

# Life of a Self-Made Entrepreneur

written by Ali Jafar | February 27, 2020



Photo: Jemelin Artigas, used with permission

## Guest blog by Jemelin Artigas

It all looks so easy, doesn't it? I appeared on the latest series of The Apprentice on BBC1 and I have had a lot of people come up to me and say how wonderful and nice it must be to be a 'successful entrepreneur'. But how many people know what the odds were against me to get to where I am today – and more importantly – stay there? Well, let me tell you this: the road to success is a marathon, not a sprint – and yes, it is stressful and exhausting!

No one magically makes their way straight to the top. How do we even define what the 'top' is? With today's instantaneous gratification culture, where some people find instant fame and success, many people think of success as a construct of luck rather than hard work and commitment. This couldn't be further from the truth!

## **Small beginnings and smaller belongings**

I was just 16 when I first came to this country in 2002 and I had only just graduated from high school in Venezuela. I was the oldest of three sisters and my mum always had a lot of trust in me as I helped her to bring my two little sisters up. Coming to London was the first time I was going to be away from my family, friends and the life that I had built up over the last 16 years. Was it scary? Absolutely! But there was always something inside me shouting that we are all born to do bigger things – so I took the opportunity by the horns.

It is London's wintery September of 2002 and I arrive with just a small bag of clothes and £800 that I planned – erroneously – to last me the whole year. Little did I know that this money would not even last a month. I was not too familiar with the currency conversion metrics so mistakenly spent most of what I had on an affluent warm coat – it must have been a designer brand or something. The weather was bad by even UK standards – but even worse for someone use to the Venezuelan heat that never drops below 35 degrees. Very soon, things did not go to plan and I found myself broke and living in rough conditions.

I fortunately found a job handing out flyers for an English school that I signed up to. I spoke very little English and people found me very hard to understand – but, I am sure, I was able to understand others better than they could understand me. However, the communication and cultural barriers made it very difficult for me to find work. Sadly, you are automatically shunned when you are socially different. Some people are not aware that they are doing this, but others are.

## **Homelessness and intuition**

Suddenly some circumstances with the people I had been living with changed and I was then left homeless. It happened very quickly and was one of the hardest moments of my life. It is that long lonely walk when you know you do not have anywhere to go to – let alone sleep. It is a totally empty and void space, and no one should have to experience this. But I wasn't ready to give up. When you are at rock bottom you find this inner strength. It is dormant but it somehow awakes when you need it to.

Soon after some additional hurdles, I found a job in a restaurant as a

cleaner. I wanted to learn English, but a lot of people told me that many immigrants come to the UK and never succeed. They told me London is a very competitive city and that with all the issues I have had, I should give up and go back – and not ‘lower’ myself anymore. I am sure they meant well – but my intuition meant better and I ignored them!

Through a positive attitude, hard work and determination, I ended up getting a promotion as an assistant waitress at the same place I was cleaning at. I noticed that I started speaking a bit more English owing to my eagerness to meet and greet people – I take a genuine interest in the people I am speaking with. This taught me something! Respecting others and working hard at anything leads to success – and that working with a positive attitude is very liberating and unbelievably rewarding.

## **Confidence and education**

My experiences taught me that life’s ups and downs are never permanent. So, I ignored the fearful warnings and I started to learn about the British culture and find more positive friends. I started to move around in circles where everyone spoke English very well. It was like a contagion – I started picking up so much of the language and culture and some 3 years later, I was comfortably speaking English. This gave me added self-confidence. Further, I find that effective communication is a synonym for confidence!

My dream was to always go to university, but I needed to help my family back home as well as support myself, so I was never able to do so. However, I enrolled myself onto a college beauty course and worked hard and then managed to get a dream job in a prestigious beauty salon. I worked there for 3 years, whilst always willing to learn and improve my English – because I started to realise that effective communication was key to my career success. By a fortuitous turn of events, I was scouted by an events company, they thought I had – wait for it – great communication skills and offered me a job in the events industry where I would help at trade shows for all different types of businesses. Working in this industry taught me so much and gave me the drive to become a businesswoman myself.

## **Tips for success**

I do not have a degree and never went to university, never had a corporate job and have very little overall business experience. I had

not even managed a team but – fast forward, some 18 years later – and here I am running a global business, developing an app for the events industry and appeared as one of the lucky candidates selected for The Apprentice series. I now regularly speak in front of hundreds of people undertaking motivational talks in English, Portuguese and Italian. I am writing a book about the past 18 years of my life to hopefully inspire people that resonate with me – and for those who have come from very little. The question I always get is, how did you do it? How did you managed to fight the odds? So, here are my top 6 tips for LSST students on how to overcome adversity and fight for your own success:

**1) Self-belief:** I know this is going to sound cliché, but self believe is the biggest motivational factor. You need to believe in what you can do, and you know you are worth. Always remember when you were very young you had so many dreams – so keep these alive. Believe in yourself and your dreams as much as you believed in them when you were a child. Self-belief will block out any negativity or fear anyone can plant on you as you grow up. Don't be upset when people shatter your dreams sometimes loved ones are just trying to protect you, so just fight for it and prove them wrong. Remember sometimes not getting what we want is actually a wonderful stroke of luck.

**2) Knowledge is power:** learn, learn and learn as much as you can, about as many things as you can. In order to evolve you will need to learn – it is common sense. Learn new skills, new languages, read books and feed your mind. Enforce on yourself that you will be learning for the rest of your life! They say successful entrepreneurs read a minimum of 50 books a year and with technology this day, you can listen to books, podcast, YouTube videos and TED talks with ease – but just be mindful that what you feed your mind, you become.

**3) Enjoy the journey:** did you know that very few of us live in the present? That's right! Most of us are usually thinking about the past (what we could have done differently) or about the future (what will happen next). You will hear fellow students saying: I can't wait to graduate. I can't wait to buy a house or get married. But we are so focused on the result that we forget to enjoy the now – the actual journey! You need to be more focused on the present because that is where you have control and thus it becomes the most important time of your life – the here and now!

**4) Don't listen to others:** sounds drastic but truth is that many

people will try to talk you out of your goals and dreams. They will tell you it can't be done: the industry is inundated, the profession doesn't pay enough, it is too competitive; too many people are doing it! **DON'T LISTEN** – just test it out and find out for yourself! You must test drive life sometimes in order to find your path. I use rejection as my fuel. Not to brag about it when I accomplish it – but to show them that with hard work, dedication and consistency – everything is possible. The word says itself **IMPOSSIBLE** is actually **I'M POSSIBLE**. So make the impossible possible now!

**5) Don't compare yourself to others:** did you know you are born a winner? Yes, that's right! You won the biggest biological race in life against millions just like you! And you made it. Unfortunately, as we grow older, other people and even our own fears can bring out the worst in us. You have a unique DNA that no one else has and you are special on your own right. Don't ever compare yourself to anyone because you are so unique. Be super focused on what you want to achieve so that the only competition you have is yourself! You are you – and that's your superpower! Your journey is unique and yours only.

**6) Fail, fail and fail some more:** yes that's right I said fail! Failure it is going to give you the biggest lesson in everything you do in life. So, the more you fail, the more you will learn. See failure as a positive instead of a negative. This will help you understand that anyone that has reached success has failed many times. The difference between those that fail and those that learn is that the winners get up and keep fighting no matter how many times they fail. Learning from your failures is the biggest thing you can do to be able to reach success.

This are some of the hundreds of tips I can give you not just to reach success but enjoy the journey in getting there. Invest in yourself and your education, work hard and live a life not just for you but in service to others.

Until the next time we meet – keep fighting on and stay very well!

## **Jemelin Artigas**

Read about Jemelin's visit to LSST Elephant & Castle where she spoke about entrepreneurship –[http://www.lsst.ac/news/bbc\\_apprentice\\_star/](http://www.lsst.ac/news/bbc_apprentice_star/)