Don’t Fear Failure. It’s How You Get to the Right Answer.

In this series, Open Every Door, Entrepreneur *staff writer Nina Zipkin shares her conversations with leaders about understanding what you have to offer, navigating the obstacles that will block your path, identifying opportunity and creating it for yourself and for others.*

No matter who you are, life changes — whether it be a new city or job, marriage, a child — can be seriously overwhelming. When Michelle Kennedy had her son Finn, she found her world transformed.

Kennedy saw the online dating industry grow and change over the past few years as general counsel and then deputy CEO of Badoo and then as an advisor and member of Bumble’s board. She understood how to connect people, but throughout her pregnancy and as a new mom, she felt isolated.

Kennedy wanted to build a network of other moms, a support system who she could call for help, advice or just an afternoon out. It occurred to her that she had all the tools she needed at her disposal to do just that, not only for her, but for other women in her position.

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“On those long days it felt obvious — why don’t I just use the algorithms that we use in dating to help me find that network?” Kennedy told *Entrepreneur*. That initial frustration turned into a promising idea and platform: Peanut.

Since it launched in September 2016, Kennedy and her team have grown the business to 170,000 users and counting, who are generating more than 100,000 swipes per day. More than 15 million profiles have been viewed and 700,000 messages have

been sent.

Kennedy shared her insights about why you need failure to get clarity and how channelling your passion helps you build up an inner resolve to go to bat for your business when it truly counts.

Interview edited for brevity and clarity.

What advice do you have for someone who is going to take the leap and start their own business?

You have to have the thickest skin. Like a rhino. And even if you think these things aren't going to knock you and hurt, they do. So you have to kind of be resilient enough to be prepared for that. That's what I wish I would have known. I think building a business is all consuming. You are absolutely living and breathing it. You don't sleep because you're thinking about it. It consumes you. And that means that if someone does something that is unsupportive, that seems magnified because it's so important. We sometimes forget that there is an emotional cost, and it's OK to talk about that. It doesn't make you less of an entrepreneur. It doesn't make you softer or less effective or any of those things. It means that it is just another factor that I think perhaps we don't talk about.

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Can you talk about a moment in your career that you had to advocate for yourself? How did you approach it?

I actually think as women we spend our lives advocating for ourselves. What I think is how successful we are are at that advocacy varies according to your stage of life. Advocating for yourself when you're going to fundraise, when people are looking at your market, product or value proposition with a specific [judgement] is character building. And I think the

more knocks that you have received in your past – that can be personal as well as professional – it all [leads to] a moment of clarity, when someone is challenging your business. You know how to deal with it.

And if I'm not going to advocate for Peanut, who else is? Peanut for me, doesn't just represent me and something I care about. It represents women and mothers having a voice that is modern and relevant. And that probably makes it easier to advocate. How dare you patronize me about the market or the value proposition? 85 percent of these women are making decisions on spending. They are the most relevant voice right now. So I'm going to advocate for them. I am one of them.

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What was a mistake you made and how did you move forward from it?

I would say I was pretty focused on delivering Peanut in a certain way and that included delivering Peanut on one platform, iOS to begin with. That was a model that I'd experienced and done before. It was something I felt comfortable with. What actually happened was thousands of women who use Androids saying, where's Android?

And it was that moment of realization where you're like OK, what you've done historically is not always relevant for what you need to do going forward. We change our road map and then we had to bring the Android development forward to be able to respond to that quickly.

I think there have been examples of that where you just have to be agile enough to adapt to the feedback you're getting because you're not building product for you. And if you don't listen to [your customers] and then they are not going to use your product. If I had to do it over, I would release Android and iOS at the same time. You don't always know the best from

your past experience you have to be reactive to your market.

How have you grown and changed as a leader throughout your career?

I think there was a huge difference between being a leader of a company where there are 300 plus people and being the leader of a company where there are six. Leading at Badoo was very different. There is always an element of safety in numbers. You're enough steps removed from what's happening that there is a confidence to what you're doing. [Whereas with] a smaller team where it is more emotional. We are all invested in the product that we building. Because of that, it means the highs are really high and the lows can be really low.

As a result of being a mother, I'm more patient. I multitask incredibly well, because you have to. And I think that I want to listen to people's ideas even more, because I want to understand why they say something. [I think that comes from] having Finn, because I want to understand his outlook on the world. I want to know why he thinks certain things. And that informs the way I am with the team. I think in the past, I was much more "get to the end" [in my thinking]. And now I want to understand it more before I make that judgement.

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Over time, how has your view of success and failure changed?

Failure is good. [In the past] I didn't want to ever fail. It's only when you speak to engineers, for example, who say, 'of course you fail. That's how you get to the right answer.' You have to fail repeatedly. So I don't fear failure. It doesn't mean that you don't feel it. Of course if something doesn't work, you still feel the reaction to that. It's disappointing. You feel frustrated with yourself. But I don't fear it because I know that it just turns into the next iteration. And I wish I'd have known that 20 years ago.

Is there a piece of advice a mentor gave you that you still take to heart today?

There was an amazing I mentor I had. She always said that you should take the best pieces of people that you meet along your journey. I've always tried to do that. You meet loads of people on the way and some of them have great characteristics and some of them don't. But if I see characteristics and I think that's inspiring or aspirational, I'm a bit of a magpie – I take a little bit here and there. It helps when you're in a moment of challenge to think, I'm going to channel that person.

What do you say to yourself to keep going during tough moments?

I just look at my son, Finn. It is important for me that he sees that Mum really works hard, is dedicated, takes knocks and gets back up and tries again. I also feel a tremendous sense of responsibility for all the the women who use Peanut. I don't want to let them down. They needed a voice. They needed a modern platform that represented them and I don't want to mess that up for them.

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