

Flight Club

*Rebel, Reinvent, and Thrive:
How to Launch your Dream Business*

By Felena Hanson
founder of Hera Hub

“This is your boarding pass to fly entrepreneur class.

A must read for every woman who is thinking about launching a business!”

~Ali Brown - entrepreneur, coach, angel investor, featured on ABC's Secret Millionaire show

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something - your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

- Steve Jobs

An Invitation To A Journey

I'm inviting you to share in my journey—one filled with rebellion, reinvention, independence, diplomacy, and (perhaps most important of all) collaboration. You'll gain a firsthand experience of the challenges, successes, and wisdom I've gained over the last 40 years. We're also going to get down to the nitty-gritty—the nuts and bolts of business—and how I was able to build something tangible yet sincere (a word not often associated with business) by creating Hera Hub.

My life story may come across as a bit scattered and tumultuous at times; however, as you'll soon see, everything I've done—from selling peacock feathers as a child, to surviving a near-fatal car accident, to sustaining three professional setbacks—has led to my life's work of providing women with a strong platform and a supportive community from which to launch and grow their businesses.

Whether you believe the prediction that more than 50 percent of the knowledge-based workforce will be independent by 2020 or not, it's clear that the world is changing, and with this change comes the need to think like an entrepreneur. My hope is that by sharing my journey, and the experience of other accomplished women, I will inspire you to take charge of your career and, ultimately, your destiny. It's your turn to take flight!

My best!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Felena". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "My best!".

Part One: Felena's Story

Chapter 1 - Rebellion

As far back as I can remember my life has progressed along a very unconventional path. It began when I was just 18 months old and my parents purchased a unique piece of property on the Central Coast of California, located near the edge of a small town called Arroyo Grande.

That old house was ripe for fueling a child's creativity and imagination. It was dilapidated in a peaceful kind of way and sat on two acres of land that consisted of pine trees, an orchard, a duck pond, and an old bus-repair barn. All of that, coupled with the creek that ran alongside the property, made it feel like my very own *Little House on the Prairie*.

I loved living in that country house (as I still like to think of it), running around the property, surrounded by nature. Along with the usual suspects of dogs and cats, we also had horses, ducks, and even a mating pair of peacocks that my mother named Mr. and Mrs. Peabody. In our house every animal was given a proper name—at one point we had 60 goats and dozens of chickens that all had their own names! I think it was my mom's way of showing respect and acknowledging that animals were very much part of the family.

As it turned out, Mr. Peabody was quite mean. He would walk around the yard with a bit of a scowl (if that's possible for a bird), chasing and pecking at my friends and me. I don't know how my mom didn't see this as dangerous, as he had some seriously combative-looking spurs on the back of his legs!

Aside from his cantankerous disposition, Mr. Peabody had a beautiful display of feathers that he'd often show off to attract Mrs. Peabody's attention. It was like a lion's mane, giving him his strength. Every fall, when he naturally shed his feathers, it almost seemed like he would lose his mojo and mope around the yard, looking dejected.

But Mr. Peabody's loss was my gain, for each fall I would run about gathering up his dropped feathers so I could turn around and sell them at the corner store for \$1 each. Considering this was the late seventies—with the flamboyant disco era in full swing and the Bee Gees on constant rotation—it's not surprising that they sold like wildfire.

Although there was a part of me that envied my friends who received a weekly allowance, my parents (along with the help of Mr. Peabody) succeeded in teaching me at a very young age that money is not gifted, but rather earned. With landslide earnings of almost \$80 to stash away in my pocket that first day out, I felt a wave of excitement and independence wash over me—my entrepreneurial roots were planted!

Roots Run Deep

Looking back to the major influencers of my early entrepreneurial spirit, it's clear to see that the roots run deep. Besides my parents, my grandpa Hanson was one of those influences. He was by far one of the most creative people in my life—a “nutty professor” of sorts. You could always find him in his converted garage behind his house, surrounded by every kind of random object and contraption (a.k.a. junk). As a kid, it was the coolest thing in the world to join him in his routine junk treasure hunts at the local thrift store or garage sale.

Although grandpa Hanson spent the bulk of his career in the accounting industry, a rebel streak often surfaced in some very unconventional and varied ways. For instance, he was always engineering that garage full of junk to create something interesting, like a self-driving three-wheel bicycle (complete with an American flag and an accompanying stream of marching music) or his own makeshift solar panels that he precariously mounted on the roof, which never really worked.

His love of unique mechanical contraptions extended to later in life when, as a World War II veteran, he purchased and refurbished a vintage fire truck so he could show it off in all of the local veteran's parades. As you'll discover later, his owning this fire truck would prove to be rather ironic in the context of my life story.

About 25 years into his career my grandfather flexed his entrepreneurial muscles, leaving accounting to buy a small building where he started a mailing business in Fresno, California; which in turn influenced my dad's own career path.

As young newlyweds, both my mom and dad dropped out of college to start a new life together on the Central Coast of California. They both wanted to do anything to get out of the Fresno heat. Driven to provide for his new family, my dad tried anything he could to earn money and make ends meet. Like his father, he started a business in the ever-so-glamorous field of addressing junk mail. One weekend on a trip back to the Central Valley my Grandfather convinced my dad to take several rolls of carpet back with him to try to sell in his refurbished bus barn. This effort eventually led to success and, after many years of hard work, my dad has a thriving retail floor-covering business.

Because his business was literally next door to our house, my dad was constantly working. He was always on the move, building something new, making improvements here or there and fixing things around our property. The thing I remember most is that he was always eager to teach me new things and encouraged me to get me involved in whatever he was doing. I don't think I remember him ever sitting on the couch and just relaxing!

Interestingly, my mom was similar—she was a hard worker and was always building and fixing things—yet at the same time, she was completely opposite from my dad. She is the most elegant, talented, problem-solver I know.

While my mom didn't “work” outside the home during the first seven years of my life, she certainly wasn't spending any time on the couch either. In fact, she was responsible (for the most part) for building—not contracting out, but actually building—the second story of our modest home and a barn at the back of our

two-acre lot. Besides her over-the-top projects, my mom supported my dad in the business, raised me, and was also very involved in our community church choir and other performing arts, like community theater.

All of these activities gave me a profound respect for her and helped me to grow up as a fiercely independent and resourceful child. No Barbie Dolls for me; my days were filled with Tonka trucks, unconventional pets, and anything else resourceful and “non-girly.”

In the end, my parents’ marriage wasn’t successful—another life event to which I attribute my fierce independence. I’m not quite sure why my parents married, as they were so completely different from each other. After eight years of giving it a go—most of which was spent bitterly and openly fighting—they filed for divorce. I always remember thinking that I never wanted to be in that position, but that *was* indeed the position I would be in 23 years later.

Despite the battle, I still feel lucky. At one point, when my mother moved us three hours away, my dad would drive six hours round-trip just so he could spend time with me for his “every other weekend” rights. He would sometimes even drive down just to see me on random Saturdays if he wasn’t able to spend the entire weekend with me. This was without fail for two years!

One thing was certain: I had two parents who loved me dearly and continued to fight over custody until the day I was legally able to make my own decision. Not all parents, especially dads, would fight so hard to spend time with their daughters. By showing me that they loved me unconditionally, my parents instilled in me a strong sense of self and, by making me work for everything I received, helped me become confident in my abilities rather than developing a sense of entitlement. This combination has given me a true sense of self-worth, which has gotten me through some extremely difficult times.

New Beginnings

My mom was, and still is, brave! When my parents divorced, my mom (at age 30) dove headfirst into a new career and built a new life for herself. Heading back to school, she joined a specialized two-year program for Exotic Animal Training and Management in Moorpark, California.

After graduating and accepting a position as the manager of the Atascadero Zoo, my mom moved us back to the Central Coast. Shortly after moving back she began attending a local church and met Steve McConnell, who was a warden at the local youth prison. Soon thereafter they began dating and quickly married. Little did I know, within that very same year, my dad would also meet and marry the next love of his life, Susan Davis, who he had met at his own church.

Although I grew up as an only child for the first nine years of my life, that all was about to change! With my parents’ new marriages came births and adoptions, and I gained eight new brothers and sisters over the course of three years. This time marked the start of an entirely new and impactful phase of my life—one filled with new stepparents, new siblings, and ... *tigers*.

Yes, We Had Tigers!

While I was a latchkey kid in third and fourth grade, I was a zoo kid in fifth and sixth grade. Every day after school I took the bus to the zoo to help my mom with her afternoon duties, including caring for all the animals. It was amazing!

The pinnacle of my adventures at the zoo was when the resident male and female tigers bred and gave birth to two adorable baby tiger cubs. To the zoo, and my mother's, dismay, the mother tiger rejected her cubs soon after giving birth (perhaps she was perturbed that she was being held in captivity—can't say I blame her!) As the manager of the zoo, my mom had no choice other than to bring the two cubs home to bottle-feed them for several months.

I feel beyond lucky to have had this experience, and I cherish the memories of having two tiger cubs run around my mom's five acre property. Can you imagine the conversations I had at school? "Would you like to come over this afternoon and see my two baby tigers?"

Getting down and dirty working at the zoo and taking care of the animals helped me shed any sense of false pride at a very early age. Diving in and doing whatever was needed deeply influenced how I moved through the world. Even now, if someone comes into Hera Hub and asks me what I do, I often respond with sassy good humor, "I'm the janitor. I scrub the toilets." Truth be told, I don't mind getting my hands dirty with the best of them!

Exploring The World

As a young adult working in my father's business, I found I had a knack for sales and creativity. The logic of business just clicked with me from an early age. Although I was involved in my high school's business club (DECA), I wasn't a very dedicated student. In fact, I earned mostly Cs throughout my young academic life. Apparently, I was far too interested in boys than class! One of those boys was Ryan Ripley, a handsome young man who was 4-years older than me. He worked for the local fire department and lived just down the street. We dated my junior and senior year, but we broke up right after high school because I felt I needed to experience other relationships. I just seemed to have something for fire trucks, as you will see again at another critical juncture in my life.

Not having bachelor's degrees themselves, my parents never pushed me to go to college. In fact, my dad hated school; he found it impractical and a waste of time. Because of this, he gave me a choice: he would either pay for college or I could take the same chunk of money and use it to start my own business or put a down payment on a home. Since I realized I wasn't savvy enough to invest in a home or start my own business, I decided it was wiser to continue my education.

Since my GPA wasn't adequate to get into a decent college, I decided to attend the local community college for two years with the goal of transferring to a four-year school. I thrived in this new environment, and I was able

to improve my grades and focus on the subjects I enjoyed. Much to my delight, my grades earned me entrance into a well-respected private school, the University of San Diego (USD).

One of my weakest subjects at USD was foreign languages. I was able to get around my foreign-language requirement in high school, but the college requirement was looming over me. I couldn't pass Spanish to save my life!

Miraculously, I was able to convince my dad to allow me to do my language requirement in Spain through a study-abroad program (I promised to pay him back, which I did.) This three-month experience was to be one of my defining moments as a young adult, teaching me just as much (if not more) about myself than the Spanish language.

I immersed myself in the Spanish culture for two months, and then I traveled around Western Europe for an additional month. Not knowing a single soul when I arrived in Spain, I was lucky enough to meet a number of great girls from all over the United States, including Shawna.

Shawna and I traveled through Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and France together for three adventurous, laughter-filled weeks. When the time came for her to return home, I was faced with being abroad one more week ... solo. At 20 years old—having never ventured outside the United States on my own before—this was where the “rubber really met the road”!

Without sharing the situation with my parents, I decided to go it alone. The day that Shawna left Paris to return back to the U.S., I put my Eurail pass to good use and hopped on a night train to Munich, Germany. I remember the whirring sound of the tracks and the rocking of the train as I slipped in and out of sleep, my young mind ever wary of the luggage thieves I had been warned about.

I arrived in Munich the next morning without incident and set off to explore the city. I had no idea that this day would turn into my defining “adult” moment. After walking around for a few hours, I found an open area with multiple picnic tables. A beautiful woman approached me and asked if I would like to order a beer. The question startled me a bit as it was about 11am. Apparently I had landed square in the middle of a beer garden. I did what any 20 year-old American would do and said “Ja! Na sicher!”

As I sat there sipping my pint, I remember feeling so free! (This was well before I had a cell phone or even email) “*No one* knows where I am. I'm an adult—I have arrived!” I drifted around the city for the day, slightly tipsy, exhilarated by my new found freedom.

As it turns out, I'm the only one in my family—out of eight brothers and sisters and both my parents—to earn a bachelor's degree. My undergraduate experiences helped me discover that I really loved school, and I ended up graduating from the University of San Diego with honors. And while my parents did not emphasize going to college, I knew they were proud.

Chapter 2 - Reinvention

Recently, as I made my way through the checkout line in a grocery store, I heard an all-not-too-uncommon exclamation from behind me: “Wow, those are some pretty *crazy* scars you have there! I hope you don’t mind me asking, but ... what happened?”

When I turned around, I saw an incredulous look on the face of the man behind me, just waiting for my response. “Well, it is pretty *crazy*, but I used to skydive and about 15 years ago, during a jump, my parachute didn’t open. Luckily, I lived to tell the tale, but now I have these scars to remind me—never jump out of a perfectly good airplane again!”

A few seconds passed by and I could see that he was trying to register what I had just said. All the man could get out was, “Wow. Really? ... That’s really scary.”

After a few more seconds of letting him squirm, I decided to let him off the hook. So, I followed up with a smile and said, “No, not really. Just joking! I was in a car accident and got hit by a fire truck. (Yes, a *fire truck*.)” As if this was any less incredible ... however, it was the truth all the same.

Although I was *just* in a car accident, the deep scars and the reminders they carry are very real and powerful. Besides having titanium plates in my face, rods in my left arm and leg, and pins in my hips, scars are visible on my pretty much every extremity of my body. Every one of these scars is important to me, as they are reminders of how far I’ve come in life. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger!

How I Proudly Earned These Scars...

When I graduated from college in 1995 the economy was not at its peak. I had a challenging time finding a decent job within San Diego. Because of this, I ended up taking work and living in Los Angeles. At the time, I was madly in love with a young man I had met in college, Brian Taylor. Luckily, Brian was able to transfer to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) to finish out his arts degree while I worked. I was happy!

Brian and I headed back down to San Diego one weekend. I dropped him off to see his family and I headed to the beach to spend the rest of the weekend with girlfriends I’d lived with while I was back at community college. I was so excited to see them, as we hadn’t all been together in over three years!

I remember cruising along in my Volkswagen Jetta as the cool ocean air streamed in my window, Bob Marley pumped out the speakers, and the excitement of going to see my girls coursed through my body. I was grooving and my Saturday night was on!

As I approached the end of Interstate 8, right as it meets Sunset Cliffs, I looked ahead at the traffic light to see if I had the “green”. I thought, “Wow, I never get a green light at the end of the 8!” This light is notorious for taking what feels like an eternity to turn from red to green.

And that’s the last thing I remember...

What happened next changed my life forever. I never saw or heard the fire truck coming. The next thing I remember is waking up 24 hours later in the hospital.

As I later learned, the fire truck had run the red light and smashed into the front driver’s side corner of my car as I sailed through the intersection. Again, it was my “lucky day”, and apparently, they hadn’t seen me either. Not really a fair fight!

It took first responders close to an hour to use a crane to separate the fire truck from the carnage that was my car. Only then could they use the Jaws of Life, opening the top of my car like an oversized tuna can. In all, it took two hours to extract me from my car. I was immediately rushed by helicopter to the nearest hospital.

Although, thankfully, I was in shock and don’t have a single recollection of what happened during or after the accident. My girlfriend’s, who had found their way to the hospital by calling the Highway Patrol after I was hours late to meet them, later told me that I was very alert in the emergency room when they arrived. Apparently I complained about the board behind my back and wanted to make sure someone took out my contacts. I was in such extreme shock that I clearly had no idea what was going on. The fact was, much of the left side of my body was crushed... getting my contacts out should have been the least of my worries!

Twelve hours of surgery later, I finally woke up to a group of what looked like a dozen or more doctors, nurses, and medical students standing around me. Apparently, I had been admitted into a teaching hospital and I was the case study of the week.

When my dad arrived at the hospital the next morning the doctors gave him the run-down of the damage and surgeries they had completed so far. They also shared their concern with the way my legs and pelvis had broken and thus the likelihood I may not be able to run again. This came as a particular shock to my dad, as I had developed a fairly strong passion for running during college—one that he now shared with me. We both had completed several marathons. I guess the information was just too much for him. He literally blacked out for a few moments.

I spent approximately two weeks at UCSD Hospital starting the long process of repair and recovery, and let me tell you, there was a lot of me to fix. I broke well over 20 bones in my arms, legs and face. They had to put titanium plates throughout my cheekbones, forehead, and palate. Many of my teeth were broken or knocked out completely, and the bridge of my nose was flattened. Ultimately, this area was rebuilt three times with bone taken from my hip. Before they could even get to these reconstructive surgeries, I had to undergo immediate surgery to relieve the pressure that the head injuries had placed on my brain. I also had a trachea tube for a

week, making it impossible for me to speak. As a result, I resorted to writing notes in a notebook in order to communicate. Thinking back, I must have looked like Frankenstein's Bride!

I think the most powerful part of this experience was the new perspective that I, as well as everyone around me, gained. It's going to sound crazy, but to have the opportunity to simply appreciate life was worth all the pain and suffering (made a bit easier thanks to Morphine).

The support and outpouring of love I received from my family and friends during this time touched me to my core.

I think each one of us, in our own way, came to terms with the importance of living every day to the fullest, taking risks and following our hearts. Anything less than living our true life's purpose—to its fullest potential—was simply not good enough anymore.

Your time is limited; so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma—which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition - Steve Jobs

Learning To Fly Again

After a month in the hospital, I began the painful, arduous, journey of rehabilitation. I spent several months in a wheelchair, working as hard as I could on a daily basis to rebuild my strength and muscle memory so I could walk again.

After I was transferred to Daniel Friedman Rehabilitation Hospital in Los Angeles, I received a phone call one day in my room. On the other end, I heard a young man explaining who he was and asking me how I was doing. It was a call from one of the paramedics who had helped me at the scene of my car accident. My situation had impacted him so deeply that I had remained on his mind, and he somehow managed to track me down. He simply asked, "I just wanted to make sure you're okay." It took me a moment to process who this person was and why he was checking on me. After our brief conversation, I never saw or heard from him again, and yet it was through this conversation that I was conscious through the entire rescue. He said that I knew my name, my Social Security number, and where I was going that night. I was shocked (pun intended) by this news. Amazing how our body and mind can suppress!

Some months after my accident, I was handed all the documents that accompanied my case. In the box was a VHS tape labeled with the date of my accident - 5/4/1996. It was apparently standard for first responders to take video footage of a rescue—I'm assuming for training or liability purposes. I was home alone one night when I curiously got the best of me. I decided to pop in the tape. I immediately saw myself lying trapped in what was barely identifiable as my car. As I watched the surreal images flash before me, I could hear myself saying in a pained voice, "Somebody help me... Please, somebody help me." The second I saw and heard all of this, the experience and memory of the accident came powerfully flooding back. I couldn't believe it. It was like a

file folder that had been shoved down into the recesses of my memory had been brought back up front and forward.

I immediately turned the video off, knowing in my heart that I didn't need (or want) to see this. I now realize how lucky I was that I was in shock after the accident, since the trauma I experienced could have had long-term psychological effects ... but it didn't. Thankfully, I'm not afraid to drive, I'm not afraid of fire trucks (although I do get out of their way when I see them coming!), and I haven't suffered from any form of posttraumatic stress.

Now I look fondly on my scars. They are here to remind me—every single day—how lucky I am to be here, alive and able to do something amazing with my life. I also believe that this “attitude of gratitude” was what helped me heal and get back on track so quickly.

Run, Felena, Run!

I'm proud to say, despite my doctors' initial nay saying, I am once again a runner! It took quite some time, as I literally had to learn how to walk again. I vividly remember one of my first attempts to walk. My family took me to the beach and rented a beach wheelchair from the Department of Parks and Recreation. I remember how fantastic it felt to get out of my regular wheelchair and into this dune buggy contraption, with my family by my side. My Grandma Hanson was even along for the outing, making it extra special.

Inspired by being out on the beach, surrounded by the people I loved, I decided it was time to attempt my first steps. It took me what seemed like forever to walk what was the equivalent of a block. Although I was frustrated, I just kept thinking, “I can walk. This is going to work. I am going to *make this work*.” I was determined—with each new step, my excitement grew.

I am happy and proud to say that, although my completion time went from three hours forty-five minutes to four hours twenty minutes, I was proud to be able to complete a full marathon with my dad about ten years after my accident. I now run with my dogs every morning—one of my favorite ways to get exercise and take time to mentally focus in on my day.

Back To Life

It was a full six months until I returned to Los Angeles and was able to go back to work. And what a relief that was, as work has always been important to me. I can thank both my parents and their incredible work ethic for this.

In fact, when I woke up in the hospital after my accident, I apparently wrote in my notebook, asking someone to call my employer, Evans Furniture. One of my first instincts was to let them know that I wasn't going to work that day, to let them know what had happened, and to extend my apology. Of course, my family and friends responded with an incredulous, “Are you kidding us?”

Remarkably, six months after the accident, Evans Furniture once again gave me an inside sales job. What a company! I felt really blessed that they gave me an opportunity to come back. The position wasn't in the same location; however, it worked out really well. Within a short period of time, I was promoted to outside sales, which I enjoyed tremendously. That job was really my first taste of real collaboration and relationship building.

My Knight in Shining Armor?

Meanwhile, a lot had been developing in my personal life as well. After three years together, I married my boyfriend, Brian, who had faithfully stayed by my side during my recovery process. It was remarkable for a man so young to have the wherewithal to stay with me through the events of the accident and my recovery. Brian visited me on a daily basis throughout the entire process. He even took the summer off from UCLA and moved home with me to Arroyo Grande in order to take me to all my physical therapy appointments.

And I can tell you, I wasn't pretty—I basically looked like a smashed blueberry for a while. I was missing teeth, I had a bolt of sorts coming out of my head, and I had scars and bruises covering the majority of my body. Again, I couldn't get over how absolutely incredible it was for a young man, only 20 years old, to stick with me through all of this.

Although Brian and I had talked about the possibility of getting married, my mind wasn't focused on it. I really just wanted to get my life back to normal. I was always the one amongst my friends who would say, "I'm never going to get married. I'm going to travel the world and live adventurously!" However, when he continued to mention the idea, I couldn't help but think, "How could I *not* marry this guy?"

So, when Brian eventually did propose to me during a weekend cruise to Mexico, I knew that I couldn't say "no." Of course, it didn't hurt that his proposal was like a scene out of the movie *Titanic*—before the ship sank of course. We were at the bow of the boat—on New Year's Eve, no less—chatting and drinking champagne. When the clock struck midnight, Brian gave me a huge kiss, slipped a ring on my finger and asked, "Will you marry me?" I just started bawling and said, "Yes." I remember thinking to myself, "If he behaved this amazingly under the horrible circumstances, he's a keeper...*right?*"

Wrong.

At first, Brian and I had a very loving relationship. He even had a wonderful family that I loved dearly. However, none of that could overcome the fact that Brian grew into a struggling artist who ultimately turned to binge drinking and beyond.

Brian always described a void he had inside of him that he was trying to fill. Because of this, he ended up having issues with depression. He's a true artist and a very idealistic and very emotional—*very* different than me. I'm very black-and-white and levelheaded, and he was very emotional. Obviously, deep emotions makes for good art, but it can be seriously challenging in a marriage and quite frankly, I was too young to know this or figure it out at the time. Instead, I was a bit blinded by love and the Florence Nightingale effect.

Not Meant To Be...

At one point Brian and I talked about having children; however, I never quite felt ready. So, when I “accidentally” got pregnant, I couldn’t ignore the nagging voice in the back of my mind: “Will this settle him [Brian] down? Will it get him to drink less and smoke less weed, and become a responsible adult?” Despite these thoughts, Brian and I became swept up in the excitement of it all. We were going to have a *baby!*

So we set up our first doctor’s appointment, full of excitement and anticipation. The day of the appointment came. I can still remember how it felt, sitting in the examination room, listening to the doctor say, “I’m really sorry to have to tell you this, but there isn’t a heartbeat.”

What?

Brian and I were catapulted into an instant state of numbed shock. The doctor was able to show us the little shadowy image of our baby inside of me, but there wasn’t a heartbeat. Within two days I went through the emotionally painful process of having it removed. Needless to say, that experience was like none other—I felt a lot of sadness for the physical and emotional loss, but also, ultimately, I felt (dare I say) a bit of relief. At this point, I was able to come to terms with how I honestly felt about the entire possibility of having a baby with Brian. I knew deep down in my being that he wasn’t the man I wanted to have children with. Being completely honest, I wasn’t even sure that I wanted to have children at all.

You see, I think there are other ways to obtain the type of fulfillment that comes along with birthing a child. Seeing my mother adopt four kids helped me see this. I personally feel that I am better suited to give my time and energy to many, instead of just one or two. I’ve found that teaching and mentoring young women fulfills this part of me.

With the miscarriage behind us, our marriage came to an unceremonious halt six years in. Brian continued to struggle with each failing business endeavor, accompanied by his *cheating* on me ... not once, but *twice*. Supporting him in his struggle to gain a professional footing was one thing, but infidelity was where I drew the line. To add insult to injury, one of his cheating episodes involved a Mexican prostitute while on a drinking binge in Tijuana—I was irate! Although I agreed to try and work things out with him after he showed signs that he was a “changed man,” his second romp in the hay with another woman was the literal “straw” that broke the marriage’s back. I knew at that moment that I was done and our 10-year relationship was over.

This entire experience and the strength it took to bring it to a close was one of the defining moments of my personal reinvention. I began writing a book called *Thirty Reasons Not to Marry Before Thirty*. I was divorced at 30 while all of my girlfriends wisely put off marriage until after 30. They were the smart ones!

Lucky Breaks And... Layoffs

My personal life aside, there is also a very real—and at times raw—professional aspect to my reinvention. It’s what I like to call my second “lucky” phase of life. It all started about two years out of school, when my first

outside sales job with Evans Furniture afforded me the opportunity to start networking. It was at one of these business-networking events that I came upon my first opportunity to move into marketing.

During the course of a few networking lunches, I came to know a woman who was leaving her job at a high-tech recruiting firm. This was during the late 90s, and her job with the firm involved various aspects of marketing coordination. It was a hot market at the time, so she was moving on to start her own business. As we sat down to lunch one day, she reached out to me and said, “As you know, I’m leaving the firm and I’d like to recommend you for the job.” I was elated—this was my lucky break! I was finally going to step into marketing, which is what I had always wanted to do.

After interviewing and landing the job, I spent my time diving into the world of HTML and general marketing practices. It was a small firm with about ten recruiters, but I was learning a lot and it felt accomplished.

One day, only nine months into the position, my boss (the owner) called me into his office to tell me he had sold the company. When he told me I was being laid off, I immediately started tearing up. This was the first and only time I ever cried in an employer’s office. This was my first break into marketing and here I was being cast aside. Furthermore, I had recently purchased a house was also financially supporting Brian’s venture to launch a surfboard manufacturing and apparel company.

I soon realized that the sale of the company was the sole owner’s meal ticket. He was done with the business and excited to sell. I, on the other hand, was devastated. I needed to find another J-O-B quickly!

Breast Cancer Scare

It was about this time that I’d recovered from what I thought would be my last surgery—a nerve transplant from the back of my leg to my left arm, to fill a quarter-millimeter gap in my radial nerve (which allows your wrist to flex up and down). The nerve had severed when my arm broke. I had to wait almost two years for the insurance company to approve the surgery. The claims department initially kicked it back as they said it was not “necessary.”

With this very tricky procedure behind me I could focus on the task at hand—finding work. It was less than two weeks later that Brian noticed a lump in my left breast. It was astonishing that I hadn’t felt it before, as it was well over the size of a golf ball. It’s not like I had big boobs and it was hiding in the depths!

Of course your mind goes to the worst... could this be cancerous? After all of this, could I really have breast cancer? I was almost numb to the possibility.

I made yet another doctor appointment to have the mass biopsied. The three days I waited for the results seemed like an eternity. I couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t eat. I remember thinking, “How could God get me all this way and then let this happen?” Well, it didn’t happen. The tumor was found to be benign and I quickly had it removed. With that behind me, I returned to the task of finding a J-O-B.

First Taste of Collaboration

After three months of searching I was able to land a good job at a full-service marketing agency. Part of the firm created marketing collateral like brochures, menus, and other printed materials. The other arm of the firm worked with promotional marketing items like pens, water bottles, and anything branded. They also started to move into web development work, creating company websites and online stores. We worked with clients such as DIRECTV Sports, Sun America, Fox News Channel, and Epson.

Although I started out as an Account Coordinator, I quickly moved up to an Account Director position, where I was making about \$80,000 a year. My position grew into a role where I helped manage collaboration projects between companies like DIRECTV Sports and large retail merchandisers.

Being in my mid-20s I thought I had died and gone to heaven! I was working with large, well-known companies, and I was earning more money than I ever imagined possible at my age. I even had my own assistant! I was truly at the height of feeling professionally “lucky.”

In usual form, I decided that I didn’t have enough to do, so I pursued my MBA. I went through two years of night school at California State University, Dominguez Hills, with the long-term vision of moving up the corporate ladder.

Right around this time, I also started seeing trouble brewing at the firm. It was owned and run by two cousins and a third partner, Roger, who made it his business to stop by my office daily and ask me when I was going to run away with him to Turks and Caicos. We were both married but that certainly didn’t stop his advances. This ritual began to wear on me, but at the time I had no idea what to do. I was the only female at this level in the company and I felt my job would be at stake if I said anything.

The company lost a few key accounts and the cousins started having visible arguments about the business, making it clear that things were not going well for the company. Ultimately—you guessed it—they closed the business and I was *laid off* yet again!

Brian and I had been talking for a while about the possibility of moving back to San Diego, so I decided to focus on completing my MBA by finishing all of the 22 remaining credits in one semester. I also worked as a teaching assistant and took on other paid research work to make ends meet.

With diploma in hand we quickly sold our house and got the heck out of Los Angeles. It was fun in my early twenties but the traffic and the overall fast-pace was wearing on both of us. As was reminiscent to my prior job search in San Diego, my prospects were meager. It was 2001 and the economy was wounded. I started reaching out to my San Diego network, hoping my recent MBA would help me land a job that would take my career to the next level. I was certainly not expecting what came next...

My Stint With The Mexican Mafia

While chatting with my dad over the phone one day, he said, “You know Todd, the pastor’s son? Well, he’s now also living in San Diego and I heard he’s doing pretty well. You should connect with him.”

It’s funny how memories can come flooding back at the mere mention of a name. I vividly remember Todd from my childhood. He was about five years older than me. I can still picture him in all of his “goth” glory—he was one of the “cool kids” in my childhood book. I remember my inner dialogue even now as an adult: “Oh my gosh, I’m going to call Todd Pitcher... *wow!*”

As it turned out, Todd was working for an investment firm in the elegant Symphony Towers building, located in downtown San Diego. Walking into his offices on the 20th floor of the building, I was immediately enveloped by the richness of it all—corner offices were outfitted with mahogany furniture and 360-degree views of the San Diego Bay. It was truly breathtaking.

I spent some time getting up to speed on Todd’s career and family life, when the founder of the company stopped by to introduce himself. After a few minutes of pleasantries and general introductory chit-chat he said, “So, you have some marketing experience... some of our clients are high-net-worth individuals who need marketing for their companies. My friend’s cousin’s kid is a graphic designer and I was thinking of bringing him onto the team. How would you like to spearhead our new marketing division?”

Had my “lucky” streak returned?

“... Oh, and by the way, we’re going to pay you under the table.” Okay, well, perhaps he didn’t immediately put that part in that direct terminology, but you get the idea. Having grown up in a small business environment, I was not a complete stranger to people being paid under the table (shhh ... don’t tell the IRS.) I was still a little hesitant, but in the end, having been unemployed for a eight months won out.

I started off with a salary of \$40,000 a year. My earnings had literally been cut in half, but it’s also important to remember that this was 2001, right after the dot-com crash, and things were going a little haywire in the market.

I really needed a job. And it was an interesting opportunity to spearhead a marketing division. I thought, “Why not? I’m going to give this a go.” So I got my fancy corner office with a mahogany desk (cool!) and started working with the graphic design team to put together programs and other collateral.

Then September 11th happened. I vividly remember the call from my neighbor, as I was getting ready to head out the front door, telling me to turn on the television. I sat there watching the events of the morning in utter disbelief. It was for me, as it was for many others, an important reminder of how lucky we are to be alive.

Longing To Give Back

When we finally did return to work two days later, everyone came back with a renewed sense of humanity, wanting to pitch in and help the affected families in some way. As a result, the CEO asked the newly formed “marketing division” to put together an event, which we ended up naming the “Proud to Be an American Expo.”

The goal was to quickly raise money for the families and victims of this tragedy. However, underlying all of this was a sense of “hey, there’s a way to profit from this” from the executive team. This gave me an uneasy feeling, but I tried not to pay too much attention to it. This was my chance to make a difference!

The entire team (or so I thought) and I put our best efforts forward to plan and produce a successful event. At first it appeared everything was moving along exceptionally well. One of our team members (Art), who was responsible for obtaining sponsorships, announced 12 weeks before the event that he had secured a large, well-known corporate donor, Gateway Computers, who pledged \$50,000. With that one “big-name” backer and a handful of other small sponsors, we had what we needed to plan and hold a successful event. At this juncture we began engaging vendors, hiring musicians, and even secured a local skateboard company to set up a half-pipe. This event was really going to be something!

A few days before the actual event, it came to light that the large corporate sponsor we were banking on was not giving us the \$50,000. When Art was pressed for details and for the money, he kept stalling, saying the sponsorship was going through the proper “channels”. Whatever his motive for lying, it became evident that the sponsor never intended to provide any large-scale backing whatsoever.

Having never received the money, we were forced to go ahead with the event with only small sums of money backing us to cover all of the hard costs. We were definitely operating at a loss at this point. Even with this, we pressed on and delivered the event, and the participants were none the wiser. This was, however, the beginning of the end.

We all knew the ship was going down. Besides this latest debacle, we had already started to see less frequent paychecks and could sense there were some other unsavory things going on in the business. The day after the event was over, the two graphic designers and I promptly cut our losses and quit.

Soon after leaving the company, I learned that the owner was somehow tied to members of the Mexican Mafia, managing the investments of some of the individuals high up in the organization in Mexico City. I don’t know the exact details, but the rumors were he was embezzling money from them. This, along with who knows what other shady dealings, ultimately landed him in jail for a very long time. So this was what I like to call “my six-month stint working for the Mexican Mafia!”

Getting A Real Job

After that experience (as you can imagine), I put all of my focus on looking for and securing a credible, legitimate job. I initially landed an inside marketing position with a biotech firm. However, I kept looking, since the position wasn’t a great long-term fit for me.

Soon thereafter, I came across a Director of Marketing position for a company called Infogate. It was a long shot, but luckily they were looking for a couple of things that I could offer: 1) client interfacing marketing experience, and 2) an MBA. I interviewed with Cliff Boro, the CEO and a well-known entrepreneur in San Diego, and got the job. What a relief. I guess that MBA was finally paying off!

I was excited at the opportunity to work at Infogate, as they were a company ahead of their time. When I joined the startup, they were in the process of transitioning from a free, ad-supported model for their technical resources to a paid subscription model. The system worked similarly to modern-day Google Alerts. When specific keywords were entered into the system, it would pull from the 2,000 or so news sources to generate and deliver a comprehensive stream of the latest industry-specific information to one's desktop, via a TV-style ticker. This provided our clients with an extremely effective way to follow their competition, along with staying up to date on breaking news in their industry. This allowed our partners, like CNN, the LA Times, and USA Today to better monetize their web traffic.

The good news was that Infogate was backed by a good amount of venture capital. However, the bad news was the company's burn rate (the rate at which they were spending that capital) was extremely high—this “show” wasn't going to go on much longer. They either needed to raise more money—above the \$30 million they had already raised—or sell. Unfortunately, I wasn't surprised when I did, in fact, start to hear the murmurs throughout the office. I worked there just under two years when America Online (AOL) bought the company, officially and squarely landing me in *layoff number three* by age 30! (Of course not counting the mafia incident.)

The Pinnacle Of Reinvention

At this point, I reached the peak of my reinvention—it was time to control my own destiny from start to finish. I had a couple options at this point. I could find another J-O-B (which to me seemed like a death sentence), or I could create my own business. Going back to work for another company where I had no control over how they chose to do business, how or to whom they sold their products, how they raised money, or what direction they chose to take their business in was no longer an option. From this point, moving forward, I was going to be in the driver's seat!

After having been the breadwinner for my married life, I felt it was my turn to follow in my father's footsteps. Plus, San Diego is small businesses town. I felt my chance of success was just as high (if not higher) creating my own J-O-B than it would be going to work for another company that could be bought, sold, or downsized. Now I would be creating my own world, my own environment, my own experience.

There were many points throughout this endeavor when I felt like I was in over my head, but my experience and recent education gave me the confidence to take the “fake it 'til you make it” attitude—an attitude I have routinely applied throughout my career. My mantra is, “Say *yes* and Google it!”

A Lucky Life...

Throughout my 20s I went about life, making my way along the classic corporate path, always thinking that I would somehow get that little nudge or acquire that little bit of additional education that would lead to getting paid more and “success.” Unfortunately, I didn't learn these skills in school or at home, nor did I have any

effective role models along the way to help me navigate corporate culture. As a result, I never learned how to negotiate or how to fight to get ahead.

Although I never worked for a monolithic *corporation*, I've certainly experienced my fair share of *corporate culture* and have been privy to the “herd” or “sheep” mentality that runs rampant. I can still vividly recall what it felt like to experience the injustice of people being treated unfairly and, more specifically, seeing women not getting raises or promotions as readily as men.

One of those vivid memories involved a male Account Manager who was a counterpart of mine at the marketing agency where I worked. One day he walked into the co-founder's office and stated, straight out, “I want your job.” As I found out through a conversation with him later, the co-founder wasn't at all taken aback. In fact, he had responded with a supportive, “I respect that!” To top that off, he was given a raise because he had the moxie to step up and ask how he could continue to climb the ladder. This *never* would have occurred to me!

Experiences like this, along with many others, continually made me feel like I was just part of the herd mentality, caught up in the wheelhouse of “getting ahead”. We learn young to follow the rules, do what we're told (so to speak), and constantly work towards receiving a stellar review so that we can get that “3 percent raise.” Why else do we work but to earn money, *right*? What about *passion*?

I don't know about you, but passion wasn't acknowledged or talked about while I was working in the corporate world, and frankly, it's not really practical for many people. Who has the luxury to focus on passion when we all have obligations? Personally, I had spent most of my professional life, up until then, supporting my husband and all of his ventures. There wasn't time for me to really dive in and figure out what I was passionate about. I didn't hate what I was doing, but I certainly wasn't passionate about it.

That's why, to this day, I say I feel lucky—and I truly mean I feel lucky—that I was literally shoved off the J-O-B cliff and given no other choice but to take control of my own professional destiny. In fact, I don't feel that people who continually work to climb the proverbial “ladder of success” are as lucky!

Yes, that's what I said—people who are climbing the ladder to success aren't as *lucky*, and here's why.

Buying into the concept that success is defined by advancing in a company, getting a new car and a bigger house, taking a vacation, and buying more “stuff” is, in my humble opinion, a trap that is easy to fall into. Our “more is better” culture is extremely pervasive in corporate America.

What I'm advocating is to think differently. Don't place such a high value on *stuff*. Instead, learn to live with less. Being an entrepreneur is the most liberating, amazing experience. Lucky for me, I didn't grow with much, so simplifying was not as difficult for me as it may be for others.

Why don't you give it a try?

Take a moment to step back from your life and visually rise above it, floating over all of the “stuff” that collectively makes up your day-to-day existence. Now, try to look at it from a different perspective: one that asks, “Do I truly need all of this? What’s really going to make me happy?”

The truth, as countless studies have suggested, is that happiness doesn’t come from buying new things or making more money. In fact, a well-known study conducted by Dr. Ryan T. Howell, an associate professor of psychology at San Francisco State University (Howell & Howell 2008), revealed that after a person’s basic needs are met (i.e., food, shelter, etc.), the relationship between income and happiness is negligible. So, you may find, as I did, that the things that truly bring you happiness have nothing to do with money.

It’s true, going after your passion may result in your having to cut down on your consumption of “stuff”, and you may have to live with less and change your life in other ways, but that’s probably a good thing. And if you have children this is a unique opportunity to teach them these lessons from an early age.

More importantly, stepping off that treadmill and shifting your perspective towards being in control of your life choices, as I did, will put you well on your way towards controlling your own destiny. I can't blame anyone else for anything that's happened in my life—not my divorce, not my layoffs, not my car accident—nothing. I don't hold anyone but myself accountable for choices I've made or will make moving forward. This alone is incredibly empowering and liberating.

Chapter 3 - Liberation

Having experienced a hefty dose of bad leadership first-hand, I decided it was time to learn the “right” leadership style. With that, I launched myself into exploring several leadership programs offered in the San Diego community. Through my research I came to rest on a particular approach that really resonated with me: servant leadership.

Although servant leadership can be found in many religious texts, the philosophy itself transcends any particular religious tradition. In fact, it’s such an ancient philosophy that it is said to have existed long before the teachings of the Bible. For example, there are passages that relate to servant leadership in the *Tao Te Ching*, a classic Chinese text attributed to philosopher and poet Lao Tzu, who is believed to have lived in China sometime between 570 BCE and 490 BCE.

It was Robert K. Greenleaf who founded the modern servant leadership movement. In his essay, “The Servant Leader”, first published in 1970, he says:

“It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions ... The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature.”

He goes on to explain:

“The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?”

Healthier, wiser, freer ... this definitely resonated with me!

I immediately enrolled in a nine-month training program on servant leadership, hoping to define my leadership style as well as meet new people. I did indeed achieve both! This new perspective on leadership and working with people through a lens of “service” helped me tap back into my true spirit. I gained confidence, knowing I had the power to truly help others.

Using My Perspective

It was with this resolve and focus that I started my marketing-strategy consulting firm. I named my business “Perspective Marketing”, as I felt I could help small businesses see issues from an objective angle. Over an eight-year period, my niche emerged: helping small, service-based companies grow through relationship

marketing. Of course, I took a large pay cut. It took me several years to get too close to the salary I was earning in my last J-O-B, but it was worth it. I had freedom and was in control of my destiny.

For additional financial stability, I also decided to see if I could pick up a part-time teaching job. Through a series of connections back in my MBA program, Cal State University, Dominguez Hills offered me an adjunct teaching position in marketing for one of their online programs. Soon thereafter, I was fortunate enough to meet the Director of Education for the Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising (FIDM) at an event. After sharing a bit about my experience in Brian's surf apparel business, she asked if I would ever consider teaching. After a bit of contemplation I agreed! I taught a couple of Marketing and Entrepreneurship classes each quarter. The eight years I spent at FIDM provided the stability I needed to generate extra income and provided an extra boost while I launched my business. I especially enjoyed teaching young women at FIDM. It was as if all of the actions and steps I had taken up to that point were finally coming together and making sense.

Growing My Network

I quickly realized that “networking” - going to industry events and meeting potential clients and collaborators - was an important part of building a business. In 2006 I met a talented attorney from Texas, Linda Lattimore, just as she was in the early stages of launching a professional organization, Women's Global Network (WGN). WGN's mission was to build local business connections, while helping women in developing nations launch small businesses through micro-loans.

I liked Linda immediately. She had such a warm, welcoming way about her. I consider her one of my true mentors along my entrepreneurial path. (I will go into more detail on this in the next section of the book.)

A little over two years after launching WGN, Linda transitioned back to Texas for work. She asked me to take over the San Diego chapter, and although I was a little nervous about my ability to lead such a wonderful, accomplished group of women, I accepted the nomination! Over the next two years, running WGN gave me not only great servant leadership experience but also good visibility. It catapulted me into many new opportunities and build my confidence greatly.

My next adventure on this collaborative path arose out of my love for fashion. My affiliation with the Fashion Institute led me to launch a fashion networking organization and several non-profit projects, including a venture with the San Diego Visual Arts Network called “Art Meets Fashion.” This was a unique collaboration project, pairing visual artists and fashion designers throughout San Diego. In addition to the artist and designer duo, each team also included a documenter (photographer or videographer) and educator. The goal was to document the creative process between artist and designer. The educator would then take the learnings back into San Diego high schools in order to inspire teens to explore a career in the arts. The work was showcased at the San Diego International Airport from was also displayed at various galleries and boutiques. This successful and inspiring venture bolstered my drive to collaborate!

Incubating New Business Ideas

After leading WGN for two years, I had the opportunity to step into a temporary leadership position with Ladies Who Launch (LWL). I took over management of the local chapter in August 2009. This provided me with the opportunity to work with a new group of entrepreneurial women and with a national organization that had fairly

good brand recognition. I thoroughly enjoyed leading LWL's Incubator Intensive Workshops, which were equal parts inspiration, education, and accountability for six to eight female entrepreneurs. Over the course of the two years I had the pleasure of working with over 200 women in the launch of their business.

Taking this concept of collaboration to the next level, I decided to join forces with a local business woman, Michelle Bergquist, founder of Connected Women of Influence, to launch the "Business Women's Mega Mixer" in 2010. As a showcase of professional women's organizations, the Mega Mixer provided businesswomen throughout San Diego County with an opportunity to gain a broader professional perspective by cross-pollinating with hundreds of other like-minded women. What a success it was—the first event drew more than 25 organizations and 500 women, and raised thousands of dollars for the Women's History Museum.

It was at this point that I truly realized that I had reached my peak potential as a freelancing "jack of all trades". Although everything was going well, it was going in way too many directions. I finally realized that I was pretty burned out and needed to create a business that was bigger than myself—something I could scale!

*"Everyone that starts a business is a technician that suffers from an Entrepreneurship seizure. Small businesses do not work the way intended because the technician only works in the business and cannot also have the foresight to work on the business at the same time." Michael Gerber, *the E-Myth*.*

Hera Hub is Born!

Hera Hub really grew out of need. It was a need that I identified within myself and, as I was coming to realize, was a common plight for many entrepreneurial women. I had spent the last eight years working from home and, while it was convenient and cost-effective as a small, service-based business, it definitely had its downfalls. I was finding it too distracting and isolating to continue working from home. The laundry and dishes would nag at me, the dogs would whine to be taken on a run, and the doorbell would intermittently ring with a new delivery or someone trying to sell me something. *Anything* had the power to take my attention away from what I *needed* to be doing!

Privacy and the desire to appear professional were also major concerns. This daytime challenge was coupled with the struggle to find evening event space for my networking groups. Hotels and private rooms were always too expensive, and community centers and libraries were closing left and right. Then, one night in 2010, I was turned on to the concept of coworking while hosting a networking event at San Diego's first coworking space, the Hive Haus. The idea was hatched!

Over the next six months, I dove into market research and visited coworking spaces in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, in order to get a sense of what was out there. One thing became crystal clear... there was a gap in the market. Most of the spaces I visited were either messy and loud (sort of looked like fraternity houses) or cold and quiet. Neither of these environments spoke to my market or me. There was only one other female-focused workspace out there, and it was all the way in New York City.

Old White Men

When I first launched into securing the physical space for Hera Hub, little did I know that I was lining up for one of my biggest challenges—the commercial real estate process! Negotiating a lease was much more

complex and challenging than I had ever imagined. I had two strikes against me - new business and new concept. No one was willing to take a risk. To top off the experience, I was “patted on the head” by older men in this very traditional industry more times than I care to recall. I could almost see them thinking, “oh isn't that cute... these little ladies want their own space.”

I spent three months negotiating my first deal directly with a building owner who was interested in the coworking model. I figured that I could get by without a broker and just use a real estate attorney. That blew up in the 11th hour when he decided to launch his own coworking space—*after* I'd shared my extensive business plan and all my financials. Then history repeated itself (although this time I was armed with a broker) when negotiating my second deal. We made it to the point where I was in the process of obtaining a cashier's check for the deposit and first month's rent, only to have the building owner tell me that he had found a better fit for the space. Six months wasted!

I was devastated. I remember thinking, “Maybe it isn't meant to be, after all!”

As fate would have it, my third lease negotiation also got off to a rocky start. After submitting my proposal, I found out the building was in escrow. My heart sank. I couldn't keep this up much longer as I was already heavily marketing the concept to my community. Every day people were asking, “When are you opening?”

After waiting four weeks for the new owner to respond, we finally had a chance to meet. Much to my delight, they knew about the coworking model and had visited the Hive Haus. Finally, someone who “gets it!”

Just after beginning the negotiation process on an open ground-floor space (approximately 3,700 square feet) they received a another bid from an existing tenant in an adjacent suite. All I can remember is thinking, “Seriously? I'm doomed!”

To my relief, the building owners came back with a suggestion to look at a suite in the sister building. The space was more than 8,000 square feet, which they agreed could be split. With a little vision, I sectioned off close to 5,000 square feet and put in a new proposal. It was a big risk, as it was quite a bit larger than the prior spaces. We pressed on with the back-forth process.

Ready, Fire, Aim

Because of what had happened in the prior two deals I kept looking for other space while we continued to negotiate. I learned first-hand that nothing is final until I had the keys in-hand.

I had recently read a book by Michael Masterson (*Ready, Fire, Aim: Zero to \$100 Million in No Time Flat*), which gave me the drive to try a different tactic. In early April 2011, I met Amy Mewborn, the recent franchisee for Xtend Barre (a popular form of ballet-meets-Pilates.) She overheard me lamenting about the commercial real estate industry at a WGN networking event. She mentioned her newly launched location, which was not far from where I was looking to land, and invited me to take a look at her second studio, which she wasn't yet utilizing.

I showed up at 9am the next morning to tour the 700-square-foot space, which happened to boast dark brown hardwood floors and aqua-colored walls—pretty much Hera Hub colors. I wrote her a check on the spot for a

temporary lease. Within one week we had the IKEA furniture and ambiance in place. We even set up a makeshift meeting room in a storage space. We made it work!

Let me take a moment to explain what I mean by ambiance. I'm a Libra so my surroundings are important to me. I like balance and order. It's important that a space "feel" just right. Even my home office was carefully set up with accessories that made it not only feel warm and welcoming but also productive. This was inclusive of running water, scented candles, ample natural light, and ambient music. I had the instinct for placement of these things well before I knew what Feng Shui was. When I set up the temporary location I applied the same principles. If I was going to convince someone to come work in a fitness studio it had better "feel" right!

A few weeks after opening a visitor and commented, "It feels like a spa in here." Aha, that was it! So I coined the phrase "spa-inspired workspace"!

I officially opened the "temporary" Hera Hub on tax day, April 15, 2011 - just a little over a year from idea to doors open. Despite the mirrored walls and the intermittent sounds of women groaning through leg-lifts in the next room, I was able to create a space for collaboration and inspiration. It was finally coming together!

Taking Flight

Knowing I was in the final stretch bolstered my faith and resolve—Hera Hub was going to take flight! I continued the negotiation process while running the temporary space. I was elated when we finally came to an agreement. Despite the roadblocks, my dream was becoming a reality. We finished construction in early August, and I officially opened the doors on Monday, August 15, 2011.

I truly feel everything I've done in my life led up to the moment I launched Hera Hub. It is a natural extension of the collaboration I have fostered throughout my entire career. It has taken a lot of 80-hour workweeks, but I'm proud to say Hera Hub has positively affected the lives of thousand of women, and a few good men! We grew to more than 150 members in the first year and launched our second and third locations in San Diego County to respond to the demand. In May 2016 we launched our first brand extension in Washington DC and are on a path to open many more in the upcoming years!

What Is Hera Hub?

So, those of you not yet "in the know" may be wondering, "Just what is Hera Hub?" Hera Hub is a shared, flexible work and meeting space where entrepreneurial women can create and collaborate in a professional, productive, spa-like environment. The platform provides our members with connections to other business experts, access to educational workshops, and visibility within the community, thus giving them the support they need to be prosperous.

Unlike other coworking spaces that tend to focus on recreating typical office settings, the Hera Hub locations were designed to benefit all five senses.

1. Sight – beautiful art, live plants, calming colors, and friendly faces.
2. Smell – aromatic candles that relax and invigorate.
3. Sound – soft, spa-like music and tranquil running water.
4. Feel – Feng Shui incorporated to ensure the space is effective and productive.

5. Taste – fresh-brewed coffee, tea, spa water, and healthy snacks.

I've never really allowed myself to claim my creativity until launching Hera Hub. This business has allowed me to explore this aspect of myself, as I've never done before. It's not only the décor, but also the programming and events. I've never had so much fun in my entire life.

Yes, I've built a bit of a “club”. I allowed myself to go big and put every intention and resource into one location. I've been able to attract the most amazing women to the community and have built something that most only dream of—a beautiful, welcoming, relaxing yet vibrant space where women connect, collaborate, and flourish. I've created my own utopia, and perhaps Hera Hub will be where you discover yours!

Who Was Hera?

Significant thought went into developing Hera Hub's name and logo. Hera, the Greek goddess of women, was revered as the only goddess who accompanied a woman through every step of her life—blessing and protecting her family and financial security. Hera represents the fullness of life and affirms that women can use their wisdom in the pursuit of any goal they choose.

Remarkably, the beautiful male peacock feather is her symbol. Perhaps I already knew my life's quest when I started selling Mr. Peabody's feathers at age eight!

Why Women?

I truly believe that women interact differently and are instinctively more collaborative in their approach to business. I felt it was important to create a space that was beautiful, comfortable, and feminine yet also very professional.

Many women running small businesses also have to juggle family life and therefore feel an affinity with other women in the same situation. A supportive environment where women feel they easily relate to others helps get to that point in the relationship where they know, like, and trust the other person and are therefore more likely to ask for feedback or refer business.

My Personal Flight

Looking back over the past 40 years of my life, I can safely say that everything I experienced—the good and the bad—led me to where I am today and will continue to propel me forward.

My childhood taught me to recognize and utilize the resources available to me, to work hard, and to try my best. From my father, I learned to be persistent, resilient, and compassionate. My mother instilled the importance of creativity and trusting my gut.

My accident taught me to really value my health and family and to live life to the fullest. Knowing that things can change in the blink of an eye makes me more mindful of living every day fully and utilizing everything life has to offer.

Making the jump from employee to entrepreneur was both challenging and exhilarating. Down deep I knew pursuing my dream was a much better idea than relying on someone else's ability to provide me with a steady J-O-B. Call me crazy, but I also choose to see the 2008 stock-market crash as an eye-opening gift. My stock

portfolio (like everyone else's) took about a 40-percent dip. While launching Hera Hub was a risk—I invested close to \$60,000 of my own money and borrowed an additional \$30,000 from my father—I felt like I was at least “in control” of the outcome, whereas I felt I had *no* control leaving the money in mutual funds with companies I didn't even keep track of. Succeed or fail, at least I knew I was in the driver's seat.

I also learned that in order to be my best, I can't say “yes” to every opportunity that presents itself. I now understand the importance of being deliberate when making choices—to avoid becoming distracted by projects, objects, or commitments that can pull me away from my long-term goals.

Surviving the accident and the end of my marriage taught me that I could recover from anything and that what doesn't kill you can truly make you stronger. Through each change, I learned that reinvention is an important part of life, and being willing to redefine my personal goals and professional life was absolutely necessary for not only my survival, but also my success. Starting my own business after all of my job losses and seemingly overwhelming challenges has solidified my belief—I am in control of my own destiny. I am in control of my own *flight*.

Why Flight Club?

I vividly remember going to see the movie *Fight Club* with my ex-husband, Brian, the week after it came out in the fall of 1999. I've always been a Brad Pitt fan (most women are), and Brian was a fan of dark gritty movies, which I grew to appreciate. Our VHS collection boasted movies like “Reservoir Dogs” and “Pulp Fiction”.

What struck me about this film, besides the fact the Brad Pitt has his shirt off for most of the movie, was the plot: Edward Norton works in a sea of gray, drab cubicles and is bored with his mundane life. As he says in the movie, “Everything is a copy of a copy.” Norton is drawn to Pitt because of what he proposes: starting an underground club for those who want to break out of the norm and really “feel” something. This is just what he needs to cure his pathetic life.

This was about the same time I was contemplating “leaning out” of my own gray cubicle and exploring new territory. I was intrigued. I was ready to ditch the “move up the ladder” mentality.

As I mentioned previously, I had the privilege to lead my own “clubs”—Women's Global Network and Ladies Who Launch—giving others a chance to break out of the day-to-day monotony, get something off the ground, and connect with a bigger purpose. Hera Hub is now also something that gets referred to as a “club” from time to time. The connotation of “belonging” is a powerful one.

I've always loved flying—not only the feeling of flying, but also the doors that it opens. I love, love, love to travel. So far, I've been to 22 countries and have another 80-plus on my list. I've often applied the analogy of “taking flight” to launching a business. The idea of getting something off the ground and soaring is a strong visual for me.

At its very core, Flight Club reflects the essence of the peacocks and other birds that I grew up with. The male peacock is the symbol of the Greek goddess Hera, as she was known for her big beautiful eyes (like those in the peacock feather) and for being watchful over women at every stage of their lives. The very intention behind

Hera Hub is to support women like you—the women who make up our Flight Club—as you launch your dream businesses.

The First Flight Club

Since I launched Hera Hub in 2011, I always envisioned taking a group of women on an exotic retreat to help them launch their businesses. That opportunity came to me when an East Coast-based company, Learning Through Travel, approached me about planning a trip to Greece and walking in the footsteps of Hera. I immediately said “yes”, and we began planning.

The inaugural Flight Club took place in October 2015. Six women and I walked in the footsteps of the incredible Greek gods and goddesses, including Hera and Zeus. We visited all the major archaeological sites in Athens, Nafplio, Delphi, Epidauros, Olympia, and Mycenae. In between stops, I worked with these amazing women to map out the foundations of their businesses and set a path for future growth. We also sailed the Aegean Sea to the beautiful islands of Santorini, Crete, Patmos, Rhodes, Mykonos, as well as visiting the historical site of Ephesus in Turkey. For me, Rhodes and Santorini were particularly special, as there I was reminded of what it meant to embrace my adventurous soul and fully experience life.

By the end of the trip, each woman had a solid plan for future growth, knowing exactly what she needed to do get her business off the ground. Upon our return, she had the support of the Hera Hub community to keep her on track. And so went the first of many Flight Club adventures.

The Flight Has Just Begun...

Now that you've heard my story, the next step is to map out your flight path. In the next section we will take you through a journey of self discovery and, hopefully, help you identify your dream business.

Part Four - Flight Notes

Chapter 10 - Irrefutable Truths to Build a Dream Business

How are you feeling? I hope the prior exercises and stories given you the base you need to move towards your dream business! As you get ready to take flight, I want to share a few final thoughts and tips. These are things I've learned throughout my entrepreneurial journey.

Passion Will Carry You Through

As Sara Clark-Williams and Debby Eubank described so well, don't start a business just to make money. Yes, you're in charge of your time and have full choice in what you do and how you do it (unless it involves government regulations), but you will potentially work much harder than you did as an employee. If you're passionate about what you're doing, it will get you through the hard times.

Never give up on something that you can't go a day without thinking about. – Winston Churchill

Be Imperfect

As Voltaire famously wrote, “Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien”—the perfect is the enemy of the good. You will paralyze yourself if you insist that everything has to be perfect before you launch your business. That's why I love the “Lean” business methodology (Lean Business Canvas as outlined in the next section)—because it encourages you to test as you launch versus waiting to unveil your masterpiece.

Why, when we know that there's no such thing as perfect, do most of us spend an incredible amount of time and energy trying to be everything to everyone? Is it that we really admire perfection? No—the truth is that we are actually drawn to people who are real and down-to-earth. We love authenticity and we know that life is messy and imperfect. – Brene Brown

You'll Never Have It All Figured Out

Similar to the last point, business is not a “set it up and press cruise control” kind of venture—things are going to go “off course.” At Hera Hub we try not to use the word “failure.” I personally like the phrase “learning moment” (coined by the founder of WD-40, Gary Ridge) or the ever-popular “pivoting.” Whatever you call it, you will always be learning and pivoting. That's just part of business! Yes, you need to plan, but be aware that it's going to shift.

I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work. – Thomas A. Edison

Determination

Business is hard. Yes, anything is possible, **but** you are going to have to be willing to stay the course (even if there are pivots along the way). There will be long hours and lots of frustration. Some days you'll feel like

someone has socked you in the stomach—or, as Gary Vaynerchuk says, “punched you in the face.” There will be many highs and many more lows. You must accept this and let your passion pull you through.

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan “Press On!” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race. – Calvin Coolidge

Be Scrappy

Entrepreneurship is all about bootstrapping. You must do all you can to be resourceful and find ways to save money whenever possible. There are things you’re going to have to learn to do yourself that you may have had an assistant take care of when you had a J-O-B.

This also means that if you’re used to getting weekly manicures and eating out seven days a week, you may need to think about how you can cut down on these until you get things flowing again. I’m not suggesting that you think from a scarcity mindset, but be smart about the money you’re spending. Ask, “Is this necessary right now?”

Finally, this also means you will, from time to time, have to fight. There have been many times when a building landlord or a vendor has tried to take advantage of a situation by overbilling me or not returning a deposit. You have to stand up for yourself, and yes, it might be uncomfortable, but that’s part of doing business.

Fear is the disease. Hustle is the antidote. – Travis Kalanick, co-founder of Uber

Set Boundaries

You need to understand that you are not your business. I see this often when someone is consulting or providing a service—they have a difficult time not feeling personally hurt when someone doesn’t accept a proposal or gives them a bad review. Men are much, much better at this. They compartmentalize things, while women mix everything up into one big plate of spaghetti! **Do not**—I repeat, **do not**—take things personally! Business is business. Get up, brush yourself off, and move on.

This also relates to “scope creep” for those service providers. For example, a month or two into the project, the client starts asking for more than what was included in the original agreement. You say to yourself, “Oh, that’s just a small task, I’ll just do it and not charge for it.” That can add up quickly. Suddenly you’re doing twice the amount of work than was agreed on and not being paid a penny more! Set boundaries. Have a conversation with the client early and often.

How people treat you is their karma; how you react is yours. – Wayne Dyer

Watch Out For “Shiny Object Syndrome”

In today’s world of constant bombardment, it’s easy to be pulled off track. Everyone will try to give you advice, whether you want it or not. This will be challenging for you if 1) don’t have a solid business plan and 2) you are not confident in your direction. Women are natural people pleasers. On top of that, they are often more sensitive

to the thoughts and feelings of others. I've seen one comment send an entrepreneur on a completely different course.

Success is what happens after you have survived all your mistakes. – Anora Lee

Keep focused on your core business, and don't let the dozens of other ideas that come your way pull you too far off track. I recommend getting an idea journal or using a platform like Trello to note down all of those "great ideas" and "advice." After you have a solid foundation for your business, then you can go back and explore some of these ideas.

Focusing is about saying no. – Steve Jobs

Be Sincerely Interested In Others

I always start out my introductions with "tell me about you" versus "what do you do?" People fascinate me—I'm sincerely interested in who they are and what makes them tick. I also work very hard to remember their name and something interesting about them. This is often surprising to people when I meet them a second time, and in turn, makes me memorable.

Tip: *I do three things to remember someone's name:*

1. *I'm a very visual person, so I try to get a glance at their nametag if they have one.*
2. *I immediately associate their name with someone I know who has the same name—it could be a cousin, a neighbor, or someone from college.*
3. *I use it as much as possible in our conversation—"Tell me about you, Diana," "Are you from San Diego, Diana?"*

Trust Your Instinct

Here is one of many places women have an advantage over men in business. We, for the most part, are willing to listen to our intuition. When I meet someone for the first time, I carefully listen and observe. I try to ask as many questions as possible and watch their body language. When my gut says, "something doesn't add up," it usually doesn't.

Sure, there have been times when the alarm went off in the back of my head and I ignored them. I tried to rationalize the situation, making excuses for the person. It has always come back to bite me. As I get older, my BS meter gets stronger, and I do my best to listen and act accordingly.

Follow your instincts. That's where true wisdom manifests itself. – Oprah Winfrey

Follow Through

This is one of my biggest pet peeves. People say they are going to follow up—call you, e-mail you, etc., and they don't. I put people in two camps: those who keep their word and those who don't. For me, this is analogous to "integrity." I'm by far not the smartest person in the room, but because I do everything in my power to keep my word I've been able to build great relationships. Plus, it just feels good to do what you say you're going to do!

It was character that got us out of bed, commitment that moved us into action, and discipline that enabled us to follow through. – Zig Ziglar

Stay Clear Of “Get Rich Quick” Schemes

Call it social selling, networking marketing, or multilevel marketing (MLM)—the concept of selling to your friends and family has been around for many years. It seems to have gained even more popularity after the recession, and especially among women. These companies sell the dream of “work from home, part-time, while simply educating your community about great products. Then get your friends and family to join you in saving the world and you’ll all get rich.” Sounds great, right? It might be great for a few people at the top, but so many get conned into buying the starter kit, paying for training, and then in turn make pennies. Run the other direction.

- 1) This is not a business. You are a distributor—paid on commission.
- 2) Nothing worth gaining in life is “easy.” I liken this thought process to the get skinny with a pill mentality.

These companies range from skincare products (think Mary Kay and Arbonne) to jewelry (think Stella & Dot and Silpada) to household products (think Amway and Melaleuca). These networking marketing companies have gotten quite tricky. Many use the phrase “social selling,” and some outright claim they are not a network marketing company—like Melaleuca. They will form companies with names like “Mom’s Making Six Figures” and “Legacy Wealth Creation” to disguise that they are simply distributing some ele’s products.

If you’re not sure, search Wikipedia for a “list of network marketing companies” or www.BusinessForHome.com also has a fairly extensive list.

Another word of caution: be careful about getting sucked into the info-product/seminar world. The high you feel when you go to one of these events may lead you to buy into very expensive programming that you don’t need. This group is also catering to the “get rich quick” market. I’ve seen people spend \$100,000 on these programs, which is absurd! Think Tony Robbins and Lisa Sasevich. These coaches are trying to sell you their “lifestyle.” But dig deep—is there content to their programs, or are they just putting neurolinguistic programming on steroids? It’s easy to get sucked into the hype. After all, it feels good to be part of something and to be told that you *can* do it. Ask past participants if they have achieved the promises of the program. Dig deep to see what’s behind the curtain.

There are no shortcuts to any place worth going. – Beverly Sills

Keep Doubters At Bay

While you’re probably feeling excitement about launching your dream business, please keep in mind that people may challenge your decision. Some may even call you crazy! (A word I welcome!) Most people are either personally fearful of such a decision or are straight-up jealous.

If you’re married you may get push-back from your spouse. In some cases you may even find yourself drifting away from friends who continue to subscribe to the corporate ladder.

I have found the best antidote for these challenges is a good dose of confidence and a solid business plan, including sensible financial projections.

Imposter Syndrome

You will from time-to-time feel like a fraud. Note it, and get over it. Even some of the most successful women I've met tell me deep down that they are afraid of being "figured out." Even Tina Fey once confessed that she sometimes screams inside her head, "I'm a fraud! They're onto me!"

Dr. Valerie Young is a leading expert on the impostor syndrome, and author of award-winning book "The Secret

Thoughts of Successful Women: Why Capable People Suffer from the Impostor Syndrome and How to Thrive in Spite of It". Boys are raised to bluff and exaggerate. Girls, on the other hand, learn early to distrust their opinions and stifle their voices. They discover they are judged by the highest physical, behavioral and intellectual standards. Perfection becomes the goal, and every flaw, mistake or criticism is internalized—slowly hollowing out self-confidence.

Now you know why you shouldn't beat yourself up.

"I have written eleven books, but each time I think, 'uh oh, they're going to find out now. I've run a game on everybody, and they're going to find me out.'" – Maya Angelou

Work/Life Integration

I am often asked—how do you balance work and life? My answer is quite simple "I don't"—my work is so much a part of my life that I couldn't possibly consider it to be something separate; an individual entity completely segregated from my personal life. My work does not feel like work.

I'm so passionate about my business because of the amazing women I get to support on a daily basis, through our space and strong community. I love helping others find what really lights them up... what allows them also to have work/life integration.

That's why I have an insatiable energy and don't feel drained after working 12 hour days. I don't mind having an inbox that is jam packed with requests, questions, and introductions because it is all a part of something so much bigger; something that I love, Hera Hub.

Make it a goal to thread your personal and professional life together. Incorporate things you enjoy into your business, so it feels like you're passing the time doing something pleasant rather than a task to be checked off of your list. Try to infuse "focused fun" by pinpointing what you love: drawing, talking, laughing, interesting conversation, list making, etc. and weave it into your business and work.

“Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” - Confucius

Find Support

If you haven't done so already, it's time to find your tribe! If you don't have a Hera Hub close to you (and you are not in a position to open one yourself), here are a few non-virtual organizations I recommend.

Check our website - www.herahub.com/organizations - for an updated list.

If You Can't Find It, Build It

Finally, if nothing exists—which I can't imagine, unless you live in a town of 500 people—then start your own group! Meetup.com is a great way to pull people together and organize your group!

If you are interested in exploring what it would take to build a Hera Hub community in your town, check out www.HeraHubExpansion.com.