experiencing.

How did you develop your character traits such as being grateful, humbleness and taking complete ownership and focus on what you can control. Is this because you come from an entrepreneurial family or did you develop these traits yourself?

My dad definitely gave me a big chunk of my character to succeed. He would always focus on things that he could control. Generally, you will find two types of people- you find people who are survivors and people who are victims. The victim will always find reasons to blame and create theories as to how they are so unfortunate. Whereas

the survivors will always try to find ways to survive and then to succeed. This is something we also learn from the animal kingdom, survival of the fittest.

Are you a competitive person and do you take business personal?

I'm very competitive, I like to be ahead of the game at all times. I even start my own games. I start my own race. Then people tend to follow and I look back, when I don't see people following me, I try to sort of entice them to.

I keep ahead of the race. I look at my competitive advantage within any business. I ask myself, am I competing? Can I be in the top three? Can I be the top five in this business regionally or globally?

I am very focused on the outcome, the most important is definitely the profitability or the sustainability of the business either from the point of view of creating jobs or being financially profitable, then giving back to the economy, giving back to the community and giving back to the environment.

However I do not take business personally; I look at business as a piece of art. Something that I want to be known for like a legacy.

How do you recharge yourself or take your mind off your work?

I work out at least thirty minutes a day. It is very important to me as it recharges me. I take a cold shower, when I get home and I am tired. Then I feel fresh again and I am able to spend time with my kids. I would take one of them out with me to go to a coffee shop or to the park or spend quality time at home. I have a big yard in my home so I would go out with them on the bicycle just in the garden.

I also spend a lot of time one on one with my dad every Saturday. I go to him, sit down with him. He is ninety-one now, and I just listen to his stories. During these times I usually put my phone on silent and I leave it somewhere where I'm not able to reach it. I sit next to him for three, four hours. He gives me his perspective. Life is not easy. Everybody goes through tough times. We are all human beings. We all have our weaknesses. We all have our moments of fatigue, moments of, you know, crashing, and those are the moments where you don't want to be making critical decisions. In those vulnerable times, you must be aware of the personal state you are in.

You need to be conscious that we can't live life without problems and we can't live lives without troubles. We can't live without those moments of weakness. When we know that these times are always going to come and they will always be there, we are always better prepared for them. When we

are prepared for them, we can take better decisions. When they come, we know how best to solve them.

Can you give me your thoughts on Work-Life Balance?

So for me, it's about prioritization. Prioritizing what needs to be done. I believe in two things – being an entrepreneur we have two worlds a business life and a family life, they both feed into each other and have to co exist with each other. Obviously, the family must support your business also. Right now, I need to focus on my business and on creating that legacy for future generations. These days it is not about putting food on the table. We already have ten, even twenty times more than we need, but problems and challenges are always going to surface. That is a lesson I have taken from my dad. He said, you know, there would always be more and more needs and there would always be problems, always prepare yourself for those two things.

If you know that everyday there is a problem coming, almost every minute, you must be a problem solver. Coupled with the needs of the family, it requires you to give maximum attention for a period. I am looking to sort of push through with this business as hard as possible for the next five, six, seven, eight years. Beyond that, things may stabilize a little as the business becomes let us say more mature.

Have you got any other habits for success?

I like my physical space to be clean and well organized I hate clutter. I think that is very important because not having clutter around you, gives you more clarity for thinking. It creates more abundant energy around you.

Also, sometimes you need to force your mind to switch off. I love to do that by cooking or playing chess or other things that tricks your mind, which switches off your conscious. Working out is something which has worked for me, when I finish, I have a cold shower and then have a nice dinner. I used to enjoy traveling and exploring different cultures around the world pre covid and for sure that is something I really miss.

What is one of the biggest challenges you overcame?

I think earlier this year, we all have had to deal with the fear of loss and fear of failure. Fear of loss is something that I had to always deal with inside me. I lost my mom three years ago. That was a big loss for me, she was truly the biggest figure in my life. I miss those moments with her. That also taught me that loss is part of life and we don't always have to challenge it, often we can't do anything about it. We can only control how you deal with yourself, how you talk to yourself. I think in life we must take

risks. I think many times people get surprised when things happen to them, but it does not just happen to them, failure and loss happens to everyone. When you leave your home, you are exposed to so many potential risks, catching covid-19, getting into an accident etc. Life is about knowing how to mitigate those risks, being able to deal with the challenges whenever they come and leave life take its own path.

How do you deal with the fear of failure?

So first I would ask myself, what is the worst thing that could happen? That is number one, to set the limits on the size of the issue and then to breakdown the chance of the failure happening. The second question I ask is, what will lead to failure and how can we avoid failure? If the failure is business related, it is good to get the opinions of your people. I always ask people for support in solving challenges. Failure is less frightening if you are surrounded by people that have experienced or avoided failure in the past. Who have the experience to give solutions to a problem.

I think overall business is always about surrounding yourself with the best team, with a team who will know how to succeed. Entrepreneurs should focus on getting the right people and work as a team with a common goal to avoid failure and eventually succeed. With the right team we can aspire to be better every day and just continuously go up and up and some downs once in a while, which is natural.

What do you think the benefits of operating in Dubai are?

There are many, many benefits. Firstly, when you come to my company and see the different nationalities working together that we are a small but multinational company in a way. I have more than 50 different nationalities at Cafu. This is the norm rather than the exception in Dubai and the diversity is a source of great strength for companies, if managed the right way!!

Of course Dubai's infrastructure is amazing for business, the Dubai Airport, the interconnectivity, direct flights to all of those countries. Even though more business is being done virtually right now soon the ability to travel will be an even larger advantage for the UAE.

Is there anything else you would like to share as a piece of advice?

First find your purpose. What is the purpose of your life? Take that realisation as a moment of opportunity. Realisation of who you are and understanding why that purpose is important is crucial. I then recommend that you ensure that the journey is worthwhile. Such that somebody, maybe 100 years or 200 years from now would remember what you have done and that it was a good thing you have done. So be good to yourself, your family. Be good to the city you live in and be good to the world.

About CAFU

Titled as the 'Most Disruptive Brand in the Region' by BrandZ, CAFU is a Dubai-born start-up and technology-enabled car service designed entirely around the needs of the consumer, transforming the way a car is run and operated. Launched in 2018, CAFU uses the technology and innovation to drive simplicity by delivering pure convenience to customers through services that range from refuelling to car wash and maintenance - anytime and anywhere they are needed.

In 2019, CAFU was recognized as App of the Year at Entrepreneur Middle East's Enterprise Agility Awards 2019.

CAFU currently provides on-demand fuel delivery and car wash to customers across Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, and UAQ, and recently introduced the CAFU SuperShine™ car wash in Abu Dhabi. The CAFU application is available to download on Android and iOS. To learn more, please visit <https://www.cafu.com>.



Photocredit: Cafu



Photo credit: Cafu

“ I always thought that I would run a part of the family business but actually my family said to go and find yourself a job outside first! Once you have proven yourself and have developed your skills then you come to work with the family. ”



Photo Credit: El Grocer

NADER AMIRI

EL GRO CER

How would you describe yourself?

I have been brought up in the UAE for 30 years. I grew up with the Dubai DNA and a DIY spirit.

I am a self-acclaimed workaholic, when I'm zoned into something I neglect everything else. Even in my corporate career, I was always the first one to arrive in the office and the last one who left.

Are you a competitive person?

Yes, I believe in always doing things better. To be excellent, great is not good enough.

Whilst a lot of people would settle for 'really good'. For myself that is not good enough as I really want it to be perfect.

How did you discover your passion?

I love being in the FMCG industry. I stumbled upon it by chance right out of university when I joined Unilever. I've stayed in FMCG one way or another throughout my life because, I believe it's something that touches people's everyday lives.

What did you do in order to prepare for the jump from corporate life into entrepreneurship?

I didn't jump in from corporate to El Grocer with nothing in between. While I was in corporate I dipped my toes in to a start-up. I was a small investor in Round menu and contributed my experience in strategy, marketing and so on.

Eventually I had the corporate experience and before jumping and doing something by myself completely, I decided to learn how other entrepreneurs, especially in the tech world were operating and running their businesses.

At the moment I took the plunge I felt that I was as ready as I could be, however I was nowhere near being an expert but I had learned enough to mix and match my experiences and start El Grocer.

What was the biggest difference between your corporate career and running El Grocer?

In the first three months I was still trying to apply too much of what I learned during my corporate career like certain structured procedures and disciplines. I soon realised this does not work in a start up with small teams so I quickly learned that I had to unlearn some of that way of thinking.

How did you do your fundraising?

The whole funding journey was one of the hardest decisions we had to take early on. Initially our funding came from friends and family which was relatively easy. As long as they know me, they trusted in me and in the idea. After that we had to learn the whole fundraising process though, what the different options are, how to prepare and how to talk to new investors.

Eventually we did the funding in an unconventional way, which was through Eureeca. We were exploring multiple options and Eureeca was something very new in this region at the time. As we were doing everything differently, we wanted to do the funding differently too. We've been very happy with the route we've taken because that's really what's kept us very agile and very efficient. We didn't take on large institutional investors that would bring more rules and set expectations. That has allowed us to keep the flexibility and agility that this sector needs, we are able to move faster.

What did you learn from doing successful fundraising?

It's very important to have advisors, mentors, board members, call them whatever you want, to go on the journey with, people that can help you avoid making mistakes that others have made.

As you go through fundraising you have to develop a kind of sixth sense and make quick decisions on who's serious, who's not serious, how much should you give away etc. Give away too much value and you're going to be in a bad position in the future. If you give too little value, then you're not going to get enough people interested. It's also key to know what level of detail to share, what kind of discussions to have. I learned that you need to be very aware in these discussions and listen actively to a lot of different people. Then at the end of the day, you must have the courage to make the final decision because there will be loads of other opinions trying to sway you in every direction.

When will you feel you have succeeded?

I'm still working on that. I think it's building a brand that people trust and love, building a brand that people rely on in their day to day life, I think that's when I can say, yes, you know, we're there.

Have you got any specific habits you have developed which contribute to your success?

I always like to start early, around 7am or 8am, I think it gives a bit of a head start. I have also been through phases when I would start at 5am but good and healthy sleep makes me more productive.

I love to read, I have a nice library where I always

read a lot. I like to read about many different topics not only business but also about the essence of time, philosophy and history for example.

Also, I tend to maintain a strong sense of balance. Each day we focus on consistently pushing through the tough times, pushing through the good times, not getting overly optimistic, not getting too pessimistic no matter what happens.

What are your thoughts on work life balance?

I have not figured it out. Ever since I have started, I have put everything, almost everything else aside to focus on my business. I only spend a little bit of family and friend time outside work. As the team grows, as the business grows, there needs to be a bit more balance there. Otherwise, it's not going to be sustainable.

What would you recommend to people to overcome their fear of failure?

I do not like the word failure, every 'failure' is an opportunity to learn and grow as a person.

So, you really should focus on the process of learning and that's the biggest goal and one that you will always achieve. Looking at things in this way will stop you considering failure as a negative concept.

For example, maybe the business didn't work out for whatever reason, the experience is still there. That's not going to go anywhere. The growth, the personal growth, the self-development, the new network, the relationships you build, those all stay.

Do you ever have days when you felt less motivated? What do you do on those days?

Of course. I think there are days where you get a lot of good news and there are days that are the opposite. There are days when you hear bad news, more bad news after another.

So, what I've learned is best to do is not to mull over it. Just let it be, it's just a bad day. It will pass.

When you are sitting at your desk feeling negative you have to physically do something different. Connect with a friend, go out with my wife, talk to a family member, get a breath of fresh air.

Whatever it is, you do something out of your usual work routine so that, the mind gets a chance to change the mood through new sensations. Often stepping back from a problem will allow the brain to come up with the solution all by itself!

What's advice do you wish you had received earlier?

I would have liked advice to take the risk even earlier. I shouldn't have spent too much time

thinking about starting a business and just gone out and done it. I wish someone had told me that you are never going to be fully ready so just dive in! It's really about having that self-belief and, saying this is as ready as I will be. Let's go and do it!

You can always get more prepared. You can always learn more. You can always save more. You can always invest more. You can always meet more people, attend more events. However, there is a point where you have to say, okay, I can always do that, but I need to take a call and do it.

What do you think the biggest benefits of operating here in the UAE are?

I think that there's a lot of DNA in this country, in this city that allows you to think freely and think of how can I go and how can I do things first? I think overall the people that are here, the environment that was built, the processes that are here I think it's a very encouraging environment to try something new.

In terms of having the right number of events, finding the right investors, finding the right mentors, finding the right team members, the UAE provides you with all of this. So, yes there's a nice ecosystem that's growing.

Is there anything else like you would like to recommend or suggest to future entrepreneurs?

The main thing is having the right team, whether the strike team is in the advisory board members, support system, whatever you want to call it, to order the team members that will work on you with a day to day basis. Having the right people around you, whether it's someone who's giving you the advice or who is working with you to get things done. You can have the same idea as 20 other people, but it's the team that can make a difference in making it happen or not.

Also put yourself out there, go to networking events and other opportunities to meet people in the ecosystem. Maybe you will meet your business partner or your investor there and regardless you will learn a lot.

About el Grocer

Welcome to a better delivery service in the UAE. I started el Grocer because I was a frustrated by consumer delivery services. Between the poor delivery times, rude customer service and the poor quality of the products that did get delivered... I knew there has to be another way.

I made el Grocer to be different, to be better, a grocery delivery service that works for the customer, not against him. Our Customer Service personnel are trained to be YOUR advocates when dealing with the store. We sign stores based on your wishes and encourage overlap so you always have a choice, we constantly update our product lists so you don't have to compromise on your grandma's favorite recipes.

Nader Amiri, Founder & COO el Grocer


 The logo for elGrocer features the word "elGrocer" in a bold, rounded, green font. The letter "e" is lowercase and the "l" is lowercase. The "G" is uppercase and has a unique shape with a small notch at the top. The "r" is lowercase and has a small notch at the top. The "o" is lowercase and has a small notch at the top. The "c" is lowercase and has a small notch at the top. The "e" is lowercase and has a small notch at the top. The "r" is lowercase and has a small notch at the top. The "c" is lowercase and has a small notch at the top. The "e" is lowercase and has a small notch at the top.

Photo Credit: El Grocer

“ There are days when you hear bad news, more bad news after another.

So, what I've learned is best to do is not to mull over it. Just let it be, it's just a bad day. It will pass.

”





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delivery network in UAE
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elGrócer

Photo Credit: El Grocer



Photo Credit: Sam Quawasmı

SAM QUAWASMI

CO-CEO & CO-FOUNDER EUREECA.COM

How would you describe yourself?

A former investment banker who became an entrepreneur. I am an investment banker or financier by trade, I decided to embark on the journey to establish Eureeca about eight years ago. I wanted to bring what is being done offline, from an investment banking and financial markets perspective, online.

What characteristics contributed to your success?

I wanted to digitize and democratise the world of investment banking and financial markets. It was a hard decision, but I am glad I took it. I think the vast majority of people would not have taken that jump into entrepreneurship if they had been in my shoes. To describe that in terms of characteristics I think bravery was key, being more brave than others to take that jump into the unknown. The hardest part was quitting my high paying job and taking that jump. To me it literally felt like jumping off a cliff without a parachute on, hoping there is water at the bottom. I had to factor in a step back in terms of lifestyle to make this happen so it was risky.

How can you prepare for that fall into being an Entrepreneur?

When you start analysing the decision objectively it is easier to form the right decision. I worked out the best case, base and worst case scenario of starting Eureeca. During this I started to realise that if I take that jump and it did not work out, I am not going to die, I am probably just going to end up getting a job in a fast food restaurant. When you put it into that context the decision becomes much easier.

What is your biggest driving force?

The absolute belief in the value of the business, it still drives me to this day. Seven years in that is what gets me up and out of bed every morning. The absolute belief in revising and digitizing the world of finance, that is my mission.

Do you come from an entrepreneurial family?

My grandfather on my dad's side was a successful trader. However I think it is important to define what an entrepreneur is and what a business man is. My Grandfather was a successful businessman. I believe an entrepreneur aims to reinvent an industry by doing things different to everybody else. The best entrepreneurs go into uncharted territory, I think my grandfather was similar, he was successful in his trading field as a businessman.

There were many other businessmen doing the same thing. Some successful, and others that were not. Being an entrepreneur is quite lonely, because you are doing it for the first time ever. So there is a lot of trial and error.

What advice would you give regarding managing work/life balance?

85% Of my waking time I am working, I spend roughly 15% with my family so I would not suggest I am the perfect example. To make sure that the sacrifice of long working hours is worthwhile, one tip I recommend is that everyone should take sixty to ninety minutes a day alone. Staying away from all gadgets and focusing your mind exclusively on the biggest challenges of the moment. It allows you to think, because you normally don't have time to think. And will likely make wrong decisions. I would personally love to increase the time I currently spent with my family to 30 / 40 percent. The only way this can happen is by delegating more tasks to my capable team members over time.

Are there any other healthy habits contributing to your success?

Of course most important is your mental health, if your mind is not healthy there is absolutely no way your head is clear enough to make the tough decisions required. What entrepreneurs need to

ensure is a healthy mind, clarity of mind in a very turbulent journey is essential. I recommend you take this thinking time away by yourself very seriously and block it in your calendar if you have to. It is one of the very few things that would help you remain calm in a very chaotic environment whilst fighting the fires on a daily basis.

I also believe in the 80 / 20 rule for most aspects of healthy living. For example, my wife is vegetarian and she is now trying to become a vegan, I am embarking on that journey as well. However, we are in agreement that I am vegan 80% of the time and 20% of the time, at the weekends, I allow myself to enjoy a steak or other animal products. By not limiting myself entirely I get the majority of the health benefits from veganism plus the enjoyment out of my previous carnivorous diet. Thus overall I am happier than if I did either route 100%.

What was the biggest challenge in growing your business?

The biggest challenge for any startup is finding the right team members. This is usually because, as a startup, you do not have the balance sheet such as Google's to pay for real talent's full deserved salaries. Therefore, you are always trying to persuade talented individuals to accept a salary cut in exchange for equity schemes in the business. So they need to buy into the vision of the company, but

also their circumstances should allow them to take a salary cut given their monthly liabilities such as school fees etc.

Those individuals are a rarity to come by. But when you do get them, the next challenges are either they use the opportunity as a stepping stone until the next high paying salary opportunity comes through, or they end up being so unlike they seemed on their resume when you initially hired them. They disappoint you from a performance perspective. You will realise after they start work, they are not like what was projected on paper.

The latter challenge is a very dangerous one. Because hope kicks in. You will always be very hopeful that they would improve in the next few months. Before you know it, a year passes and nothing had changed. So you end up spending another six months interviewing all over again to try your luck with another replacement. That ordeal could easily cost an entrepreneur years to get right just for one role as there is quite a bit of recycling that takes place in different departments. My advice to anyone out there, do not allow hope to take over. Put more emphasis on your instincts in the first few months of them joining, because your first instincts tend to be right. At that moment, as much as one would not want to press the recycle button to start the process all over again so early. My strong advice is that you do. The earlier the better.

Tenacity is crucial to the success of an entrepreneur, bumps in your journey are going to come and it is your tenacious personality and character that will get you past these challenges.

What books would you recommend?

The biography of Lee Kuan Yew is a must. The founder of Singapore and an entrepreneur in the political sense. People forget that there was a civil war in Singapore 55 years ago, similar to the plight of Syria right now. Would you believe in 35 years from now Damascus could be the number one city to live in the whole world? Lee Kuan Yew turned Singapore around and made it the number one city to live in around the world in a matter of 35 years, with no natural resources to support him in his quest. There is a lot of tenacity there, a lot of calculated risks, and a lot of vision. Vision is important as that gets you out of bed every morning.

What advice do you wish you would have received earlier in your journey?

Building a business takes a lot longer than you originally expect without a doubt. My business partner Chris and I were running the business for 5 / 6 years and it has an impact on your health, an impact on your time. You lose a lot of friends as you have to prioritise your time. I would have liked someone to have been able to explain the reality of

how long it takes to build a successful platform and the sacrifices that might be involved.

Also understanding the power of delegation really early on in the process would have been useful for us. Aside from finding capable people, the easiest way to delegate is to develop a decision-making matrix early. At Eureeca we grade decisions into three categories, High, Medium and Low impact. Once you have identified the type of decision being made and decided on which person is able to make that decision you have a framework where you can start genuinely delegating decisions and actions. This leads to a motivated team who can decide what is right for their own departments as opposed to reaching out to the CEO on every minor decision. Early entrepreneurs often make the mistake of trying to make every decision. Million dollar funding or investment decisions get distracted by ten dollar decisions about administrative issues such as printing business cards or arranging document delivery. You have got to effectively delegate and trust your team with these decisions in order to have a healthy lifestyle, and the clarity of mind to work on the critical decisions that will really move the needle for your business. Co-founders and CEOs should be working on growth matters that have a positive impact on the valuation of the business in two or three years from now. Not matters that have an impact during that quarter or year.

What do you think the benefits of operating in the UAE are?

We are geographically positioned in a city where we can serve the needs of customers in Asia as easily as we can serve customers in Europe and the Middle East. The timezones are manageable across all these territories meaning that we have a huge market opportunity across circa two thirds of the worlds population.

Dubai is also the ideal place to set up headquarters in terms of finding talent. The city's infrastructure is perfectly suited to attracting talent from around the globe. The safety of the city, the education, the lifestyle is all exceptional and promotes the happiness of residents. Having a framework that allows a high base level of happiness amongst team members makes the journey of growing the business so much easier.

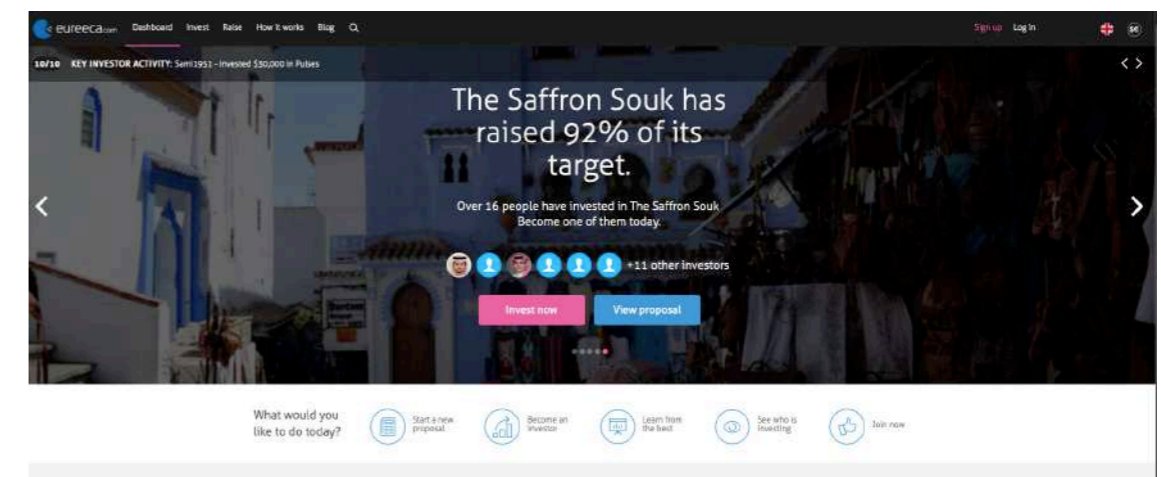
We are also blessed with a business-friendly government that drives initiatives for growing business and attracting talent. For example, the Dubai International Financial Centre is a

fantastic melting pot of talent and companies. The infrastructure is allowing as many as 4 or 5 fintech firms to be established each week. The city has got a lot to offer and I would not want to live anywhere else in the world

About Eureeca

Eureeca is the first global equity crowdfunding platform. It enables members of its investor network, who range from casual and angel investors to institutional firms, to buy shares in growth-oriented businesses, while providing operational businesses with crucial access to capital.

Launched in 2013, Eureeca has a global presence in various locations. We are fully licensed in the UK by the Financial Conduct Authority with a Branch Office in The Netherlands, regulated by The Netherlands Authority for the Financial Markets and the Securities Commission Malaysia in 2015. From its global offices, Eureeca offers high-yield potential investment opportunities from the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia to its investor network. Businesses raising funds can leverage this network for capital, strategic connections, and expansion into new markets.





“The hardest part of quitting my job and starting a business is taking that jump. To me it literally felt like jumping off a cliff without a parachute on, hoping there is water at the bottom.”



Photo Credit: Mirna Sleiman

MIRNA SLEIMAN

FOUNDER & CEO FINTECH GALAXY

How would you describe yourself?

Let me share something my daughter shared with me; I have never read anything that represents me more than this.

She has been broken. She has been knocked down. She has been defeated. She has felt the pain that most could not handle. She looks fear in the face year after year, day after day. But yet she never runs. She never hides, and she always finds a way to get back up. She is unbreakable. She is a warrior. She is me.

That is powerful. Could you clarify it a little bit more?

I am Lebanese and I was born a few years after the beginning of the Civil War and a few years before the Israeli war with Lebanon in 1982. The war continued for like 10, 15, 20 years, that was my childhood. We were displaced from my parents' house when I was very young. We had to get out of the capital to our hometown, to go live in an old house owned by our grandparents. The first 20 years of my life were the most chaotic a child could have. However, I still look back on them fondly. I have beautiful memories of my childhood despite all the problems, the wars, the calamities, losing people, death.

We lived in a very loving family and the little things meant a lot to us.

In 2000, I got married and went to live in the USA. I was 21 years old, had big dreams and wanted to study English literature. I relocated as Beirut was not a very safe place and I thought of the United States as the safest country on the planet!

But then September 11 happened just two weeks after I arrived. I lived in Virginia, right next to the Pentagon in a skyline tower on the 19th floor. From the thousands of people who were living in that building, I was probably the only one who had her bag packed with my passports, my jewelry, my cash, my phone; I had them all ready because growing up in Lebanon, I am wired in survival mode.

They asked us to run out of the building and go downstairs because there was a plane that was heading towards the White House and it was going to hit the towers. Those were very sad days.

And then, you know, the anthrax, if you remember the sniper around the metropolitan.

I thought to myself, if I am going to die, let me go back home to Lebanon. I was twenty-two and we had a one year old son. We went back to Beirut and I started my career as an editor of a magazine.

How did you discover your passion for journalism?

I have always liked writing and I wanted to do something special. I realized that financial journalism could be very challenging. I saw an ad at Zawya for a financial journalist so I applied. Even though I did not have any experience or knowledge of the finance world, they gave me a chance and I started with translations into English and Arabic. I worked for only a third of the salary a regular editor would receive just to prove myself. But I worked hard and within six months, I was among the highest paid reporters.

So where did your drive come from to do something challenging?

Firstly it is in my personality. When you are living in survival mode and facing lots of external challenges, you learn how to excel during these situations. For me if life is rosy and happy and all of that, I start having anxiety. If you look at all Lebanese entrepreneurs, they are in survival mode and they all work best under pressure.

What characteristics contributed to becoming a successful journalist?

I was curious. I acted like there is no tomorrow and was really proactive in building networks and relationships. I also started relating to the stories I

was writing and really seeing the effect my stories had on people. People trusted me. They would give me the scoop knowing I would report them accurately and fairly. Also I do not comply to rules well, I am always rebellious.

What are your thoughts on surviving in a male dominated industry?

Number one, instead of focusing on equality, we have to realise more that females are blessed with certain powers: mental, physical, intellectual and emotional. We often do not utilize or practice with these enough. Instead of wanting what men have and focusing on what we do not have, we should take advantage of our own capabilities.

We can get away with a lot of things men cannot. We can prepare and execute a project in a shorter time period as our brains are better wired for multitasking.

Number two, there cannot be anything better than being a woman in a male dominated society, such as the Arab world, since we get a lot of respect, a lot of appreciation and a lot of care. Rarely do I face rejection when I ask for something. When you ask for a meeting, Arabs will give you the time. I do advocate for empowerment and for a level playing field but I think it is important to focus on a broader range of topics rather than just male

/ female. Women by nature are survivors. We are fighters. When we believe in something, we go after it. Also we know how to support others even more than ourselves which makes women great leaders.

Are you a competitive person?

I am very competitive, but I compete with myself, I do not care what other people do, like when I do an assessment of what I have done and where I want to go, I always compare myself with how I performed last year, and then compare the me from the year before compared to me five years ago.

I don't get fixated on what is going on around me but it is not like I do not care. I learn from other people and even when I was a journalist, which is a very competitive industry, I would not pay much attention to the other newswires to see what they are doing. I would just look at what I have done and I would want to do more.

If you are leading and you keep looking at the achievements of other people, you are looking backwards. I do not look backwards, not in relationships and not in work.

I only look backwards to gain wisdom from the mistakes I've made and make sure that I do not do them again. Otherwise I just do not care who is behind me or who is looking at me.

What is the most challenging situation you have overcome?

In 2013, my mom was diagnosed with cancer. She was my best friend, my go to person. She was my pillar. She was my everything. At the end of 2013, she passed away. I just could not function, I became paralyzed. I had no energy, no desire. I did not want to talk to anyone. I did not want to pick up the phone. I lost my competitive nature. I did not want to fight for anything. I just lost my life. You know, I had no desire to do anything.

I broke down when I was interviewing a CEO for a story. And he ended up becoming my mentor. Together we made plans for the short and medium term. I created two lists, one for the current year and one for the next five years.

The first thing on the list was to move out of journalism. However, the company I was working for did not want me to go, so they offered me a job on the business side instead.

How did you make the first step to becoming an entrepreneur?

I was offered many opportunities to go back to journalism but as I said, I never look backwards. I was halfway through my MBA and I actually

realized that I wanted to start my own company. I analyzed the fintech ecosystem and I realized that it is highly fragmented in the MENA region. I started putting the pieces of the puzzle together. Every course I took for my MBA taught me something I would apply. Fintech Galaxy was an idea that came to me while I was completing my strategy course.

I used my personal savings and invested in the platform to get started. Also I was fortunate to have two friends who gave me one hundred twenty thousand dollars to support the business. They came in as angel investors and on October 2nd, I launched Fintech Galaxy.

I did not drop everything to work on Fintech Galaxy immediately. However, at the time I was also consulting with the government so I kept that rolling for another year until my company was properly established. I made back the first hundred thousand dollars in 2018 and, then we tripled that last year and I successfully raised another round of seed funding in 2019.

What do you find the most challenging and what keeps you going when times are tough?

The biggest challenge is the fact that as a CEO, it feels like you need to know everything.

You need to do everything from speaking on stage to engaging with ministers and heads of state,

to speaking with investors, convincing them to give you the money, down to printing papers and creating tables and arranging invoices. Even when you are hiring people, you have to know who you are hiring. So the biggest challenge is to actually have a mind that is so elastic and have the curiosity and energy to maintain the momentum.

There were many times when I did not have money in the account and I got so worried. In those moments, the only thing that kept me going is, number one, my purpose, why I am doing this and number two, I just believe in it. I believe in myself. I believe in what I am doing. I know that if I am positive and I attract only positive thoughts, I will generate positive results. I do not like negative people and I try and ensure that negative thoughts and negative vibes do not come too close to me.

What is success to you? When do you feel you are successful?

You never reach success. Success is a moving target. Every day I feel successful in some way. You know, every year I say, OK, I am going to reach this level of members. I am going to touch this number of lives. I am going to help this number of banks. I am going to work with these regulators. Then I set a plan to hit that target. However just as I reach the target, I am always having a conversation with myself saying that it is not good enough.

Let's increase the bar a little bit. It is just like a love relationship. Every day you have to prove that you love that person. The moment you say, OK, I love him, he loves me and you know, our life is happy. That is when the relationship stumbles. You have to work on the relationship every day for it to flourish. This is the same with business.

With startups, you have to go out and seek new success every day. It is a moving target. They used to tell us in journalism you are only as good as your last story. The only thing that matters to me, really, is making sure that people see the value and they love what we are doing.

What do you think your biggest driver is?

Impacting lives.

What would you recommend to people on days when they feel less motivated?

Anybody who says that we are always happy and joyful and in high spirits is in denial. We all go through ups and downs.

The first thing I ask people to do is to listen to their own heart. Your body will tell you if you are tired or not, if you are down or high, if you are happy or sad, if you are depressed or not— you know yourself

first. You have to know yourself and you have to have a toolkit to deal with the emotional state you find yourself in on any given day.

I read a book almost every week, sometimes as many as three books at the same time. I'll read everything from the law of attraction, applied artificial intelligence, and bank 4.0 all at the same time.

The second thing that helps me is a connection to God, your own God, whichever your God is. I am a practicing Muslim. I do pray, I fast, I go to Omra and I do read the Koran. My religion is my go to place when I am not feeling well.

So my relationship with God is something that I rarely talk about in public, but it is something that I manage and it is very important to me.

Another thing I do to lift my spirits is listen to music, Arabic music. I sit in my car, drop the roof and put on loud music. I go driving on my own, and it feels like just living, you know. I also like to connect with nature, I go to the beach, I watch the sunset, I have watched thousands of sunsets, I am a sunset person. I like walking on the sand. I like listening to the sound of waves. I like sunbathing. I just like being outdoors.

Also, I make it a point that every year I have to go on a one-week retreat. I usually go to Asia. I have

been to Cambodia, Vietnam, Bali, India, so many countries. Every year I spend a week with people I do not know. I do a lot of chakra healing, I do a lot of self-loving. I unblock my energy. I let go of all my baggage.

What are your thoughts about work life balance?

I do not believe in work life balance. Somebody once said to me, when you love what you are doing, you do not even feel like you are working. Some days I am a workaholic, a total workaholic. Like I can barely have one hour for my kids just to focus on them. On other days, I turn off my phone, put it in a drawer and dedicate the time to family or my wellbeing. It is really great that my kids know that when I am happier at work, I am happier at home.

Is there any kind of advice you wish you would have known that I could share with budding entrepreneurs?

Avoid setting up a company with the goal of becoming a unicorn. You will never become a unicorn, unless you have a driving purpose. You will give up easily and you will not commit as strongly as you need to. It is a tough ride. There is no glamour in being an entrepreneur until you are done and dusted with it. Yeah. So this is the first one.

The second one is to have great mentors around you. The first thing I set up before I even launched

the company is an advisory board and I gave them equity. Equity means that you can expect people to allocate time and effort to give you great advice. So you have to give them something in return. Do not be overprotective about the equity; sometimes having those people saves you a lot of money and heartaches.

When you are hiring, listen to your heart. Do not look at CVs in too much depth because the job they will do for you is in the future, not the past. What you need to look at is the person's personality, their values, their skills, how they work under pressure, their curiosity, their positive energy. So just listen and feel and hire. Do not read and test and hire. Once we like all the soft aspects of a person, we look at what they know and where their gaps are and we make a plan to teach anything that is required. It is very easy to teach skills, we learn them every day. You can never teach personality nor attitudes, values and principles. Even if they are the best coders in town, you do not need them if they are energy suckers or troublemakers.

What do you think the benefits of operating in Dubai or the UAE are?

Dubai and the UAE are ideal places for anyone to thrive. As I mentioned, I lived in Lebanon and I lived in the States, and yes, Dubai is the best of all. There are a lot of facilities that make your life easier

and happier. And these are very important for an entrepreneur. You know, you have a family. You want to manage time. You want to participate in all of them and a city like Dubai allows you to do this. It is a lifestyle, it is an ecosystem, and from here you can always expand into other markets without having the hassle of relocating. More importantly, the spirit of Dubai and the UAE are incredible. Their leaders have made the impossible possible through their ambitious targets for the country. Nearly everyone who's living here is probably doing so because they are doing better than they can back home. Whether it is construction workers building the tallest buildings in the world, cab drivers driving tourists across the city, or an executive of a big business moving about in his Range Rover, all are living in Dubai because the city is contributing to their success – and they to its.

About Fintech Galaxy

Fintech Galaxy was founded in the United Arab Emirates in 2018 as a regional platform that fuels innovation in financial services, drives ecosystem collaboration and facilitates integration between financial institutions and fintech companies.

From scouting to deployment, we aim to build the future of financial services across the 22 Arab Countries



“ There cannot be anything better than being a woman in a male dominated society, such as the Arab world, since we get a lot of respect, a lot of appreciation and a lot of care. ”



Photo Credit: Krush Brands

IAN OHAN

FOUNDER KRUSH BRANDS

How would you describe yourself?

A later in life entrepreneur. I am somebody who likes to create things.

I am originally from Canada. I have a wife and three beautiful children. I have been in Dubai for 21 years. Dubai is our home.

Are you a competitive person?

I am a competitive person however it is not about winning. It is about doing your best and being good at what you do, giving everything that you have. The purpose is to be the best at what you can be and win in the field that you choose to operate in. Primarily I am competitive with myself, but I do keep an eye on other entrepreneurs and businesses for inspiration, especially if they are performing well, as I can then learn from them.

Do you take business personally?

Yes, for sure I do. I mean, how can you not care hugely about something you spend 10 to 18 hours a day working on? You can not just say, hey, it's nothing personal! It has to be personal, especially as the founder of the business.

How did you discover your passion?

In my earlier life I was very much pushed into science and maths subjects at School and University by my parents. However, over time there was a realization that possibly this was not the sort of challenge I was looking for. It took me a while to get to this awareness it was not until I was around twenty years old that I became aware of how the route I was pursuing did not make me happy.

I remember calling my dad from a phone booth to tell him I dropped out of university and was going to cycle through Europe instead. It was in the middle of winter and I even called him collect as I was short on funds. It was that bad.

After dropping out, I started working at bars and restaurants to make money for my travelling and I started to discover a passion for the food and beverage industry. In many ways my discovery was not driven by what I wanted, it was running away from what I did not want.

When I was nearing the end of my cycling travels, I started to think more seriously about things that I liked, and what I really enjoyed.

What kind of feelings and emotions went through your head when you started your own business?

When I sold out from my first company, I had to stay with them for three years as part of the buyout. It was a great company and a great job, I made a massive salary and had a great life. Despite all this though I hated it. I had all these possessions but I was not fulfilled.

I just got to the point where I would wake up every morning almost in tears. I just hated going to work because it was not fulfilling my needs. I did not like the big corporate environment and it did not feed me in a way that I needed to be fed. With big companies, you are either part of the system or you are not. There is little room for you if you do not want to be a part of the existing system. I just do not have the headspace for that. I just want to create something amazing and make people happy.

I remember driving away the last day I worked in my last company and I felt like I was jumping out of a plane! I got this huge adrenaline rush and it was sort of a mix of emotions. I had a very visceral physical reaction as I left it just felt like I could breathe again for the first time in a long time. Driving out of the parking lot I got goose bumps and it was a bit uncomfortable, but I felt this incredible weight lifted off my shoulders and I felt vibrant again, I could breathe.

There was also a feeling of fear because I went from a pretty good job into the unknown. There was fear

and excitement. I always compare it to jumping out of a plane for the first time. It is really scary. Once you have left the plane, it is just you. You have already made the decision, you can not go back. Along with the fear though there is also a sense of freedom as well. It is very liberating because you are now experiencing something new and you have thrown yourself out of a comfort zone. It is scary, exciting, exhilarating. It is all of those things.

I think it takes a lot of courage to take that jump. Where did that come from?

A lot of it came from my wife who was very supportive and actually was the one who said you should just do it. I do not think I could have done it without that support and we did not have kids at the time so I could commit fully to the growth stage of the business. Also I had a very real fear of going and doing the same sort of role in the same environment I had just left so that drove me towards a radical change.

What is your biggest drive?

What drives me is creating something that matters. Over time I have become obsessive about solving problems or doing things differently.

I am more motivated by fear or urgency than

comfort. I need to be uncomfortable to perform at my best. I am addicted to the high intensity of business. If something was very steady, I would get bored very quickly.

I am not really driven by the monetary reward, in fact I actually dislike money in many ways, it is nice to not have to worry about it anymore. Entrepreneurship is complete and utter freedom and that is my drive, some people want private jets and fast cars but my needs are not that extravagant. For me money should not play a part in deciding on anything that I want to do.

My relationship with money comes from my parents who were first generation Canadian. We never wanted for anything growing up but money always played a part in what we could not do. We had a great upbringing and everything, but money was such a big part of the conversation when deciding upon our options. My parents were being prudent middle-class folks. I hated that because I just thought, you know, why do we have to think about those things? Why can't we just do it? Those constraints tarnished the joy of the moment because of the monetary consideration.

And what are your thoughts on work life balance? How do you recharge?

I have not figured it out to be honest, it is never perfect. It is partially my personality as well. I have a hard time just shutting things down. I am an all or nothing kind of person.

Even though at the weekends I am at home and able to spend time with my family I am also very distracted physically and mentally and do not really feel like I have left the office.

What does really help to recharge is that we leave Dubai for two months during the summer, I think the physical distance from the business forces me to delegate and recharge more than if I was still in Dubai. I sleep a lot more when I am away, heading home for those two months is something I look forward to all year.

The other thing that I do for fun is motor biking, at least once a year I do a motor bike trip for 7-10 days. This is normally a solo affair, I just zone out and find it is actually extremely therapeutic for me. When you are riding, you can not do anything with your phone. You feel small which leads to humility. You experience gratitude, the first two or three days of these trips is usually unwinding. After that there is a sort of inflection point where you reconnect with very human feelings which takes over from all the

regular brain chatter. I go through this unwinding process and then I feel very, very relaxed.

So I have these longer periods where I set time to focus on myself and the family, but day to day I have not figured it quite out. To maximise my time with the family I protect my time by not socialising too much or attending too many corporate events.

How do you go about delegating tasks to free your time?

I put decisions in two different buckets.

One decision type are decisions that are not life threatening and do not present a risk for our company.

Then there are those decisions that will have a material impact on the business or my family either positively or negatively

By defining my decisions into these two buckets I can delegate the first, non-critical bucket to my team and focus my energies on the essential decisions that I cannot avoid. I proactively push delegation to the team wherever possible so that they can make mistakes, learn and grow!

We have got a really great management team, generally between 28 to 32 years old. They have enough experience to take on the majority of

tasks and decisions that come up. They also have something to bring to the table in terms of energy and vibrancy which I really value. I am happy for my team to make mistakes just as I have done many times. There is no hierarchy in that respect and a lot of trust.

What kind of habits contribute to your success?

I go to bed early and I wake up early, I get up at 3-4am.

That is when I am the most productive. I have got three kids, there is something about the night when everyone else is sleeping, the quiet, that gives you a lot of clarity.

I also think exercise is super important, even though I do not do it as much as I would like, I make sure that I cycle in the mornings. I also do some of my best thinking when I am cycling. It helps me process a lot of information.

What would be the biggest advice you would want to give to entrepreneurs?

I would try and convince them not to do it!

I would list a number of reasons they could fail and suggest they do not even start. If I can talk them out of doing it then they should not even think about

entrepreneurship. Setting up a business requires absolute persistence, more effort than you ever thought, however when you do not give up you also get rewarded extremely well emotionally as well as financially. An entrepreneur needs to be ready for the naysayers and be ready to focus wholly on why they can achieve their dream, not the challenges that need to be overcome. There were a million and one reasons not to open another pizza restaurant but I am glad I did not listen to them and got started regardless.

What do you think the benefits of operating from Dubai are?

My only professional experience is here in Dubai so I really believe that the DNA of Dubai is in me and in our company. Dubai is exciting, because it is the place where you can make things happen. The leadership of this country make things happen. The government is very self-driven and pro-business. The city has a can-do attitude, which I have not experienced anywhere else in the world. There is a couple of other benefits. Firstly, this is a growing entrepreneurial hub.

There is a great and growing entrepreneurial ecosystem here. This country is so entrepreneurial in nature the ecosystem is great. You are also at the epicentre of the world. You have global reach both East and West.

If you can prove yourself here, then I think you can go global with what you are doing. This market is not easy, there is plenty of competition, but there is also a lot of opportunity for innovation.

I think that Dubai has reached a point where it is mature enough that it is now exporting knowledge. Right. when I first got here twenty years ago, Dubai was buying everything from overseas. Everything was bought in and they had to do that. Today they are exporting knowledge so I think the flow is reversing.

Is anything else you would like to share?

I think the whole way we work is going to change rapidly and I think it is going to impact entrepreneurs. I think everyone is going to need to become more entrepreneurial because the standard 'job' is going to become less defined and less secure.

Entrepreneurialism does not necessarily mean starting a big company, or a company that you are going to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on. Entrepreneurs should simply be doing something that they care about, that is meaningful to them. Ideally this activity should also help to keep the lights on and create the lifestyle you want as well.

I do not think the idea of a nine to five job is actually very humane, it is not satisfying. I think there are

very few people who, genuinely prefer things this way. I think entrepreneurialism, is going to take on a lot of different forms and even corporate work patterns are likely to be disrupted.

I think everyone should keep an open mind to entrepreneurialism, it is not exactly what the media and people portray it as.

About KRUSH Brands.

Proprietary technology and delivery for restaurants, powered by fearless love. We help great restaurants and food brands become more resilient by fully owning their customer relationship with proprietary technology and delivery science, seamlessly integrated with brand and operations. Founded in 2015 by serial entrepreneur and Chief Executive, Ian Ohan, KRUSH Brands is a full-service, multi-brand, multi-kitchen development, operating and franchising company. Cool, healthier brands that you love bound together by proprietary technology and professional delivery – convenient, reliable, better for you from a company that cares. KRUSH Brands owns and operates Freedom Pizza, Wildflower, Salad Jar, Coco Yogo Vegan Kitchen and is partnering with other awesome local brands. It is present in the UAE and has regional and international expansion ambitions under its new umbrella platform - Locale.

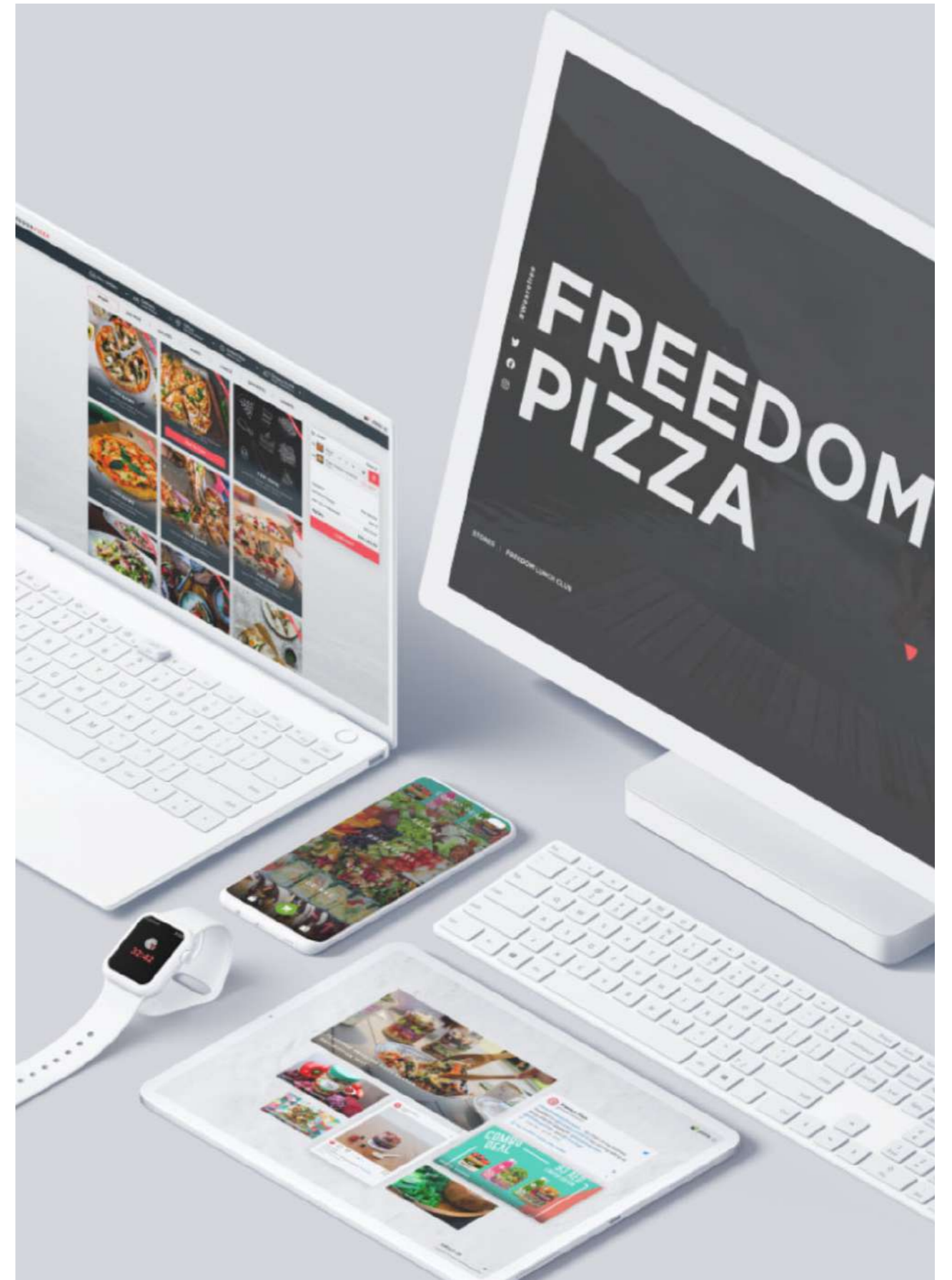


Photo Credit: Krush Brands

“*It was a great company and a great job, I made a massive salary and had a great life. Despite all this though I hated it. I had all these possessions, but I was not fulfilled.*”





Photo Credit: Mumzworld

MONA ATAYA

FOUNDER AND CEO MUMZWORLD

How would you describe yourself?

Firstly, I am a mother of three amazing children, I am also a serial entrepreneur and I am a self-starter.

I have been living in line with my beliefs since a very young age. I follow my passions. I follow my dreams.

Did you come from an entrepreneurial family?

My father was an entrepreneur. His father was an entrepreneur, a Palestinian. My grandfather left his home in the 1940s when many of the Palestinians left Palestine. They left as refugees, starting from nothing but with a very entrepreneurial mindset, back then he was pushed in an entrepreneurial direction through necessity, through war.

I think that entrepreneurial DNA has spread through the generations because my father was also an entrepreneur with the mindset of creating things that were positive and we have all followed the same path. I am the second of five siblings, all five of us are entrepreneurs.

What are your biggest character strengths?

Nothing comes from nothing. The Olympic champion who comes first did not come first by waking up one morning and saying, I am good to go to the Olympics. He or she has trained more than everybody else. He or she has put in more hours than everybody else and has been more disciplined. If you really want to do great things in this world, you must be more disciplined and you have to work hard. You must take more risks. You have to sweat it out and you have to fail.

So when you try something new, you get out of equilibrium, you get out of comfort, there is no happiness in that. There is actually pain and suffering but when you continue down that path of discipline, of commitment, keeping your eyes on the vision. Then you come out of the tunnel and into the light.

It is about discipline. It is about conviction. It is about commitment. It is about hard work. I always say and people ask me, why do you think you are better than another person? And I tell them I am not better than another person. There are many people who are better than me, who are smarter than me. People are stronger than me.

However, one thing I can tell you with conviction, nobody works harder than I do. There are people

who excel in other things, but no one works harder than me.

I believe that is my main point of difference, I keep on running the marathon while others are falling, complaining about the sacrifices required. That is the difference. I am not easily swayed by success or failure, personally I am pretty level. Whether I have a success or a failure, I react pretty much the same and that is to keep on trying.

Are you a competitive person?

Very, very competitive. I do not like to lose. I do not like to come second. I do not like to achieve less than 100 percent. I am very competitive because I have very high expectations of myself.

I believe that I can always come first and that competitive nature comes out in everything I do. Even if I have a dinner party, I will be the first to spot if anything is amiss, because of my competitive nature, I am very hard on myself.

Everything has to be perfect because, again, I believe that there is no reason if you work hard enough and smart enough for you not to get the results you want.

Do you take business personally?

Yes. As a mother, I wanted to empower other mothers and I was willing to make that sacrifice. I was willing to make that compromise. The most difficult thing to hear is when a customer is dissatisfied, I often take it personally. From my perspective, I am doing everything I possibly can for you the customer to have a great service and a great product. I have given up my life for you and you are calling me names on social media because a shipment is delayed by a day or so.

If only they knew what was happening behind the scenes... Of course you have to take it personally.

You had a good corporate job and you decided to give it all up and move to Dubai. Where do you think this courage comes from?

I think courage comes from conviction and the desire to do things that will create positive impact. Courage comes from not caring so much about the outcome but caring more that you attempted to do something that is worthwhile. If you know that you are doing things for the right reason, then you are normally OK.

My personal view is that most things in life are out of your control. The only thing you do control is

your behaviour and your actions.

If you take actions expecting to head in one direction but the world leads you down a different path, that is OK. You just pivot and turn to face the new journey. So long as you are going on a journey that aligns with your values and broader personal vision, the outcome becomes secondary.

What can I control today? Recognizing that 99 percent of this world is out of my control? You do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. You do not know what is going to happen after tomorrow. You do not know how a person is going to react to you. You only know that you can control your actions. By focusing on the controllable aspects of my life I gain focus and courage everyday.

And you have been a successful entrepreneur since, can you describe how your life has changed?

For me corporate life was a lot easier than being an entrepreneur, it was finite hours of work each day. You work from nine to five. You have a paycheck at the end of the month. As long as you are performing in-line with expectations you still have a job. You have a lot of added benefits and for me personally, relative to the entrepreneurial world, it was a lot easier. It is cushy, it is cozy, it is secure.

Entrepreneurial life is different. Entrepreneurial life is 24/7. Your job does not go away. You cannot wake up one morning and say, oh, today I am going to quit my job. Your job is you. You can not walk away from commitments as an entrepreneur. As founder and CEO of a company to leave the company would be like walking away from your own children.

This is my perspective, you have more at stake. You work longer. You don not go home and say tonight I am switching off; you are always on.

Disconnecting is really challenging. You can disconnect but in reality these days you are always connected. If I were just motivated by the financial gain from entrepreneurship, I would never have gone through the journey I have because corporate life is so much easier.

For example, when you setup a venture your first source of capital is normally the funds in your bank account. The first year and a half after launching Mumzworld, me and my business partner took no salary at all. On top of that we invested circa 500,000usd of our own savings to get the business started. Those first couple of years we had to stay true to our vision or financially the return would not have felt worth the sacrifice.

How do you recharge?

The main ways I get energized is through learning, family and travelling.

For example, I am energized when I am surrounded by super smart people that are teaching me new things. I love to read and take on new ideas, I also love to interact with other entrepreneurs and thought leaders to gain a broader perspective. Taking a new idea back into the workplace is exciting for me.

In terms of family, when I see any of my family work hard and succeed, for example, when my kids get selected onto a sports team, that energizes me. Time spent with my family is a great energizer for me, it helps add perspective as to what is important and what is worthwhile and what my real responsibilities are in this world. Another thing that recharges me is playing the piano. I enjoy music. I love to read. I love to travel.

Traveling allows me to be exposed to all the different people in the world, that energizes me every single time. This is really it. I do go on the occasional spa day or girls night out. Not often though, to be honest. I just simply do not have the time for that, travel and family are my two main getaways

As a family, we travel twice a year together, once in the summer and once in the winter. My husband

and I also usually travel as a couple once a year as well.

What was the biggest challenge you overcame?

When the business was launched, I was passionate about solving problems and along the way the journey was very, very, very hard. I have to say that my Mumzworld journey was probably the hardest journey I have ever taken. It was hard because the ecosystem was not developed. It was hard because we did not have funding. It was hard because we did not have talent. It was hard because I was a mother. So really, the odds were stacked against us. Yet in spite of that, I was passionate about solving these problems. Creating solutions became part of the journey to empower mothers, just like I wanted to be empowered as a mother.

For me, the most difficult part was when we were trying to grow Mumzworld within an ecosystem that was not ready. Couriers were unreliable, payment gateways did no work, talent was difficult to find etc. Against all of this, we still had to figure out a way to address the mother's needs and we did it, but again it was a real roller coaster.

How do you survive in a competitive market?

The region has become very saturated and competitive. You have competitors watching you as the market leader. I always say, do not watch the competitors, they are watching us. Let them watch you. We watch the customer. So long as you are watching the changing customer demands, we will always be the first to solve the problem. Our competitors will always solve an issue second or third.

That is really our differentiator today, our extreme focus on the customer. We always ask ourselves questions like: How can I serve the customer better? How can our platform be better? How can I do more? How can I add that wow factor? Asking these broad questions constantly creates opportunities for ingenuity and problem solving that allows you to fulfil the customers demands better each time.

The other key for us is a very active quality checking process, I personally still jump into random quality checks on customer service, on data, on product quality and on supply chains. I am very hands on and detailed and I use the quality metrics of the organization to help steer future decisions.

What do you think the biggest benefits of operating in Dubai are?

I do not think there is another place in this region that would have allowed us to start Mumzworld or even create the debate about Mothers and Babies welfare.

Dubai is a central location. It is a hub for global commerce and global trade. It is easy to import and export. That is another great reason to setup operations here.

This country is built on entrepreneurship and disruption. I lived here 20 years and I have seen Dubai evolve from being a very simple town to becoming a global hub for commerce, trade and innovation. This city is a pulse point of entrepreneurship I was lucky to see it grow before my eyes. It is a natural extension for Dubai to have startups like Mumzworld flourishing and growing.

What advice would you like to give to future entrepreneurs?

Believe in your vision and your mission. Personally, this is what allowed me to continue to do what I do when the going got tough. First of all, a commitment and a belief in my vision whether it would be achieved or not. Fundamentally you must believe that what you are building is relevant and

important.

I expect for most entrepreneurs in the first five years, out of 365 days a year, you will wake up 364 days a year and say, what have I gotten myself into? This is hard. 364 days a year you will wake up. Wanting to quit. Not 10 days. Not 20 days. Almost every day. This is hard. What have I gotten myself into?

However every day you also realize that you can not quit. You realize this is what you have signed up for and you can only go forward. The only time you quit is when you physically cannot move further. That is the only time you quit. Entrepreneurs need to know that it is going to get hard and then it is going to get harder and then it is going to get even harder!

That is why your vision is so important. That is when you look at the end goal and you say that that is where I am going and this hard problem in front of me becomes of secondary importance.

I would also advise entrepreneurs to develop discipline. One of the things that I struggled with in the early days is getting so caught up in the routine of working long hours. You forget about fuel for your body and mind, your mental and emotional well-being is very important.

You cannot run a car without fuel. Similarly, you

need mental, emotional and physical fuel. That means you need to watch what you eat, you need to exercise. You need the discipline to maintain balance, it is very important.

I can honestly say that the times when I am not disciplined in my exercise or disciplined in my eating or disciplined in my sleeping, the business struggles.

Finally I would recommend that entrepreneurs find things that motivate and energize them. For me, whenever it gets hard I would reconnect with learning. I reconnect with leaders, with winners, I would read about them or meet them and remind myself that other people have achieved even greater things with tougher odds than I have and that helps garner a broader perspective.

About Mumzworld

Mumzworld is the 1st and largest online shopping site in the Middle East for mother, baby and child, servicing the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, Lebanon and further shipping all over the world

“ *I always say, do not watch the competitors, they are watching us. Let them watch you. We watch the customer.* ”

mumzworld.com
#1 mother, baby & child site in the Middle East



Photo Credit: Ibrahim Colak

IBRAHIM COLAK

FOUNDER MR. USTA

How would you describe yourself?

I am a solution provider and have been my whole life. The companies I worked for were always focusing on finding the best solutions for customers. Originally, I am an electrical engineer and I worked for Nokia for 13 years after my graduation.

Through my whole corporate career I worked at Nokia in different departments. When Nokia got sold to Microsoft I felt it was the optimum moment to exit the corporate world and start my own business. Mr Usta is an online market where customers can find home services for problems with their homes we help people find reliable and hard to find technicians for any job at home or the office.

Personally, I am social, I really like to talk to people and get to know them, building rapport.

Do you come from an entrepreneurial family?

Everyone in my family runs their own business, my uncles, my grandfather and my dad. I have two sisters and one brother and they are all engineering graduates. Seeing my family running their own business I have always been intrigued by being independent, being

able to make my own decisions and take control of my own life. When Nokia was sold to Microsoft and decisions concerning me were made that I had no control over I decided to make a life change, take that control back and start my own business.

How was it to leave your corporate job?

It was very scary, not having the security, however I was not yet married and my daughter was not born yet so I had few financial commitments to worry about. I thought right now is the best time, even if I fail, now is the best time to fail. But if I succeed my dreams come true.

And when would your dreams become true?

I am still working on it. I did not setup a business for a small return and quick exit, I did it because it is my passion.

It is a long-run, a marathon. It is very rewarding to be one of the brands everyone in the regions knows such as Careem, Souq, Fetchr etc. I love that Mr Usta is really appreciated by individuals, corporates and government and is becoming part of people's daily life.

How did you discover your passion? being a solution provider

When I was younger I always helped out my family with all their problems especially computers and computer networks. I tried to understand what they wanted and discovered I had a talent at describing complex solutions in a simple way. This demonstrated to me that I really get satisfaction in helping people solve problems.

What habits would you attribute your success to?

I like to read a lot, I get hooked on interesting topics and want to know everything about them. Having strong social skills has really helped me to attract the right people. I always have people around me who could help me and I help them. A close circle where we give and take.

Any particular books that stood out?

I think everybody should know Greek or Indian mythology. It helps to understand life, ambitions and why people are this way. They really explain very well how cultures are created, religions, what makes people, people. It is really useful, especially when you want to work with different cultures. I enjoy the readings of Donna Rosenberg on the mythology subject for example.

What is your biggest challenge?

People are naturally resistant to change and leaving their comfort zone, even with something simple like ordering a handyman. My biggest struggle is attracting first time customers, after they use mr Usta they know the benefits and most will regularly repurchase, but the first-time customer acquisition costs a lot of money and effort to change current lifestyle and habits. People seem to be happy to make more compromises in terms of quality workmanship rather than simply creating an account online.

What is your driving force in life?

Satisfaction, with what I am doing. Being happy with the results of my actions, that is satisfaction.

Do you have days when you feel less motivated?

Yes of course, as with every start up, you have ups and downs. If you spend so much effort and money but still do not find the right solution it can be very demotivating. When that happens, let it go, if it does not work, make other things work.

I have dealt with failure like this two or three times. What I had in my head for mr Usta five years ago is 95 % different to what we have built today. Do not

insist in keeping to some rigid vision, meet in the middle between your vision and reality.

What was your biggest failure?

When I started this business I thought it was going to be easy. I thought I knew what customers needed based on the power of my research with friends and family but I did not. If I started over I would do much more research, talk to real customers and stakeholders to ascertain their true desires.

What advice would you give to other entrepreneurs?

You need to know as much as possible about your customers. Real customers, not just your own network of friends. Minimise assumptions and back up decisions with research. Base your business on real market facts, test your assumptions using data to avoid surprises. If you have the money you can also use external research providers but you must always be hands on with the data and insight generation.

I have done a lot of customer calls and replied to a lot of support emails myself. This helps me understand what is really happening in my business. I suggest everyone to go out to the field and really see what is happening, even when everything is going perfect, you still need to be aware why your business model

is working or not.

What is one piece of advice you wish you would have known earlier?

I wish I had figured out the finance part of being an entrepreneur earlier. It is important to know how to create a sustainable business model and how much investment is needed to create a break even state. If I would have known the business model more clearly, I could have invested money much more efficiently.

What do you think the benefits of operating in the UAE are?

It is very multicultural, you can find every different segment of global society here. You can test your product the best here because you have to build your company with different demographics in mind. You can find people who love sports, you can find people who like being online, buying online and spending online you can find people who love to spend traditionally. There are also extremely diverse income ranges and a mix of different cultures and habits. It is the best market to test whether your product is going to work in other markets too. Of course it is not 100% perfect but you can get a lot of data and feedback about your product here to help internationalise your company.

The people here are young, they gravitate towards tech and online. There are more early adopters here than other countries, this is great for us in the tech world.

Also the UAE is more advanced compared to the majority of other countries in terms of forming a company, access to third party tools, technology, finance, online payments, offices and government support. I recommend people use the UAE as a platform to test your ideas and then go global with confidence.

Is there any other advice that you would like to give?

If you really want to have a say in your work life, try being an entrepreneur and having your own business. It is fun and you feel more satisfied when you see the results of your own effort.

If you have entrepreneurship on your mind, really go and do it as the feeling of satisfaction is very different compared to corporate success. Leave your mark, that is a real satisfaction. Do not be afraid of failure, as we fail every day big and small. However next time you will always do better. Remember that you do not know if you will enjoy it if you do not take that first step!

About Mr. Usta

Mr Usta makes it easier to get jobs done in and around your home, saving you time and money. Clean, fix, move or renovate in a few clicks and with peace of mind.

Mr Usta was founded in 2015, out of the need to simplify the process of finding trustworthy and affordable skilled professionals. We use smart technology to match you with home service professionals (aka Ustas) that have been vetted by us and reviewed by our customers.

**Usta in Arabic, Turkish and Farsi means an expert or craftsman; a guru so-to-speak.*

Ibrahim Colak - Mr Usta

“ When I started this business I thought it was going to be easy. I thought I knew what customers needed based on the power of my research with friends and family but I did not. If I started over I would do much more research, talk to real customers and stakeholders to ascertain their true desires. ”



Photo Credit: The National

PAUL EVANS

FOUNDER & CEO
THE SOLUTIONS LEISURE GROUP

How would you describe yourself?

Well, how do I describe myself for a long time in my life? I describe myself as somebody who was consistently punching above his weight. I never expected to be particularly successful. I think even now, I do not really consider myself to be successful. I am a hard worker, I am loyal, I am honest, I believe in living life in a certain way, I am decent, I am pretty straightforward, I am extremely dedicated and I am extremely focused. I get so much joy from seeing the growth and development of the people around us through the experiences we have shared.

You know, initially my drive was to battle through as the underdog. Battling through with the feeling that I am punching above my weight. I do not think that now today, I believe I have earned what I have got.

I read that you were very competitive from a young age.

What would you dedicate it to?

The difficulties and challenges that I went through from a young age made me able to fight. Made me push. Made me compete. Made me not want to be considered second, last or stupid. It gave me a

backbone to strive to be the best at whatever I did. I do not stop until I become the best. I set myself a task where I believe I can achieve number one status. I do not enjoy getting beaten on any level. So I try and avoid it. If we are competing, I will make sure that I can win.

I think it is admirable that you took these challenges and converted them into strength. How did you do this?

I think my upbringing with dyslexia had a negative effect on me for a lot of my life. You know, I am not a superhero, it still hurts. Being told you are stupid, till you are circa 14 years of age, that still sits me today. I wake up every morning and still work hard to prove those teachers wrong. I use them as a motivation constantly to prove that I am somebody of value and that I am a decent individual with good ethics. I am smart and I am always trying to prove that on a daily basis. You know, I am a dyslexic schoolboy who is currently CEO of a 150 million dollar company.

What does success mean to you?

To have inner peace. To stop doubting myself. To stop questioning everything I do. To stop ripping myself to pieces thinking I could do it better. That I could be better. That I could achieve more. That I could be more successful. I could have a nicer car. I

could have a bigger house. I could have more money in the bank. I could have a bigger business, more people working for me, more venues. All of that thinking nearly killed me, that constant, constant battle of I am not good enough. My perspective changed when I met a life coach who started to teach me the understanding of inner peace and tranquillity. Right now, I do not think every aspect of my life is as complete as I want it. I am working at the moment on having a base in England so I can see my children more for example. That is probably the only aspect of my life today that I can not quite fix or do on the timeline that I want to do it.

I see every problem I ever have as simply something I have not yet figured out. I think when you have been through the perceived challenges I have been through you need the inner peace of knowing that I get through the challenges. That confidence in business only comes with experience though. My life coach gives advice and guidance that really help, I expect I will engage with a coach for the rest of my life. The more stuff you overcome, the more achievements you have, the more flexing in the sun that you are able to put in. The more that inner peace comes because you start to realize it will be OK and you can start to tackle even bigger problems if you choose to.

What drives you, what motivates you?

My driving factor today is to continue giving opportunities to people who work with us to develop. My entire management team of 14 heads today are all homegrown. Every single one of them. I do not have a single person sitting in a senior general manager position that was not promoted from within.

I also want to take our brands international. I think that the pride of developing a concept like Lock, Stock and Barrel into other countries around the world would be huge. It also gives massive opportunity to the barman who joined me when we setup the business, he is now a bar manager and is chomping at the bit to become a general manager.

Much about me today is about giving back, I am proud of the fact that I understand that. I have been



Photo Credit: Paul Evans

a very selfish individual at stages of my life. I have been self-centered and self orientated. I have not been a good friend always.

I think if you talk to any of my team, you will find that during the day I am on the ground with them. I am not the CEO who runs around telling you what to do. And the CEO needs to work as hard as anybody else, often harder than anybody. I am working for them rather than me now, if I wanted to, tomorrow I could sit on a desert island and retire. However I feel that I owe these people something. They got me where I am today and I want to get them days which are in line with their goals as well.

One of the big things to achieve inner peace is gratitude, how do you practise this?

Every day I walk at the beach. I live on the end of JBR Beach and I walk from zero gravity and I touch a rock and then I walk a little further to Blue Waters and I touch another rock. The rocks symbolize two blessings. When I put my foot on the rock I will give thanks, could be big, could be small could be something insignificant. For example I am grateful for my cat. I am pleased for the promotion of an individual. I am delighted for the opportunity to open a Lock Stock in London. And I am glad that I have got an interview with you. Whatever it may be, every single day, I do not go to bed at night till I have visited that beach. It just keeps me focused

on the real reason for doing what we do. You know, gratitude and being humble and thanking the universe for giving what it has given me. It has been a very rewarding experience. I have been doing that now for three and a half years since I got divorced. It is just a great, great bit of solitude for me. I unplug from the mainframe for an hour, put my feet on the sand. I connect. I am so close to the ocean. Have a real connection with the ocean. It is just my happy place. I recommend everyone to get their shoes off. Put their feet on the earth, clear their mind. Leave the mobile at home and be with yourself for an hour.

Have you got any other habits or routines you would attribute your success to?

The blessings I mentioned is something that I use on a daily basis and I always set goals. I think visualisation is probably one of my favourite techniques.

I visualise the best possible version of myself and think through how I want my life to look? I combine that visualisation by making mental notes of all the important milestones I have achieved, I call them flags in the sand. It is about visualising all the different things in life you get to do every single day that are considered to be significant. For example I look back and see the day that I launched my book. The day that the book was in the airport. The day I just sat there, watched my son do his

first live zippity play. The day that my other son was football captain, the holiday I had in Florida with my children. So I now have all these little mini visualizations at most great moments in time.

I am always somewhere along this journey in my mind. Whether I look left or right in my mind I either see the future state I wish to create or the milestones I have already taken behind me. When you do this exercise, wherever you are on the journey does not matter. I always had a reference point of where I had been previously and that helps to make future goals feel attainable and a step along a manageable journey.

Once I know where I am and where I want to go I chase after becoming the guy I want to be. I imagine what I am wearing in the future, where do I live, it is always the best, best version of me in five years. He is the guy I chase. I do not compare myself to anybody else. I am not chasing anybody else's life. I am chasing my life. And I am here now 45 years old, what do I want my life to look like when I'm 50? What does he look like? What does he do? What are his traits? What is he doing? Does he have 100 outlets? Does he have 500 outlets? Does he live in the UK. or does he live in the UAE? Does he live in New York? Does he live in Singapore? Does he? How is he with his friends? How is he with his colleagues? How much time does he spend with his children? How much time does he spend with his mom? With

his dad? What type of guy is he to his girlfriend. You know, the best possible version of me. Only in the last few years I began to like me, I started to know that I am somebody I am quite proud of. How great of a leader, best mate, boyfriend could I become? You want to be here and then chase it. And then when you get close move yourself along the journey a couple more milestones and look right to see the next steps on the road.

What advice would you give to overcome the fear of failure?

If you watch my video about my book, then the very end statement is whilst you have air in your lungs, you can go again, and until you quit, you are just practicing.

What is failure? Just a label, it does not exist in my vocabulary. I do not allow it failure because it's not real. If I do not succeed this time round I will just go again until I reach my goal. I fail only when I die. I fail to breathe again, for the rest. There is no failure.

I use a different word for life's experience, I use the word practice.

You only fail when you quit. When I say I am not doing OK. When I make the decision, I can not work it out. So I am not going to try. Then you quit. Then you fail, but the choice is always yours.

Apart from faith or a destiny, what would you recommend to people who have not found their passion yet?

A lot of it has to do with feeling, so get out there and go and find out what you like. If you are not allowing influences into your life you will not experience what will give you that emotional kick. Expose yourself and then you will find it. If you have not found it yet you have not exposed yourself enough. Passion is easy to feel and it comes naturally. If you do not like blue, you might like red. Does something give that inner excitement? Do not try and force it, it comes or it does not come as you experience things during your life.

What advice would you want to give to future entrepreneurs?

Find your passion. Once you find yours, then everything changes. It is not hard work. Once you start to live, sleep and breathe it, you can become an expert. Money should not be the reason. It is the by product of doing something you absolutely love and if you love it and you are good at it then more people buy it, and the more money it gives you. Our financial success comes purely from us being very, very good at what we do. Yeah, that is the only reason. The reason why Lock Stock has 80000 people a month visit is because it is brilliant. The brilliance came because we loved it when we designed it. We

developed it. We built it. We lived in it and I mean lived in it. Six months, 20 hours a day, every day. When we went home we were skipping like we skipped back in at six o'clock the next morning. We adored the project and that is why it is becoming the biggest bar brand in the world.

What would you say the benefits of operating in the United Arab Emirates are?

I think Dubai gives you the best platform on the planet. If you work hard, you dedicate yourself, your honest and you put down roots. I think roots are huge, hugely important fact here. People come to Dubai and think the road to paper gold can come in quickly, earn a lot of money and disappear. I moved here to live here for the rest of my life and I gave it everything I got and I got it back.

I think Dubai has a beautiful ability of saying, if you give Dubai time, if you make strong foundations, if give Dubai commitment and passion Dubai will I'll give you a similar reward back. If you give me short term, quick grab mentality. I will give you that back as well. If you look at financial crashes or real estate market booms and bubbles, they are all short term and those who were really affected had short time horizons and over leveraged themselves to try and make unrealistic returns. When I came to Dubai I decided that my future, my career, my family, my everything is coming to Dubai. Through

people like me and the government of this country we have achieved incredible things in such a short period of time. I am happy and fortunate to be part of that story.

About The Solutions Leisure Group

The Solutions Leisure Group is a leading food & beverage operator in the UAE, currently running 7 of Dubai's most successful venues.

Over the past 15 years, we have worked tirelessly to become the leading F&B operator and one of the biggest entertainment & nightlife groups in the Middle East. Demonstrating a proven track record of success, today we welcome over 100,000 customers per month across all of our venues.

Our unique and diverse portfolio of venues has been strategically developed to cater to the cosmopolitan demographic of the UAE.

Whether international franchises or home-grown bespoke concepts; our relentless drive and appetite for success has no limits.

We are solely dedicated to the hospitality and nightlife industry. It is the first thing we think about when we wake up and the last thing we think about before going to sleep. Simply put; this is what we do!

Wavehouse, Lock Stock & Barrel, Asia Asia, Baby Q, Karma Kafe, STK are among our iconic brands.

Paul Evans

Paul Evans is also Co-Author of 'When I Woke Up' The True Story of Paul Evans written by Carolyn Coe – is one man's inspiring story of starting rough, making mistakes, personal suffering and the raw grit it takes to get back up when life deals the heaviest blows. Told with his authentic humour and frank wit, this is an upfront and personal account of a life of full of jaw-dropping, gut-wrenching and heartwarming events that will leave you reeling in disbelief and full of admiration for one man's spirit to survive and live life to the full.



“ My driving factor today is to continue to develop others ”

”





Photo Credit: Rod Nacouzi

ROD NACOUZI

TRANSCORP INTERNATIONAL

Please tell me a bit more about yourself and your company?

Transcorp is a tech and compliance driven last mile delivery company. We employ close to 300 people. Our operations cover the seven emirates of the UAE. We have four warehouses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, we own a fleet of 150 vehicles, and we deliver an average of 7000 boxes a day.

We are proud to be comfortably the largest firm of our type in the industry. It is like a family here, the same people who started the company with me are still here. I always trust in this culture. Importantly our people have kept growing with the company. The customers kept on appreciating what we were doing and we are always hiring fresh talents and developing them into our future leaders. We aim that the people who have been successful here in the UAE go and run our new markets such as Saudi Arabia and further afield. It is a continuous process passing on roles and responsibilities to the next in line as we expand the scope of the business.

Another interesting fact about you?

I used to be a professional basketball player in my early twenties before I decided to pursue my professional journey in the UAE

What made you successful?

Firstly I was not always successful, the success at Transcorp is born from failure in two prior ventures. Prior to being an entrepreneur, I worked in two great multinationals where I learned a lot about structures and processes. I also realised where these companies were making mistakes and made sure that I avoided these same issues when building Transcorp. I always advise people to work in well structured companies to understand processes models, cultures and your target industry before launching anything on their own. While working in such diverse environment will you gain some kind of emotional intelligence which will help you to successfully build the right culture in your company. Personally I believe part of my success is based on keen self-assessment, knowing ones strengths, weaknesses and passions allows you to surround yourself with experts in areas that complement your skillset. No one is an expert in every facet of business, I often run brainstorming sessions with everyone in the company to sanity check ideas and develop solutions to current challenges rather than dictating the playbook. Actively listening to the voices around me has been a key contributor to our success.

What do you think are your three strongest characteristics?

I am very flexible. I have high quality standards. I am strong believer in empowerment and delegations.

You are a family man, how do you manage your work life balance

I always knew the first few years were going to be difficult. Before setting out I discussed it with my partner. She knew what to expect since I had prepared her and by sharing the vision we were able to reach alignment as a family unit. I believe you can never prepare your family enough for an entrepreneurial journey as you never know what to expect along the road.

I had long, sleepless nights, sometimes sleeping in the office or on the couch. Honestly I compromised a lot on the family side in the early years. These days I try to ensure that I am free on Fridays to spend quality time dedicated to family. We are also going on vacation more often now as things are much more organised at the office. I now have a great team to handle the company when I am not around

When are you at your happiest?

I am the happiest when I come into the office in the morning and then again when I enter our home at night. Generally, I am happy throughout each day. Sometimes it might not show on my expressions, but I have an immense inner happiness and it reflects on my quiet character

How do you think you achieved that?

I am very much into self-assessment, if you don't know what really makes you happy you can never succeed in reaching happiness. I know what makes me happy and I also know what I should avoid. I surround myself with good energy at work and at home. My family, friends and people in the office make me quite happy.

Have you ever had days that you feel less motivated?

Of course, when you suffer a setback for example. In these circumstances you need to evaluate yourself and over time you get better to deal with challenges that come up. Stress is a friend, if you are going to make it your enemy it is going to beat you everytime. You must embrace stress and transform it into positive actions. I learned methods of self-assessment through reading books and other materials over time and now it is very rare that I

feel overly stressed.

Can you share a specific tool you use to embrace stress?

Always look at any problem as a small setback, not life threatening. Having the right perspective on problems is an important way to manage stress. Once you have identified a problem, look directly for a solution with a positive mindset. Finally, I recommend that you focus on what you will attain when you have overcome the problem. After you have got past the issue look for learning opportunities and understand how to avoid this challenge in the future. There is always a positive side in everything you do in your life even with your problems and issues.

You read a lot, is there a specific book you would recommend?

I like geo-political books because it helps to see the world from a wider angle. The techniques the people are using in politics will widen how you look at business challenges and often allow you to analyse them on a deeper level.

You're obviously very driven, what would you say your biggest driving force is?

A single success is never enough for me, my biggest driver is not financial reward, but in contributing

to society and the addictive feeling of overcoming challenges. My overall mission is to contribute positively back to society and that keeps me motivated. I had a lot of people who contributed positively in my life whether ex bosses, coaches, family members, acquaintances. I believe if I am blessed with something it is my obligation to share this blessing with other people. Creating jobs, solutions and opportunities for other people to work, thrive and share happy moments with their family members motivates me.

What is one piece of advice you wished you known earlier?

Understand what to expect. I wished I had spoken with more likeminded entrepreneurs at the beginning of my journey. Lots of entrepreneurs in public forums speak in a very positive way about their success which sometimes masks the reality of the struggles they are going through. I try and do the opposite; I always tell people to be aware of what challenges they can expect. It is not going to be an easy ride and failure is always possible. Everyone must understand and measure the risks vs the ultimate reward.

I would like to advise prospective entrepreneurs that the reality is this is a hard path to travel. There are long nights without peace of mind, extreme stress induced by not knowing how you will pay

your dues. I like to talk about the negative sides of the journey and then explain that the reward for taking such risks is justified in terms of the success and contribution you can make.

So what are the main challenges budding entrepreneurs can expect?

1. You are going to have fierce competition. Almost every developed market is devoid of price regulation, therefore every competitor has the option to launch a price war against you and take your customers. This happened to Transcorp but the quality of service we provided built a culture of loyalty amongst our customers we are proud of. This loyalty from our customers is what allowed us to thrive.
2. How to finance the business. No company in a dynamic market can carry on without the right support. You need to understand the financials, plan for the worst-case scenario, and ensure you have the cashflow you need to survive.
3. Investors. Often investors exploring your business have a completely different mindset to you. They don't understand what you have been through and won't have the same passion for the business you do. Investors review things from a risk/return perspective and you need to be able to speak their language if you are going to get their support.

What are the benefits of operating in Dubai?

Massive exposure, from Dubai you can truly conquer the world. Everything is very well processed when it comes to governmental approvals and now everything is digitized. The vision that the leaders have for the country creates opportunities everywhere. The more the country is growing the more you can grow with it. The size of the market keeps on stretching every year with new projects, new visions, new budgets.

Final advice

1. Trust yourself and the people you work with
2. Surround yourself with the right talents
3. Make stress a friend
4. Don't overcalculate, you will never get all the numbers perfect regardless

About Transcorp

Transcorp is a leading provider of smart cold-chain solutions across the UAE. Since day one, we've been working to improve the last mile of our partners by using innovative programs that ensure "Fast, Safe & Cool Deliveries".



Photo Credit: Transcorp

The company is recognized for its unique temperature-controlled last-mile-delivery programs backed by a cutting-edge technology offering that gives the utmost visibility and flexibility to its end-users. Transcorp has been on a mission from the very beginning to disrupt and revolutionize the delivery norms for the last mile services in every city it operates in, by narrowing down the waiting time, increasing the delivery windows to 5 per day and achieving an average success ratio of 98.2% on guaranteed same-day & next-day deliveries.

"We believe receiving a package on time and at the perfect temperature is a right not a luxury."

We exist so start-ups and SMEs can thrive and grow. Everyday we deliver to thousands of customers across the Emirates and soon within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ensuring that we provide the highest levels of promptness at all times.

With less than 0.9% customer turnover since our inception date, we can proudly say that we have more than two hundred long term satisfied customers!

MADE IN THE UAE

MADE IN THE UAE

“ Firstly I was not always successful, the success at Transcorp is born from failure in two prior ventures. ”

Dear Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to read and learn from some of the UAE's leading entrepreneurs. I hope you got just as inspired by these amazing individuals as I did.

One message that came through from all of the interviews is that an effective leader must be able to use/ know his or her strengths and be resilient to overcome challenges.

Self awareness is critical in the modern workplace whether you are employed or you are growing your own business.

My coaching practice, Danielle Smith Coaching supports intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs as they pursue growth. I use Positive Psychology, NLP and other coaching tools & techniques to help you discover your natural strengths, values and create good habits.

Self-knowledge is a foundation for success in any pursuit and I would love to help your discovery and growth to help in all facets of your life!

If you would like to take the jump into entrepreneurship or discover new routes to growth in your current job, you can refer to this book to avail 50% off of your first coaching session.



Voucher

50% off of your first coaching session

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COACHING

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