

FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Founder Julie Burleson's success: an international franchise (and healthier kids)

Julie Burleson built success by integrating good business practices with a sense that kids would love to learn to cook with other kids. Her Young Chefs Academy is now in 10 US states and 8 other countries as well, and classes are full everywhere. Read here about the genesis of the company, why it works, and her thoughts on her own success as a woman founder.



YOUNG CHEFS®
ACADEMY

What inspired you to start your business? Where did you start and where are you now?

I was inspired to found the [Young Chefs Academy](#) (YCA) by my son's desire to help me in the kitchen. Entrepreneurs are cursed with minds that are always working, and when my son approached me to help while I prepared a meal for a friend, the light bulb went off. I had it: a cooking school for kids!

So I called a friend whose mother ran a children's art school. After doing a little research, I found that there was a need for this kind of business. Not only that, but nothing like what I had pictured in my mind was out there.

That said, the inspiration for YCA didn't all spring from one singular moment. I had spent years building it up. For instance, I had planned an elaborate pizza making party for my daughter's fifth birthday. The invitation read, "You are invited to Rachel's Pizza Parlor." Little did I know, that model would later become the main revenue stream at YCA locations around the world. I still keep that invitation in my office as a reminder of how far I've come.

Where do you want the Young Chefs Academy to go?

I want it to keep going in the direction we are headed, with YCA locations dotting every state in America and extending our global reach even farther. We are the premier children's cooking school around the country and the world, built on the mission of spreading the joy and value of cooking to every child.

How can we help your business?

We are looking for like-minded people who not only appreciate our strong business model, but who understand the essence of what YCA stands for. The challenge in finding the right owners is that what we're looking for doesn't fit into any particular mold. It's hard to put your finger on the "essence" we're searching for.

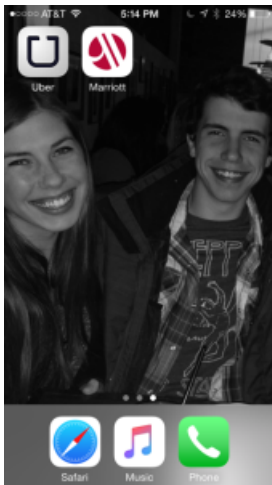


Our owners come from a wide range of backgrounds. We have welcomed everyone from lawyers to health care providers, accountants, chefs, marketers, and those with the full-time job of parenting. But they all have one thing in common: a passion for the ways YCA can positively impact children's lives. When the right people come to us, we usually know pretty quickly.

So, what did you eat for breakfast today?

If by breakfast you mean my first meal of the day (which was at 1:30 p.m. today), I had a Greek salad with extra olives. If my phone starts ringing after my first cup

of coffee, breakfast often gets passed by. I am trying to improve. Yesterday, I would have been able to tell you I had plain Greek yogurt with fresh blueberries.



What's on your phone home screen?

My inspiration and motivation: my children Rachel and Andrew!

What do you love about being an entrepreneur?

I love that I can come to work every day and be creative. I love that I can handpick the team that I work with every day. It is an amazing gift. I love that I can hire people who excel at my “weaknesses” and watch them become passionate about our brand and far surpass my abilities to make us even stronger.

Why do you do what you do, and why does it matter to you?

I do what I do for so many reasons. Not only is this a viable business with unlimited opportunities for success, but YCA makes a positive, sometimes life-changing, impact on so many children's lives, and it's not just learning to cook. It's the friendships and bonds these kids make during our classes.

All kids need to feel like they “fit in” somewhere. For many of our YCA members, the love for cooking provides a place where they feel connected with a group of like-minded children. It is such a gift to see kids from all walks of life with a variety of interests bond during a cooking class. It's hard to explain. You have to see it for yourself to understand the impact.

What would you call your “entrepreneurial superpower?”

I have the mind of an inventor. I'm always solving a problem or filling a need. That way, while my super-staff applies their many talents to the day-to-day operation of my business, I'm able to use my creativity in seemingly unlimited avenues to apply new ideas. That may be coming up with ways to answer changing customer demands or cooking trends, cultivating partnerships, or developing products. The opportunities are endless.



**PLAN A
BIRTHDAY
PARTY!**

Who is the entrepreneur you admire most right now?

Sara Blakely, founder of Spanx.

Why Sara?

She too has an inventor's spirit. She found success using nothing but her own desire to succeed, even after many failures. I love her positive, humble, can-do attitude.

What's the best and the worst thing about being an entrepreneur while also being female?

I've never let being female be an issue for me. I live by Henry Ford's creed: "Whether you think you can or you can't, you're right." My children can attest to my aversion toward statements like, "I can't" or "I'm not good at" this or that. It gets on my nerves.

Well, okay, one time I broke down and started crying in a meeting. I felt like I was seeing my dreams slip through my fingers, and it was during a crucial turning-point in my business. It was the strangest thing. I can usually control my emotions but I had to excuse myself and take a ride with my associate, someone who had been with me from the beginning. I think at the end of the day the experience helped me, because the gentleman in that meeting became my new partner, and he remains my partner and biggest advocate today.

What felt like my worst "female moment" may have also been my best, because I showed passion and feeling for my business.



Do you think male entrepreneurs are "different" from female entrepreneurs?

I think females are more nurturing by nature. So many female entrepreneurs want to help and take care of people.

What is the best advice you ever got, and from whom?

Wait to worry, because most of your worries won't come to pass. My father used to tell me that all of the time. I guess I was a worrier as a child.

We can waste so much time worrying about what might be when we should be using that precious time for so many other things, like working towards a dream, helping someone in need, or just being excited about all of the opportunities out there in the future.

When all is said and done, success comes down to attitude and perseverance.