

For Shay Mitchell, Success Is All About Taking Chances – Not Taking Risks

Actress and lifestyle entrepreneur Shay Mitchell discusses her love of travel, motherhood and the creation of her travel accessories line Béis.

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Shay Mitchell is an actress and lifestyle entrepreneur with a growing brand and her own line of travel accessories, Béis.

Only in NYC for a whirlwind 24 hours, Shay still made time to sit down in person so I could hear firsthand about the origins of Béis, and about how taking chances helped launch her career as an actress. Shay landed a breakout role in *Pretty Little Liars*, and now stars in the much-anticipated, female-led Hulu series *Dollface*.

Shay spills all about launching her product line and continuing to find growth opportunities whenever challenges arise. She has an infectious positive attitude and has let a pursuit of joy lead her to some of her biggest career moves.

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She has achieved success by constantly pushing herself – something she started when she moved to Thailand at 17 to learn to live on her own and be truly independent. She told me that “the sky is the limit,” which reminds us all how far we can go when we believe in ourselves and take that first step.

Hopefully, this interview with Shay Mitchell will inspire you

to take a chance on an idea you have been sitting on. Also, keep an eye out for Béis's recent launch of The Woven Collection.

A special thank you to our incredible venue partners at Convene for hosting us in New York City.

Interview produced by Kari Jones.

Kathleen Griffith: What have you built? What inspired you to build it?

Shay Mitchell: I started Béis. It's a travel accessory and luggage brand. And it started out of my love for traveling simply. I realized that there was a lack of chic, affordable and functional travel out there in the space. So I was either able to fall in love with this luggage that wasn't functional and was completely out of my budget or I would be able to see maybe not-so-nice luggage which had no functionality and was super affordable. There wasn't anything there. So we created it.

Were you born a builder or did you have to learn to be one?

I've always been somebody who wants to kind of put the pieces together. And even now in a different space with executive producing shows, that's kind of, I guess, building, too. I feel like I've always had that in me since I was little. And obviously now it's something that I'm doing on a day-to-day basis, and I completely love it.

Who was the first woman you looked up to? Why did you want to be like her?

I would say my mom, definitely. She worked a full-time job but was also such an incredible mother. She'd come home, make dinner and just made it look so effortless. And especially now being a mother myself, I realized that it's not so effortless, so I have a lot more appreciation and respect for her these

days.

What's the greatest risk you've taken?

Risk is funny. I don't really use the term "risk" just because I feel it's more like taking chances.

I've taken chances since I was little. I mean as soon as I finished high school, I moved to Thailand. I lived there and I wanted to really get a sense of what it was like to live alone.

Then I moved to Toronto to take on my acting career over there and again, move away from home. Then, with Béis I took a chance to go into a field that I've never been in before. For me, it really is just about taking chances. I don't know, risk to me just has a little bit of a negative connotation when I think about it, but if I say "chances," to me it's just taking a chance. I'm really careful with my words.

When you were thinking about starting Béis, where did the idea come from and what was that moment when you were like, "It's time to now take this chance; we're going to jump into this"?

Again, from my love of travel. I've been traveling since I was younger, but when it came to the time where I was purchasing my own luggage, and travel accessories, I just realized there wasn't anything on the market that I was really excited about, or that I thought had great functionality. I'd find myself on planes or really anywhere, just kind of doodling and drawing up the perfect bag in my mind.

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For me, it was always just sort of coming up with my dream bag or my dream accessory that could really help me in all of my travel journeys.

Did you start that process slowly or was there one day when

you were approached to immediately build a team and raise capital?

I'm really good friends with one of the founders of the company. He came to me and he was like, "Listen, I know you have an entrepreneurial side to you. What do you want to create together?" And I was like, "A travel line. It's my first love."

When I was little I cared more about the cosmetic bags and my toiletry bags than I cared about the new products I was putting in them. I've loved bags since the caboodle, right? For me, it was always about the bags that I was putting items into that got me excited and so I really just needed to go with my passion. I absolutely love what I do, and I love creating items that can help people on all their travel journeys, and when I say that, it doesn't mean just getting on a plane. It could be honestly from your home to the gym, or gym to work, or wherever. We're always on the go, and so these are just items for you to take with you.

And you have a new baby bag, too.

I say the diaper, non-diaper bag. You take out the changing pad, and it's basically just a normal work bag. It's super cute, and that's intentional. All these products I've really created selfishly for myself, but especially after becoming a new mom. I was doing a lot of research prior to having Alice, and I just didn't find anything that was exciting in the diaper bag category. And I thought to myself, *Why does this have to be so depressing? Why do I have to get something that looks like there needs to be breast milk spilled on it?* No. I wanted to create something that's chic, and that I could take with me to a meeting and nobody would know what I had inside of it. And so that's where that came about, and that's really how this company is run. It's like ideas that come in for any of us on the team with things that are actually going on in our lives.

We're obsessed with this idea of breakdowns. We call them "big 'B' breakdowns" and "little 'b' breakdowns." So big B are those like cataclysmic traumatic events that blindsides you out of nowhere. It's a divorce. It's someone cheating. It's these big, horrific things that you don't anticipate happening. Little B breakdowns are these small, incessant lack of alignments, telling you that something's wrong. When have you had one of these breakdowns, personally or professionally? How did you breakthrough?

Let's start off with "big B": I'm not married, so there will be no divorce. "Little B," I guess even just starting Béis. I had a major anxiety attack the night before because I'm a little bit of a perfectionist. I think with anybody that's putting something out in the world that maybe people don't expect you to be doing, that can be a little nerve-racking, and for me, it was just kind of like, "Oh my gosh, is the website good enough, are our products good enough where people are going to like this? What am I doing?" But again, by the same token, my whole belief with everything that I do is if other people can do it, then so can I.

What's the greatest risk you've taken?

I just kind of really believed that since I was little that the world is your oyster. Do I have fears? Do I have breakdowns? Sure, but so does everybody else, and it's how quickly you pick yourself back up that really sets you apart. And I think one of my strongest things is I don't really have a fear. I don't look at things as being risks or failures. I call them missteps instead.

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I'm really critical about how I use my words, especially leading a team. I'm careful about how other people speak, because I believe you speak things into reality. Everything in my life I've been able to create from, believe it or not, a

vision board. Everything that I put on there has come to fruition. Literally, my daughter has blue eyes. But it really is the power of words and really believing it.

So when people are like risk, what's the risk? OK so it doesn't work out. People don't like my bag. Well, great, I have a bunch of free samples. I stressed a little bit the night before we launched, but then at the end of the day, I'm like, *I took that chance*. And that's pretty awesome. I'm going to try my hand at anything and everything that I want to because what scares me the most is dying and wishing that I would have done something. That's what's terrifying to me.

Image Credit: Béis

We actually came across a stat that 50 percent of women say they've given up on their dreams.

And that's so sad to me. Why? Because of other people's opinions on if it's going to be good or not? Don't have that fear. You literally have one life; do everything and try everything you've ever wanted to, because the worst thing that can happen is that you tried it at least, right? That's way better than sitting wherever thinking that you could have done it. Yeah, I don't want that.

What makes you doubt yourself? How do you manage it?

What makes me doubt myself is if I'm not excited about something, or there's no passion. Specifically to Béis, I've created a few things where at the end of the day, I was like, "I don't like the color of this." We've already made them, but we're not going to launch them because for me, if it's not a bag or a product that I'm proud of, to carry myself, then it shouldn't go out there. Because this isn't just a

collaboration. This isn't me endorsing somebody else's brand. This is my company. So for me, every single thing that we launch or put out there has to be something I am proud to talk about, and not just today, but for a long, long time.

If I'm not really sure of something, that's when I kind of doubt it. We've dropped a lot of products before that I just wasn't passionate about, and so when that excitement and passion isn't there, that's when I questioned myself. And like I said, I'm creating these products for myself, and so I need to like them.

I think the other thing, too, is that I'm really, really fortunate to have such an incredible small-but-mighty team. Whereas if I was just doing this by myself, there'd be a lot more doubt. But I have other people to turn to, and that's helped this entire process. I didn't go to design school. I didn't go to business school. I'm really doing this on the seed of my passion. And then I've aligned myself with incredible people to help me bring this to life.

Are you still five people strong?

Six, and predominantly women.

How do you know when to leave someone or something?

I think more so now than ever, being a mother and my time being incredibly precious to me. If it's either a person or a product or a job that I'm on, if I don't feel strongly about it, or if I leave feeling not so great about something, then I drop it. I just don't have time. I'm very precious with my time and with whom and where I spend it. And so that is something that's actually quite easy for me. I've dropped relationships before and business relationships and projects that I've worked on because they just didn't feel right to me. I'm not going to stick to something just because.

No one's going to do a good job if they're not excited about

it. So I don't want anybody on my team who doesn't feel strongly about something we're working on, and I don't want to be a part of anything I don't feel strongly about, because then I'm not giving it my best.

When was your bravest moment, and how do you practice being brave?

I would say childbirth was definitely my bravest moment. Thirty-three hours. I feel like after coming out of that, you can take anything on. I would say that was my bravest moment for sure. And I don't know what else could surpass that.

Going back to younger you, 17, you moved to Thailand ...

Yeah, taking chances. I also moved to Toronto after that by myself because, at that time, it was where all the acting was. And so I was like, *OK, I'm going to try my shot at this*. I had never done acting school or any of that. I really just did it when I felt right, which was after I'd taken some time off to travel and work abroad. And then when I came home, I was like, *All right, I'm going to try this acting thing. Let's move to Toronto*.

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The unknown is something that I'm really excited about. As soon as I get comfortable in something, I feel like that's when I stop growing. And I don't want that. I always want to be a little uncomfortable. And it's not in a negative way. I love it. I love putting myself in situations where I'm like, *How the hell did I end up here?* Again, I didn't go to business school. I didn't go to design school. But I know what I'm talking about because it's coming from my passion and my desire to really be working on what it is that we're doing.

Knowing what you know now, was it worth it?

Absolutely. And it has been the best learning experience for

me, similarly to acting. I didn't go to acting school, but then I landed on a show that went eight years, and I was thrown into a very successful show. So I had to learn very quickly what it meant to stand on my mark because I didn't even know what that was when I booked the job. Similarly to Béis, we sold out of six months of product in a month. And that was my initial "this is what it's like to own a business" moment. We were really successful right off the bat. And it was cool because I think when we were first starting, people didn't really know how well we were going to do, and so we were a little more cautious when ordering even though I told everybody that I knew it was going to do well. I really believe in this, and there's a need for this in the market. So they didn't order as much, but then we quickly learned to order more and little things like that. It's been an incredible learning experience.

What can you see yourself building next?

I think the sky is the limit. There are so many different directions we can go in with this, because like I said, it doesn't just have to be with travel on a plane. We're always in motion, every single day. So there's always something you're going to need to bring with you ,and we want to be the go-to travel line. And for me, it really is also just about my passion to make traveling easier for people, especially being a new mom. I wanted to create this diaper bag selfishly because it looked cute, but also because the functionality of it just made sense. And then hearing from other people who have used our products who are like, "Thank you so much. I didn't even know that I needed this." That's the best compliment ,because I drew this on a cocktail napkin because this was my dream bag. And now other people are saying that it's helped them so much in their own life and travels. That's amazing. And that's what I want to continue to do. So, yeah, the sky's the limit. I have so many ideas about where I want to take it, and we will.

What do you value most and others?

Passion.

What do you value most in yourself?

Empathy.

What holds you back?

Nothing.

One thing you're afraid of?

Rodents.

One thing you could change about yourself?

The ability to relax more.

What is your biggest vice?

Pizza and reality TV.

What keeps you sane?

The gym and hot sauce.

Something you wish you kept doing?

Piano lessons.

Something you wish you would have stopped sooner?

I really don't know. That's a good question.

What keeps you going and building?

My family and friends.

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