

# Bold(her)

## Sustainable Beauty - More Than Just Skin Deep

**Note to reader:** The statements and opinions expressed by guests & interviewees are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of Bank of Montreal or its affiliates.

**Lisa Mattam:**

And people are looking for values-driven opportunities. They want to be able to put their dollars behind values that they can stand beside.

(music)

**Lisa Bragg:**

Values are an integral part of Lisa Mattam's business. It's in the product, the packaging, and the people. And it started by thinking about the future and the past.

(music)

**Lisa Bragg:**

I'm Lisa Bragg and this is Bold(her), stories of and for women who stand out, brought to you by BMO for Women.

(music)

**Lisa Bragg:**

You have a lovely story of finding your daughter, two years old, with all of your creams on her face. Tell us a little bit about that story and what your shock and awe at that moment was.

**Lisa Mattam:**

So, I was a consultant at the time. I was pregnant with my son and I came home and my daughter had gotten into my skincare. Kids love to be like their parents. And so, she had taken the skincare, all these creams and stuff, and she had it all over her face, and her arms, and everywhere. Super thick, the way that kids put things on. And I remember looking up at the top of the stairs with all these as you do with your children. I was like, "Oh, you were so cute." And I remember also thinking like, "That's a million dollars on your face probably."

And also thinking to myself, "You have to take that off. I have no idea what that's doing to your young, beautiful skin." And particularly, I don't know, for many parents, especially with your firstborn, you're a little bit more like, "I'm going to give you organic carrots. I'm going to do all these great things." And so I was in that like, "Oh." And so, I went up the stairs and I said, "You know what? You shouldn't play with that. Those aren't good for you." I think might have been what I said. "If you want to play with something you should play with these." And I took her to her room and I had these bottles of oils that my parents had brought from India.

They were ingredients and things that my parents would've used on me, their parents would've used on them. And it was in that moment that it was just like a series of events that probably if you were watching a movie would've been light bulbs or some beautiful mind event going on. And I was

thinking, "Oh, my gosh. If I really, in that instant, don't think my skincare is good enough for her, then why is it good enough for me?"

And then on top of that, if this is what I trust, if this is what I could blindly say, "If you want to play with things, use this." Then there's something more there to that trust. And it created a cascade of things because as point of background, I started my career in pharmaceuticals. So, I worked for big pharma. I worked for very specialized biotech, but I've always been along this wellness journey. I've been practicing yoga for a long time. I'm trying always to be healthy and incorporate healthy things in my life. And so, I thought, "Why has it taken me so long to get here?" If I have been in different ways in my life incorporating things to contribute to my wellness, why had I never thought of what I was putting on my skin? And I had a number of hypotheses, one of which was when we buy skincare, we buy it for results. We buy it for, I feel tired. I have redness on my skin. I have acne. I feel I'm looking old. Or at least that's why I buy it.

And so, we start with that. And we don't really think about what's behind all of that. And so, I thought you know what? I started looking at the time, a clean products which were very hard to find in general and certainly harder to find in Canada. And those that were clean were just really we're clean, we're clean, we're clean. And so, I thought, "I have this incredible opportunity." One, because I have these ingredients in which I was raised, that I believe in, that are time-tested, that are high performing. But I can take those which are actually steeped in this ancient science of India, where my parents are from, and I can prove them to people in modern science, because I grew up in pharma. But I can show people they can get the best results from these beautiful plant-based ingredients. And so, there is my story. That's really what set me off on this path.

**Lisa Bragg:**

And how long ago was that now?

**Lisa Mattam:**

Oh, my gosh. I'm old. That was eight years ago. Maybe longer. Yeah. Because we were a couple of years in formulation and I was still consulting when I first had the idea. And I had a baby. It was crazy times, but I was working on Sahajan while I was still working and still having babies. And then it was a couple years after that we launched and everything became.

**Lisa Bragg:**

That's a whirlwind story though. You're doing all these things. Looking back just briefly, what would you say to that woman eight years ago? What would you say to her?

**Lisa Mattam:**

I would say like, "Take your mat leave." I would say. When you do self-reflection, what I love about my personality is that I jump into things wholeheartedly because I remember I kept it to myself for a long time. I didn't want the feedback of family and friends because I didn't want people to say, "You're crazy." And so, I kept it really close. And then when I started to tell people, they were saying things like, "Well, what's your business plan? What's the market value?" And I was like, "What? I just had this really good idea." And not because I actually have a business background, but because I really was shooting from the gut. And I would say to that person, "Keep going. You've got a good idea." I would do things a little bit differently probably, but that's the knowledge of experience, but I wouldn't change a thing. I would definitely still jump in.

**Lisa Bragg:**

So often when we'd start new businesses and we do these different path things, people are like, "Where is the outcome? What are you going to do? What is your business plan?" And you're like, "I don't really have one because I'm making it up as I go along." Which is really scary to them, but I don't know if it's as scary to the entrepreneur or the person who has the idea. Was it really scary to you that you didn't have this big, I can't see the end result yet I'm just in the middle of it?

**Lisa Mattam:**

No. I found that part really comforting because, one, I don't see myself as a creative, but it allowed an interesting creativity because we were developing products. I was working with a small agency, but we were working on the brand and we were developing the brand and its inception. And so, all of that stuff was really exciting. It's actually sometimes in the formalization of it when you start building the business plans, and the forecasts, and you're looking at the numbers and all of those things, that to me was a bit more frightening because then it became, "Okay. Well, I know what we need to deliver. How are we going to get there?". And I think as an entrepreneur, if you don't believe you can get there, then the whole ... It's a house of cards. The whole thing falls apart.

But I think that there's a little bit of lunacy to being an entrepreneur. There has to be because why also people like my mom, I remember. So, I was in pharma and then I left to consulting, and when I was consulting it was under my own banner. The business flux and the practice group, but I remember my parents looking at me, you know, sort a "child of new immigrants". My parents came here for stability. My parents came here for a better life for their daughter. And then they were like, "So you've just given up your corporate job at a Fortune 500." And candidly, again, this maybe speaks to my family, but they were like, "They've given you a company, BMW, and you're giving it up to take the bus to our house." And they just couldn't conceive of it. And so there has to be an element in entrepreneurship, not where you necessarily give up where you take that leap of faith, or you take the risk, or you just say, "This isn't for logic. Logic doesn't belong here."

**Lisa Bragg:**

I think everyone can understand that the beauty industry is a tough, tough business. Did you have to fight to get this off the ground?

**Lisa Mattam:**

Because it was very much an idea in my head and not discussed with a lot of people, there was no fight. There wasn't necessarily an oppositional idea. I think in the early days it was interesting because I had hired... I was going to get my first loan and I had brought in a financial consultant to help build the business model. It was interesting because he had no problem building the model and I'm not an Excel person. So, it was all Excel and this link to this, and if you did this, you did this. But I remember him saying, "I just don't know if people are going to be into this." And for him it wasn't whether or not they would be into beauty, it was like, "Would they be into something inspired from India?" He didn't know the word Ayurveda. Ayurveda is the ancient wellness science from India. It's a sister practice to yoga. Prior to what I'll call Western medicine or medicine, as we know it. A lot of people are more familiar with traditional Chinese medicine. It is the sister in India kind of is the way I'll say it.

And so, I think what he couldn't conceive of is that the idea was so unique and that the idea was being inspired off of something that he couldn't wrap his arms around. That's what he struggled with because he had built financial models for other beauty brands in Canada and ones that you and I both know, but I think for him it was like, it didn't have that ... However you want to say it. That sort of,

I think in his mind, a foreign element to it or an element because it wasn't about... I was a model who wanted to start a skincare company or I had discovered a rare plum. And sometimes you see that in beauty. Especially in those early days, I remember meeting a brand and it was like, "I went on vacation in the Amazon and I discovered this rare oil." That was the narrative of a lot of discovery. Whereas this narrative was like heritage, this narrative was ancient, meet science.

So, where I saw that confusion or where I saw the challenge was not... I think the beauty people could get it because they were always looking for new, but I think sometimes the finance minds or the other minds were kind of like, "Are people going to link into this? I can't say the word Ayurveda. Is somebody else going to be able to see it?" All of those things. And I think that's where the confusion lies. And it also shows you, because we launched the brand over six years ago, that even the awareness, not just because of us, certainly I hope we had a small part in it, but the awareness of Ayurveda is... has exponentially grown, thanks to so many things. And because of food, because people are eating in a certain way, because of the pandemic. The world couldn't get any more turmeric. They were putting it in their smoothies, and they were making shots of it, and they were doing all these different things. I was almost early in seeing what I thought people would do. And so, in some ways I look at that as a blessing and a gift, but in the early days it was like, "No, no, no. I can see it. I can see it."

**Lisa Bragg:**

Yeah. I know exactly what you're talking about because I was early with content. So video, animation, podcasts, like I started in 2007. Some people weren't there yet. "Putting video online, what do you mean? What's this YouTube?" And so, there's so much education that goes into telling people about it. So, you end becoming an ambassador, but it does take away some of your energy because you're doing the education part. You're passionate, but you're so early that it takes away a lot of it. Did you find that at all?

**Lisa Mattam:**

For sure. I think in some ways it was exciting because you're teaching people about something new because yoga and Ayurveda, they are sisters, sister practices, people who were deep into yoga had heard of it, but also people could make that, "Oh, you're telling me yoga?" But there was always that initial piece. I even struggled. Do I use the word Ayurveda or do I just call it Indian beauty? Because if I call it Indian beauty, you can just go, "Oh, it's from India." And there's the full stop. It's from India. I don't need to ask more questions to understand more. Whereas when I say it's from Ayurveda, you have to say, "What is Ayurveda?" And even when I explain it, maybe you don't understand. It's all of those. It's a longer conversation.

But I also think that's what makes it amazing because, one, I became very mission driven around, yes, I want to give people great skincare products, but I want to teach people about this old world science because I genuinely believe it'll make them healthier. I genuinely believe that. And in India there's this huge hospital close to where my parents are from where there's Ayurveda doctors and medical doctors in the same facility because there's an understanding that these two aren't in opposition to each other. So, I wanted to bring that. So, it was both exciting, but I think it would be more disheartening even I think I would meet South Asians, people from the Indian subcontinent who would be like, "Do you really think other people are going to get into this?" And I'd be like, "Yeah. Yeah. I do. They got into yoga, they got into meditation." Those two things both have a similar heritage. And so, they will.

**Lisa Bragg:**

They are. They will.

**Lisa Mattam:**

They are.

**Lisa Bragg:**

And they are.

**Lisa Mattam:**

They are.

**Lisa Bragg:**

So, tell us about your brand so we can all go run out and buy it because it's beautiful online. I love the feeling that you give online that it's not the fix, it's the thrive, it's the whole live and strong. There's something more to it and it feels the luxury too. So, tell us about what we would expect if we opened up one of your jars.

**Lisa Mattam:**

What I hope people will experience and what we want to deliver on is across a line of, we want it to be a ritual. So, Ayurveda, at its core, believes you are well when you're in balance. And when you're out of balance, that's when other things show. And that other thing could be stomach stuff, that could be redness on the skin, that could be anxiety, all of those things. And so, we need to be able to learn to keep ourselves in balance. And so, I hope from the moment someone touches the product that it does become part of a soul care routine. We talk a lot about self-care, but to me it's about nourishing the soul, but then there's an element of it which is just so performance-driven. So, if you pick up our ritual body oil, it's a great body oil. It's going to hydrate the skin, it's going to moisturize the skin, it smells amazing.

And if you're using that, that's a very ritual product. I encourage people to use it for self-massage. I encourage them to use it for meditation. One of the things that Ayurveda says is that there's no greater act of self-care than anointing oneself with oils from head to toe. And so, there's an amazing experience in that. But if I take you to our best sellers, which are our nourish creamery or our radiant serum, those are clinically proven based on Ayurveda ingredients to minimize the appearance of fine lines, increase the luminosity of the skin, increase the hydration of the skin. Even out skin tone, depending on the products. I'm giving some of the different claims from different products, but you're going to get the experience, you're going to get to me Ayurveda that's at its best because it's a little bit of the magic and a little bit of the science all rolled into one.

**Lisa Bragg:**

And I get to see Lisa on camera because we do this with video camera first. And her skin looks great. So, I'm just going to say that right now. So, it looks really good. It's a little bit of testimonial, but you don't get to where you are with building this luxurious skincare brand that is really doing amazing things on your own. You've had to have help. And you mentioned some finance person saying, "I don't really understand this." Did you bootstrap this?

**Lisa Mattam:**

We bootstrap, but we do have some loan funding. And so, we have some loan funding that we were able to access in the early days and that really helped accelerate our growth. I was part of the

Sephora, the first Sephora accelerator. So, it was an incubator program for early-stage beauty businesses that they believe. I think they call it, I love using the term because they coined it but changed the future of beauty. So, we did get some interim loan funding when I was launching a product through them. So, there's been definitely some financial assistance on the way, but bootstrapped in that when you, so loan, obviously you're responsible for returning that loan. And then with BMO, we won our grant on sustainability, which was incredible. And all of those insertions are really helpful. But it is hard to do the finance piece. And my background is marketing and strategy. So strategically I can sit down and really work on where the brand needs to go, but the finance piece doesn't come naturally.

So, I would say to anyone who's starting a business, my biggest learning is get a finance person. But is also because I think I, along the way should have brought in that help sooner because I had somebody come and build the model, for example, for the first loan. But then that was a project and we didn't continue for example. But I would add to that, you really have to know where your gaps are because as an entrepreneur, you try and do everything. Up until a year ago, if you were messaging on Instagram, it was me that wrote you back.

And that's great because I actually love being close to the customer or the interested customer, but it's also not sustainable. And from the gap perspective, yes, left to my own devices and I don't do this because I know better. But because I'm a marketer, I could easily be like, "Let's invest here and let's invest here and let's make the packaging of lights on it?" And so, you need to have that balance of function. That's why corporations, you realize why corporations have their executive teams the way that they do, because everybody has that function. And it's that synergy which makes the business grow.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Yeah. Because you don't know what you don't know. And you come in having a passion, having a meaning, having a mission, but you don't know all the financial pieces to it. And that's often where we just want to make something that's great in the world and make something better. But we don't really understand that because we also just want to take money from our own bank account because it's a risk. So we don't want to even bring in necessarily our friends and family. We really just bootstrap it personally. And then we realize, "Well, if I really want to grow it, how are they growing it over there?"

**Lisa Mattam:**

Exactly.

**Lisa Bragg:**

You did take a loan, so was that scary for you? Or how was that?

**Lisa Mattam:**

That wasn't scary because it still felt within my control and it felt as though it wasn't hard to get. What I think is more nerve wracking is when you start opening the books to other people. Because as I said, I'm a marketer by background. So, for example, from the beginning of the business, I've always added these cards into our orders and I call them mantra cards and they say something really nice. They might say a mantra that you can say in the day or an affirmation or it could be something that. And one of my best friends, her husband helps me with finance stuff now. And he said to me, "What's the all-in cost of you sending out a shipment?" And I was like, "Well is the cost of the product?" Because I don't think that way I was like, "Well there's the cost of the product." And he was like, "In the cost of the box" and I was like, "Well, oh yeah, I guess there's the cost of the box that the product

goes in." And he was like, "Uh-huh." And then I was like, "In the cost of the card" and he was like, "Well, how much is the card?" And I was like, "I don't know, I just ordered them." They're so pretty. And so, it's when you start, you have to do it. And it's interesting, because I have finance friends who started businesses who are not marketers. And so, for them to open up the sleeves of showing people what they're doing from a marketing perspective is so frightening. And so, it's really part of owning a business is being vulnerable. And so, you have to be willing to come to the table and be vulnerable all the time in order to succeed and in order to move forward. And choosing obviously the right people to be vulnerable with.

**Lisa Bragg:**

Yeah. There's a whole lot of naked for sure.

**Lisa Mattam:**

Yeah.

**Lisa Bragg:**

And you've had help though, along the way. So the sustainability grant, tell me what was that about for you?

**Lisa Mattam:**

We were able to win the BMO sustainability grant, which to me meant a few different things, obviously recognition for the efforts we were making in sustainability and on two fronts. And it was really neat the way that BMO had set up, because whenever you think sustainability, everybody thinks recyclable packaging or biodegradable packaging or minimizing your plastic, which we are doing those things. And so, we are going through a phase where we do have plastic, which is minimal because we use glass jars, but there's no way to do a dropper without using plastic. It's just some of those things aren't capable. So we're moving things to post consumer resin or basically up-cycled plastic. So, it was recognition of that. But what was also cool about it is when BMO looked at what the definition was around sustainability, it also was broader in terms of community.

And we, our Lip Karma, for example, we're in partnership with Plan Canada, for every Lip Karma we sell, we send a girl in a developing country to school for a day so that she can navigate her own future. And I've always been, like for me, if you asked me what my life's passion is, it's really elevating women and girls. I've always wanted to do that. I even knew when I started this business that it would do that. I didn't know in what capacity. I didn't know how. I didn't know on what platform, but I always knew we would do that. And so, doing that was really important to me. And a lot of people said to us, "You're so early in your business growth, why have social impact now?" And I was like, "How could I not have social impact now?"

So for me, the grant was recognition of the things that we were doing. The grant funds itself helped us work with a program called Packed, which actually takes. So, if you can imagine you've got... So if we're talking our product, you've got your Ritual Body Oil and you can easily rinse the jar and throw it in the recycling. But what do you do with the cap? You throw it in the garbage, well, it takes all those hard to manage pieces and it up cycles them. It takes your mascaras wand. And we're supporting not just our own product going through, but other products, but you could put in a box, you put in our pump from our hair oil and our dropper from our serum. And then you put in the pump from your shampoo bottle, all these hard to recycle.

And so having that grant enabled us to partner with this program. It actually paid for our membership and our capability in that program, which was significant. And then there was a third element, which I think people don't talk about, but I'm going to say it and you can disagree or agree or not. But is that one thing that I've learned over the course of this business that I'm continuing to remind myself, because sometimes we'll get an email from a friend that says, "You should apply for this" or sometimes you'll get, "You've been nominated for this" and in the busyness of your day, you're just like, "I can't fill out that nomination" is that recognition is important to the viability of your brand because one, it grows the awareness of it. So, when people doing that, BMO is in fact lifting our business because they're putting our name out there. They're saying, "This is a business we believe in."

They're putting it on their social platform. So, it's one other discovery point. But also people want to know that they're... I think I used to think like, "Please buy it from me, my kids need to eat." But really what the truth of the matter is people want to buy from brands that they believe in, that they can stand behind, but they also want to buy from brands they know are building success. And so I had a number of people who were like, "Oh my gosh, congratulations on that BMO grant." And maybe left out the word sustainability. But for them that validation from BMO, that piece of congratulations on that is really important. And it sends a signal to them that, "Hey, this business is doing interesting things." And so we don't talk about that a part of awards, we don't talk about that part of grants, but that part for an entrepreneur does help elevate your brand and those pieces are so important.

**Lisa Bragg:**

I absolutely think 100% that you need to brag, which means talking about your successes and showing the world. And then when companies like BMO say, "Hey, you are doing something," then amplify it again, because then it's just going to attract the right fit people who want to buy a quality product yours and then come back again and again. And I think you're also bringing up an interesting point that we're all shopping, much more. A lot of us are shopping based on our values because there are so many products out there and that we're saying, "Hey, I'm going to put my money where my mouth is and make sure that I'm buying something that has woman found or that is going to be successful, that helpful with the sustainability of the environment, or just aligns with me." Are you finding more and more people are walking the walk?

**Lisa Mattam:**

Absolutely. And one of the things I learned through the pandemic was we're not only a Canadian company, but our products are made in Canada. So, they're made just north of Toronto and just side of Montreal. And so, Canadians certainly love that we were made in Canada because it was a critical time in all of our economies where we wanted to be able to support our economy. And then I even think for Americans because we do have a good portion of customers in the U.S., knowing that we're investing in our local economy, knowing all of those things becomes really important to them because they know that there's a whole group of people behind me that they don't see that are printing the boxes, that are filling the jars, that are doing all of those things. So, I think we see that with our made in Canada, we see that with the efforts that we're making towards sustainability.

We see that because we're using natural ingredients. We see that because we're transparent. We see that across a number of fronts. And I say that as a consumer, I try really hard over the holidays. For example, there's certain things that I buy from the big brands because I want them or I want to be able to gift them, but I work really hard to purchase from entrepreneurs or to purchase from brands that have ethics that align with mine because I think, yeah, we invest with our money. We vote with our money. We're saying, "I vote for this brand. I spend money here." And I think we see that across



the board and we'll continue to see that. And people are looking for values driven opportunities. They want to be able to put their dollars behind values that they can stand beside.

**Lisa Bragg:**

I think too, back to one of your earlier points though, we also want to cheer you on because it makes it more of a story than just something that we can't see where we can see you on social media. And we can see your daughter in the initial video and that we want to hear the stories of people that were humans wanting to have a human connection more and more. So, the spending with intention, I think really is part of our fabric for a lot of us. Was it hard for you to break into this industry and really make your mark?

**Lisa Mattam:**

Yes, very much so. And it continues to be because you have big, big, big businesses, the Estee Lauders, the L'Oreals, the whoever's of the world. And I say that with no criticism, but who have just larger marketing budgets, who have larger capabilities. I was an end of one with a part-time office manager for a long time. And that limits your capability just in terms of your share of voice, how much could we possibly do with that limited voice? So, there was that element of it, which is just the reality of life. And then there's the other element of it, which is what's cool is that indie beauty is becoming a real thing, which means that clean beauty, founder driven brands, the lesser known, having a big, big conglomerate say, we're going to launch a new brand or we're going to launch a new version of Olay or something, there's more happening in the indie beauty industry, which is really great.

But the barriers to entry are also not that high. And so in the last years, there's been more entrance to the beauty industry than ever before. So that in and of itself is interesting to navigate. And then there's the element. I didn't come from beauty. I didn't understand consumer package goods. And then some of it is just, and this is I think the challenge that most entrepreneurs have. And when we think of other things that impact is access. So is being able to get in front of the right people, to tell your story, because online, you have this incredible ability to tell your story, which is amazing and through social media, but I am not a social media aficionado. I'm becoming one and I've become one, but I didn't start there. And so there's so many points of access you need to understand and being able to get those, being able to get those with limited capacity, all of those things are really hard. And then there's no shortage. Someone once said to me, there's a retailer that we're with called the Detox Market. And I love them. They have stores in LA, in New York and in Toronto, and then they have a much broader presence. They're one of the originals in the clean beauty space. They're a huge thought leader. And I was told that every year 700 brands apply to be in that store. I didn't even know 700 indie brands existed. I really didn't. And so even if you took and you can find that number online, so I'm not talking at a school here, but if you even said, okay, maybe half of them are not marketable or they're maybe not viable, or maybe somebody just wrote in an application, but really they made soap in their kitchen that morning or something, maybe they weren't yet ready.

That's still 350 brands. There is no shortage of competition. So, the challenge is what are the ways that you're going to succeed and meets that competition? What are the ways that you're either going to show yourself to be different, show yourself to have more value and access is a huge thing. How are you going to get access? To be able to showcase your brand in an environment where you could go to sleep for a day or a week and somebody else is going to be telling the story anyway.

**Lisa Bragg:**

And also finding out that you did have a magic gem where you're looking at something different, and then they're going to go in and just copy you too. We're always afraid of somebody copying our ideas,

but if you don't put it out into the world, and keep it hidden, then what's the point? So, did you find there's competition in what you chose, old and the new, is there competition there?

**Lisa Mattam:**

Oh, oh my gosh. Yeah. So if I think of Ayurveda specifically, in a really beautiful way, I was at an event in New York a couple months ago when someone introduced me as the OG in Ayurvedic beauty, and I was like, "Yay," that's such a nice way to say it. But I also realized I was sitting amongst my panelists and they all had Ayurvedic the beauty brands, some haircare, some skincare, but what's incredible is I think once you've created a category, once you have competitors, some at the same space, some are luxury, some are mass, but we've created this category to me that creates validation and it's no longer. And so it's frightening because it's true I had this magic jam and what if too many people have it? And it's diluted down or it doesn't seem as unique.

But I think when you're creating something new, having that validation of, "Yes, I have competitors now. And yes, there's enough people in the space," says to the consumer, says to the retailer, hey, there's something here. If this many people are spending time talking about it and we all have customers buying from us, this isn't so foreign is the word that I used earlier, but it isn't so foreign to me or it isn't so niche that it's not going to work in my retail environment. Actually, there's a category being formed.

**Lisa Bragg:**

How does that feel to say you were anointed or category maker, to make a category nowadays is really a different thing. So, to make a brand category, especially in packaged goods, that is quite a thing. So, having somebody say that to you, how did that make you feel?

**Lisa Mattam:**

I mean, let's be totally transparent. Were we the category makers? I don't want to overdo our... But it's nice that somebody said that. But I think what it says is when I started, I can think of one other brand, in Canada for sure, in the U.S., there was another brand that was really on my radar. And there were always other brands, but maybe not looking for that expansion, they were at a beautiful spa or they were maker made or some of those things. So I want to make sure that I'm honoring all of those things, and I'm learning, but I am learning how to brag. But what I do think is knowing that even as a brand, if we are part of creating a category, I heard you say it.

And I'm like, yeah, that is wild. It is wild to think that you're part of that. I had an investor reach out a couple of years ago and I wasn't ready for an investor. And it wasn't the time for me, but I remember him saying, I said, "Oh, why did you call me?" And he said, "Well, we consider you category defining." And I was like, "Wow," I remember writing it on a sticky and putting it on my wall just to feel good. But I was like there is something really wild. And what it speaks to though is that from the mouth of babes, but from small ideas or from small moments can come great things.

**Lisa Bragg:**

So you are also very generous in the world and you're giving back, tell us how you're giving back.

**Lisa Mattam:**

Giving back to women and girls has always been my passion. It's something that I've always known, I would do throughout my life. In university I was Gender Equity Chair. This was something that was always born in me. With every purchase of a lip karma in the association with Plan Canada. And then because I am a girl campaign, we send a girl in a developing country to school for a day, so she can

navigate her future. And it's really about girls lifting themselves, lifting their communities, growing through independence. And then the other thing that we'd done this year, which I'm super excited about is we've created an accelerator for women entrepreneurs. So, it's called Accelerate(her). And it's specifically in Canada because my observation was that we need it in Canada. There's room for more. So there are some really beautiful programs out there for women entrepreneurs, but there's certainly an opportunity for more. And so what we've created is an accelerator. We've just launched our first cohort. It has eight participants, our eight cohort members, their businesses can range from either 50 to 500 thousand in sales. And what we've done is the program has two streams. So, one is they get set up with a mentor and the mentor is another woman entrepreneur who's grown their business through that financial period and also through other hurdles and is working in a seven-digit business. And then the other part of it is that we have learning programs. And so every once a month or twice a month, depending on the month, we have sessions anywhere from finance to marketing, to working with influencers, to pitching to editors, to wellness.

So there is a number of people who've agreed to... All of these people are volunteer, which is incredible. Every single person is Canadian, which is incredible, and it really we're working in Canada. And so it really speaks to, I think the support of community we have around women in entrepreneurship, but it also speaks to the need. We had over 150 applicants. And so my goal is to be able to roll out this program for the next five years to really help, to also change the future of entrepreneurship and women's entrepreneurship in Canada. But it's also meant this is something I had flirted with in my head for a long time. And in talking with one of my colleagues here had told her, and she said, "Why don't you do it now?" And my initial answer was, "Well, we're not big enough." I think I wanted to be, I don't know what it is. Estée Lauder. I wanted to be something different before I could do it. And the learning for me is she said back to me, "Do how many people haven't been able to get..." There's hurdles along your business. There's first getting sales. And then there's getting to 100,000 in sales and 500,000 in sales and then a million dollars in sales. And so she was like, "Do you know how many people are struggling through these different hurdles? And they need some support to get to the next hurdle. You don't have to be at a kajillion dollars to be able to create something this. You can be where you are and still give back in an incredible way and still create this community." And in a world post pandemic, where all we do is sit on Zooms. We don't have community.

And so it's community creating. It's meant to be uplifting for women. And if we're going to survey these women at the end of their six months with us. But if my goal is for them to say, "My business is better for having gone through this program." And if they do, we'll have been successful.

**(music)**

**Lisa Bragg:**

So on Bold(h)er we always ask these three questions, tell us a time when you were bold.

**Lisa Mattam:**

I really, really wanted to work with a retailer. And we had been going through this back and forth, back and forth. And the feedback on the products was incredible. Best serum shaper tried, look at your oil cleanser, amazing, all of these things. And so I'm going to cleanse out names here, and we just weren't getting to like, "How do I close this?" And I was really struggling with like, "What do I do? How do I get to that place where I can get this yes?" And so what I did was I sent an email and this company wasn't in Toronto, and I said, "I'm going to be in your city on these dates. Let me know if

you're free to get together." And she wrote back and said, "Yeah, no problem. I'm free. I'd love to meet you in person."

I wasn't planning on being there. I had no ticket booked. I had nothing. There was no trip. This was a made-up trip. And the funny thing is I get on. So I'm like, perfect. I booked a ticket. I get on the plane. I get there. I get there a day early. I'm walking the city. And I get this email that says, "I'm so sorry. I need to reschedule." And so that's the funny part of the story, because I almost start crying in the middle of the store where I'm like, "Maybe I'll get a blouse for this meeting." So the bold part was going all the way there and asking for the meeting. And then I wrote back and said, "I'm here. What can I do? Can I meet you for breakfast? Can I meet you for lunch? Can I meet you for a drink at midnight? What can I do?"

And unfortunately, we weren't able to meet. I was able to do other things with my time, but even in that cancellation, it created a closeness that she said, "But I know we need to do this face to face. So I will talk to you in two days over" wasn't Zoom back then. I forget what we talked over. And that helped me solidify that opportunity with that retailer. And I think to myself, "Gosh, Lisa, why did it take you so long to just say, hey, I'm going to be in your city. Can we get together?" And because I will often do the opposite, which is if I know I'm going to be there, I'll be like, "Hey, I'm going to be in Montreal next week. Are you free?" Versus sometimes I just think we have to do the bold thing and give people reasons. At the end of the day, I have to remember I'm a salesperson. That's what my job is. My first and foremost job is business is to sell for it. And so I need to be clever with that and bold.

**Lisa Bragg:**

When was there a time you wish you had been bolder?

**Lisa Mattam:**

I think I consistently wish I was bolder. And I also think I'm a bold person, but what I realize is I sometimes underestimate either myself or the business because it's almost like I'm managing expectations. I joke, I have a friend who runs a business and he would always tell me how amazing his business was. It was this. And it was that. He was like, it was this and this and this and this. And then he in one day happened to not say the exact number, but suggest how much money the business was making a month. And I almost fell off my chair because I was like, "Really?" Not because it wasn't good, but because I thought it was so much bigger than it was. Whereas I think I use words small and I use words consistently sometimes unknowingly that take away from my capacity because I say we worked with, I heard myself do it on this podcast.

I said, we worked with a small agency. I don't need to qualify that. I work with an agency. And so I think sometimes I use language that I don't even realize minimizes things and I don't do it with intent. I think I do it sometimes because I feel I need to manage expectations because I worry that someone will say, "Well, you're only this big or you're only this." And it's all constructed in my head. It's all constructed in my head. And so I wish I was bolder every day because in that boldness is where greatness is going to come.

**Lisa Bragg:**

What would you say to your 20-year-old self?

**Lisa Mattam:**

I would say get a lot of sleep because you're not going to sleep that much more. But I had no idea at 20 that I would be an entrepreneur. I had no idea at 25. I had no idea when I worked in pharma. I

never thought I would be an entrepreneur. It wasn't even in my head. Even when I met my husband, I met him at work and he had joined the company and I was already there and I was like, "Well, they're not going to be okay with the two of us," because it was a big company, but not a bank. And so I was like, "They're not going to be okay with the two of us. So you're right. You're going to have to leave." And so I never thought that any of this was possible, but I think what I would tell my 20-year-old self is you don't have to be so focused on the destination because it's really going to change. And I didn't know that back then.

**(music)**

**Lisa Bragg:**

Thanks for joining us Lisa Mattam. I'm Lisa Bragg, and you've been listening to Bold(h)er, stories of and for women who stand out, brought to you by BMO for Women. If you liked the show, please share it with other women who stand out, just like you. Talk to you soon.