

THE TUG: FINDING PURPOSE AND JOY THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

by BARBARA J. ZABAWA

Introduction

LET ME SHARE A SECRET: YOU KNOW that feeling you have, or maybe it's an inner voice, telling you to do something different with your life? The one that creeps into your conscience day and night? I call it the "tug." Well, the tug is real. I have felt it, and much to the protests and objections from others, I followed it. And I couldn't feel more fulfilled.

I first felt the tug during my final years working as a lawyer for a big law firm. I didn't know exactly why, but a nagging little voice kept telling me I was meant for something different. It was frustrating to sense this "tug" away from a secure job where I had just succeeded in making partner. For many lawyers, I had just achieved the ultimate milestone and should celebrate. But the tug was still there, so I was unhappy and restless. I didn't know what to do about it, or why the tug was even bothering me in the first place.

Pay attention to that tug. Even though it may not seem like it, it is leading you somewhere that is full of excitement and fulfillment.

This book is for individuals who yearn for something more. Who have ideas but don't know what to do with them, or if it's even worth pursuing them. I am one of those "serial entrepreneurs" who is full of ideas. I struggle with finding time to implement them all, and must prioritize them so I can be as effective and fulfilled as possible. But therein lies the difference between me at the big law firm, and me now.

When I finally took the leap to entrepreneurship, that "tug" I felt for so many years disappeared. I still feel frustration and disappointment in my ideas, but the overarching purpose of my life has become more clear and my internal compass is steady. And though I have not yet achieved the same level of financial success as many start-ups you read about in the news, I am able to pay my bills, be in control of my destiny and feel joy in what I do, which is priceless.

Why did I write this book?

I wrote this book to help people who, like me, feel a "tug" to take their life in a new, exciting direction but haven't the faintest clue about entrepreneurship. I want to show you how to do what you love. You see, I think often times the tug is leading you toward entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is scary, especially for people like me who have held secure jobs all their life. Well, let me tell you another little secret, those jobs are not always secure. In fact, in my experience, jobs are volatile and can be gone in an instant without much notice. I have seen so many friends fall victim to corporate restructuring, company closures, or just unbearable conditions where the choice between sticking it out or keeping your sanity, sanity must win.

One of my favorite comedians, Jim Carrey, gave a commencement speech and referenced his father, who could have been a great comedian, but believed such a dream was impossible. Instead he made a conservative choice and took a "safe" job as an accountant only to lose that job. In his inspiring speech, Jim Carrey said: "I

learned many great lessons from my father, not the least of which is that you can fail at what you don't want, so you might as well take a chance on doing what you love."¹

That speech was all over the Internet the year I started my law firm. It inspired me to take the leap. Perhaps it will inspire you.

Using my own three entrepreneurial ventures as examples when most appropriate, I walk you through the steps of becoming an entrepreneur. As a budding entrepreneur myself, I've read my share of career development and business success books. I've also watched videos by successful entrepreneurs to gain nuggets of wisdom. I love hearing about other people's success stories, particularly when I am starting my own new venture. When your life is thrown into chaos because of something new, whether done purposefully or involuntarily, you feel vulnerable, alone, and often have many questions. That's when self-help books and videos are all the more coveted.

Often those books and videos are authored by individuals who are years into the future from when they first set out to achieve their ambitions. They have found success, and now they are sharing their wisdom with you. There is certainly value in that. Or, the books or blog posts try to address early stage entrepreneurship, but they consider early stage the first few years of a venture. There is also value in that. Or they assume you work in Silicon Valley and want to become the next Steve Jobs. There is a lot to admire and learn from that as well.

I believe, however, that there is a group of people out there who like me, just want to quiet the inner voice that keeps them up at night. They are in search of their true purpose at this phase in their life and just want to hear that quieting that voice is indeed possible through entrepreneur-ship and they would like a roadmap on how to do it. So, this book is about learning from your peer, me, who is going through the very beginnings of a new venture and has had some success with two others previously. When I say I'm beginning a new venture, I mean the first few weeks or months of implementing an idea. Hearing from a peer who is at this stage as their venture unfolds can offer important lessons and create a sense of camaraderie, like a support group.

Indeed, learning from your peers offers details about the experience, as it happens, that are often lost in the retrospective wisdom often found in the self-help books and videos I mention above. For those of us who are taking their first entrepreneurial steps, hearing the details can be very helpful. Experiencing the highs and lows during the first year of a new venture is more tolerable if you experience it with a comrade.

As Duke University researchers Victor Bennett and Aaron Chattergi point out, entrepreneurial research offers very little insight into the early stages of entrepreneurship. But it is in these early stages where crucial decisions are made as to whether to continue pursuing your idea. Many self-help books aim to provide you inspirational courage, but lack in practical know-how. Sometimes those self-help books offer advice concerning stages of idea or ambition implementation that are years away, such as scaling your venture, or building a strong company culture. Information like that, although valuable, is not very helpful in the very beginning stages of a new venture. Especially for individuals new to entrepreneurship. And especially for those of us without high-powered funding or connections. This book tries to change that.

¹ Jim Carrey, Commencement Speech to Maharishi University, June 13, 2014, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2rVDCrt6QY&ab_channel=WonderJam (last visited October 6, 2020).

When I started writing this book, I read an article about the founder of the information technology news publication *The Information*, Jessica Lessin. She is doing important work by exposing how information technology is taking over everything, and not always in a good way. But she was able to start her successful publication with her own money; her family, as well as her husband's family have financial resources of which most of us only dream. I'm here to tell you I am not from a family with financial resources. I am the first in my family to attend college. And, I provide financial support to my parents, not the other way around.

Despite the lack of family financial backing, like many of the readers of this book, I am starting my latest venture called Pursesuitz without any financial inheritance or investor backing. It is not my first venture. About six years earlier I started my own law firm, the Center for Health and Wellness Law, LLC, something that was never on my career bucket list. Yet, I felt compelled to try. I attribute the move to the tug, nudging me to do something else, something brave. I had been working as in-house counsel at the time, after having just made partner in a large law firm. When one of my former clients begged me to come back to private practice, the thought of opening my own law firm jumped into my mind. Once I thought of starting my own law firm, the thought refused to escape my mind. I knew that if I didn't at least try, I would regret it later in life.

Before my law firm, I had also started a venture called Lemonspark. Lemonspark grew out of an unexpected loss almost ten years before I started my law firm. It was my first real "lemon" in life, and I felt alone, afraid, and without hope. I longed for a community of people who could understand the deep sadness, anger and fear I felt, but could also help me feel hopeful and inspired. In terms of my life's purpose, I needed to know "why" this lemon happened to me. None of the support groups I found could help me answer that question, so I started Lemonspark to seek out stories from people who had overcome life's lemons through starting a venture that wouldn't have existed but for that lemon.

My latest venture, Pursesuitz, definitely feels like another idea I must try or face regret later in life. The inspiration for creating clothes with functional pockets grew out of personal frustration with lugging around a purse most of my life. As I discuss in this book, the idea of a blouse with pockets appeared, I took some action initially, and then sat on it for a while until I felt compelled to move forward, which at the time of writing this book was only a few months ago. The idea of writing a book about my entrepreneurial experience arose as I thought about how useful it would be to memorialize my entrepreneurial journey for the benefit of future entrepreneurs. I have started enough ventures, both service-related and now a product-based venture, that the details of my experience might inspire someone to heed the call of their own "tug" and help guide them through the process. Indeed, this book represents what Pursesuitz is about: to give people tools to pursue their dreams with more freedom and ease.

As you take steps toward finding your purpose, doors will open. Those doors may have been open to you the whole time, but until you start paying attention to that tug, you won't notice them or seek them out.