
Episode #1 Transcript

Are you cut out to be an entrepreneur?

Gina Benedetto shares tips for startups and pivoting entrepreneurs.

Linsi: You are listening to episode 1 - yes that's right - this is the *inaugural episode* of the **Spark and Victory podcast**. I am your host Linsi Brownson and I cannot wait to share with you this season of conversations and radical insight from maverick entrepreneurs like you.

This season of Spark and Victory podcast is called Mavericks and Victory. In each episode I'll be talking with a maverick entrepreneur who brings their unique experience to the table, and is willing to share a business lesson they learned the hard way.

One thing you should know about me is that I 100% believe that every one us is brilliant and capable, and I want us all to create success on our terms. But I'm not actually interested in that story. What fascinates me is what comes before the success. The gritty part - the spark of genius, and setting out on our own version of the hero's journey to get battle scarred and learn so many valuable lessons. Then, we return victorious. That's an epic story, and that's the one I like to hear.

I think these conversations are so much more valuable and relatable to entrepreneurs like you.

My guest today is Gina Benedetto, I know her as the graphic design half of the talented husband/wife website company Kymera Studio. But Gina has recently started a second company which is a total shift in that it's a product line and she is the artisan. And no, I'm not talking about soap. Gina has mastered the art of botanical perfumery and as a branding expert I can tell you she has also totally killed it with her brand, **Veyali**.

Let's talk to her.

Linsi: Hi Gina!

Gina: Hi Linsi, hi guys.

Linsi: Gina and I are going to talk today about smelly stuff and business.

Gina: Good smelly things.

Linsi: So Gina is a multi talented creative. She is the founder and, oh tell me your title again?

Gina: Perfumer.

Linsi: Perfumer and owner of an amazing botanical scent line for home and humans...I'm totally butchering that so please tell people what it is that Veyali does.

Gina: She got it, yeah that's just it. It is a line of 100% natural fragrances. I started with perfumes and expanded to room sprays for your home. Fragrance is a very fascinating topic that I love to talk about, there's a lot of articles coming out about harmful effects of short-term and long-term exposure, so I wanted to create a product that no one has to worry about that with.

Linsi: Awesome, I love it. So can you talk a little bit about the power of scent?

Gina: I mean, how long do we have? The short version? It's our biggest, it's more powerful than our mental memories is my understanding. I was in a mall the other day and someone walked by, and they had cologne, and I'm like, "my fourth grade boyfriend!"

It just came flooding back, it's very, very powerful, so I am honored to get to tap into that with my product. The reactions I get to the perfumes are all over the place. It's really, really fun and often funny, about what it brings to mind for people and the memories that they get.

Linsi: It's so true, with memory and what that evokes, but it also creates a sense of atmosphere.

You and I both work from home offices, and it's really important that this place we spend so much time in is a good environment. We need to spark the creative energy we want to keep flowing, so I love the idea of bringing in scent as part of creating that environment.

Gina: Yeah, no, I do too. On a less romantic note, our air quality indoors is so poor, people don't even realize it's really, really bad. And so you want to freshen your space, you want it to smell great.

But by adding a traditional fragrance air freshener, you're just adding a toxic load, so it's nice to know that these are pure essential oils, so they actually are cleansing and purifying the air. And smelling really, really great, and so you get a therapeutic benefit, so good for productivity, mental clarity, calming you down, relaxation, whatever you're looking for.

And diffusers are so big right now which is great, but this is even easier. You don't need to drag this from room to room.

Linsi: True. It's kind of concentrated on whatever the space is that you're wanting it in.

Well okay, so I just asked you a couple minutes ago if you would tell me about how you got started with this company, and your story was so amazing that I have ask it again so everyone else can hear. So Gina, what got you started in the world of botanical perfumes?

Gina: Yes, so the shortened version is I run a design studio and have for about 15 years, and it was about four years ago that I really got a big itch to create a product for myself.

I didn't know where to start, and then I read an article that had a really great exercise you can do to try and find what that direction might be.

So you get out your journal and pen and you set a clock for like five minutes, and you just write down everything you're passionate about; everything you love, without judging it and thinking, "can that be a career?" Just list anything you like.

And when you're done, you're supposed to look at it and see, are there patterns, or areas of interest repeating? That can help guide you.

So when I was done, there were things like warm chocolate cookies and sunsets. But there were also things like spa treatments, relaxation, and I saw a theme of pampering. I was like, "you know what? I'm going to make salt scrubs and lotions!" Oh it sounded so great.

But during the research part of that, I assumed they were all scented naturally. I realized they weren't and there were all these articles about the dangers of synthetic fragrance, and in those articles was a little mention of natural perfumery.

And it was love at first read, it's an ancient art form, and I was just so in awe by it. I decided to spend the next three years studying it, to see if I enjoyed it and could learn it...and I did!

Linsi: Awesome! I really wanted you to share that because I think it's so beautiful. So many creatives that I know tend to be naturally multi passionate, and so we can go through a lot of our career kind of testing out different areas. Sometimes we really nail it and land on something that speaks to our core, and a lot of times we find a lot of little things that are interesting to us, but we don't know how to weave them together and really create a career out of that.

So an exercise like the one that you did, I think is a really helpful and beautiful way to do that exploration and see what comes up for you. Because you were surprised right? At some of the answers you got...

Gina: Oh absolutely, yeah. And I mean, I was either going to do this or obviously become a cookie baker.

Linsi: That also would have been great.

Gina: Either or, I've got another idea in the mix if this doesn't work out.

Linsi: That's right, we'll circle back to this in five years and see how the cookie baking is coming along.

Gina: I'll be baking, yeah.

Linsi: The Veyali brand is just a gorgeous lifestyle brand, and I know a lot of your customers are women, but it's a very unisex brand with deep colors, there's a lot of obviously natural elements, and it's very primal and ethereal at the same time.

And it speaks really well to what it is that you're creating, and who it's for, so I definitely commend you on that. Your branding is amazing, and the lifestyle that you create with that story is very exciting.

Gina: Thank you. Yeah, I'm excited to see how it evolves. It's a fun part of running Veyali, and Instagram in particular...I'm on a green journey as you can see when you visit.

Linsi: Yes. It's really fun to watch. So definitely check Veyali out, it's @shopveyali, right? V-E-Y-A-L-I which will we have in show notes.

So Gina, I would love to know, this isn't the first business that you've had, you've been an entrepreneur for a long time. What was one of the hardest lessons that you've learned in this journey and how has that shaped what you do today?

Gina: So this is such a good question. Oh my goodness. I'm going to speak for, I mean this applies to both my businesses but especially to Veyali, which I just started in January so it hasn't even been a full year.

But the lesson I've learned is that nothing will go as you imagined it going. Perceived easy tasks will be difficult. Difficult tasks will be easy. I feel like, it's not like in our personal lives, where we have these growth lessons maybe once a month, maybe once a year.

When you're running a business, it's just lesson after lesson after lesson, and I've come to terms with the idea that this is an endurance race, and not a sprint but a marathon.

Linsi: Yes!

Gina: And I'm a natural sprinter so what I've learned, and how I work differently now is that I try not to get too bogged down by any one of these lessons or hurdles.

Because there's another one right around the corner. And I was realizing that I was getting bogged down and wasn't able to move through things and learn fully from them, and then be ready for the next one.

If you're finding that you're coming up with lesson after lesson, it doesn't mean you made the wrong call or you chose the wrong career path, or your business idea isn't great. This is just what it looks like. And I'm just really fully getting that now. That it's okay, we're building something from nothing and there's no easy way to do that.

Linsi: You nailed that so hard, so many good nuggets in there. But yeah, I hear so often, and I've had this as well, the moments where the challenges that come up in your business make you really question if you're fit to be doing this.

And it's such a great way to frame this, to say "this is going to continue happening because this is how business sometimes looks," and it doesn't mean anything about who you are or what you're capable of. And truly, the answer to who you are and what you're capable of comes out of continuing to run that marathon. So that's a beautiful way to express that, thank you.

Gina: Thank you, yeah, yeah.

I think it's important to know, because I think too many people give up too soon because they assume oh, these hurdles and these lessons, I'm coming up with too many, it must mean that this idea's flawed or any number of things.

Linsi: Yes.

Gina: And that's not necessarily true.

Linsi: Yeah, yeah, exactly. That's so good. And that is the wisdom of a long-time entrepreneur.

Gina: Is it showing?

Linsi: And generally your first business doesn't work, and your second business sometimes doesn't work. And that is the wisdom that comes out of it. You get to a point where you say, "well I've faced challenges like this before, I'm somewhat familiar with this. I overcame it before so maybe I can apply it in a different way this time."

Gina: Yes.

Linsi: Oh, I love that. And, one of the first things you said which was really interesting, I've never thought about it this way, but in our personal lives, we don't come up against the adversity in that way nearly as often. So once we get into our 20s and 30s, we have a pretty good sense of who we are. We don't tend to be challenged by these life-altering-giant-question kind of things all the time.

Gina: No.

Linsi: It's pretty incremental. But in business, it's totally different.

Gina: Yes. It is, it really is interesting. And it's important to understand that difference, and again know that it doesn't mean you made the wrong call. Because we're just not used to it. Can you imagine your personal life if it were like business?

Linsi: We'd be a pretty big mess.

Gina: Oh yeah, it just wouldn't be possible, which is why everybody doesn't start their own business, it's just a whole other ball game.

Linsi: The culmination of the painful parts can either really weigh you down, or they can become those moments where you say, "ah, okay. I don't have energy to give this beyond what it absolutely requires from me, because I have to move on."

Gina: Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. It's not easy. I think the key is to make sure it's your passion, because that's what gets you through. That's what gets me through, I just come back to how much I love the product and what I'm making.

SPARK+VICTORY

Linsi: Yeah, and what other people experience with it as well! I mean that's a big factor too, to have customers who really love the product and are really invested in the brand. When you get that feedback from others and keep building that loyalty in your community, it reminds you "I'm supposed to be here."

Gina: Yeah, I like that, it's so true. Because you're always going to have people that enjoy your product, even if it's just a handful in the beginning and you just focus on them and knowing that they'll grow. But that's the energy you want to feed off of.

Linsi: Totally. I love it. Well, Gina, thank you so much for coming and hanging out with me.

Gina: My pleasure.