

THE Mompreneur™

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FAMILY | AMBITION | INSPIRATION | BALANCE

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Success! 1 Year and Counting

LIETTE TOURSIGNANT

Hang & Level

What to do when success calls!

9 WAYS TO BOOST
PRODUCTIVITY

RECIPE FOR
SUCCESS

LEGAL EASE
FOR THE
MOMPREENEUR

SUCCESS

Liette Toursignant

Hang & Level Success as a Momprenneur.



Photo by: Stephanel Cragg

WHAT MADE YOU DEVELOP THE HANG & LEVEL? As an interior decorator, my biggest frustration was hanging pictures or any other wall decoration. Hanging “stuff” in the right place on the first try was definitely a hair pulling experience for me. You know how frustrating it is to hang something on your own walls so now just imagine the pressure when you are paid to do it on someone else’s walls.

One day in 1998, after spending hours creating a collage of pictures on a large wall, I thought I should look for a tool that could help me with precision and speed when hanging artwork. I checked the large retail stores, specialized decorating boutiques, art galleries, framing shops, paint stores but to my big surprise I didn’t find anything. Store clerks kept telling me that carpenter levels and measuring tapes would help me do the job, nothing else. Little did they know that I already owned every possible size of levels and still could not hang pictures correctly.

I went back home frustrated and explained to my husband Kelly, who has great carpentry skills, that I needed a tool to help me hang pictures. So we went to our garage and worked on a prototype. Our "home made" prototype worked extremely well, it allowed me to hang pictures quickly and with extreme precision. It's all about having the right tools to do the job right! People started commenting on my nameless tool and wanted to buy it from me because it worked so well. They would say: "Just make another one, Liette"!

That's when Kelly and I decided to take our picture-hanging tool to the market.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT DEVELOPING A PROTOTYPE AND THEN FIND A MANUFACTURER? Kelly and I contacted the National Research Council (NRC), to get their thoughts and advice on our invention. They loved our picture hanging tool as one of them, had just moved into a new house and had spent hours hanging artwork. They immediately saw the value and potential of our tool.

We worked with the NRC and an industrial designer who helped us design a more sophisticated and refined tool out of plastic to help us further test the design and concept. From there we had computer drawings done and had a rapid prototype made. Making a prototype is a very important step in product development as it allows you to "iron out all the bugs" before spending thousands of dollars in tooling and manufacturing expenses.

The prototype confirmed that a few more tweaks were required. We then proceeded to have a mould of our product made. Making a mould is very expensive so you need to be 150% sure that your prototype is perfect otherwise all the parts produced by the mould will turn out imperfect. That would be a huge waste of time and money.

Finding a manufacturer turned out to be one our biggest and most expensive challenges, as well as a sometimes stressful experience! We researched manufacturing plants in Canada and obtained quotes but unfortunately manufacturing in Canada would have cost us three to four times more than manufacturing in China....so we went to the Orient.

A manufacturing "expert" highly recommended one Chinese manufacturer. Unfortunately neither the manufacturer nor the "expert" delivered. Quality was so poor that after three tries we cancelled our agreement with them. We had trusted the expert's advice and while he was well recommended we realized that we should have done even more due diligence on his experience. This ordeal set us back by almost a year. It was extremely

frustrating as we had everything else in place to launch our product that spring.

We had to literally start all over again finding a reliable manufacturer. This time we didn't rely on any experts, we became the experts! We did extensive research to find the manufacturer we are currently working with. The first samples they sent to us were almost perfect, we just wished we would have gone that route the first time around. Yes, we definitely learned an expensive lesson.

WHAT OTHER CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE?

Every day brings a new challenge. Some challenges are bigger than others but in the end they all need to be handled with the best of care. Here are a few examples of challenges we had to face:

Finding the right name for our tool turned out to be quite a challenge, it was almost like finding the perfect name for a child. The first name we came up with was "Spot On" but after a market survey revealed that it sounded more like a stain remover than a name for a picture hanging tool we dropped the name. In the end we decided to pick a descriptive name that said exactly what the tool does, "Hang & Level". It makes it easy to hang your pictures and then level them.

Finding people who have an entrepreneurial spirit, who are motivated, disciplined and who share your passion and vision for the company continues to be a challenge.

Sometimes everyday is a challenge for a mompreneur! I work full-time, raise two teenage daughters, try to cook healthy meals, keep the house clean, work out every day if possible, get six hours of sleep and get to all the parent/teacher's interviews. I realize that I cannot do it all so I have learned to cut some corners and hire help when I need to. I am also very fortunate that my husband helps and shares almost all the household chores. This is also a great opportunity to involve our daughters. My girls are more involved in the day-to-day operations of running a household than most I suspect. They do their own laundry and help with cooking and cleaning as well. So between the four of us, we all contribute and somehow manage to make it work but it's still pretty crazy!

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF YOUR SUCCESSES? We are a small local company who designed and manufacture a consumer product that is now sold in major retail stores across Canada and will soon be sold in the United States. That's a HUGE success.

We have built an incredible team. Each person is extremely creative, has a great sense

of humor, and is dedicated and motivated to make the Hang & Level a great commercial success.

Seeing the Hang & Level tool displayed for the first time in a national retail store was an extremely proud moment for me. Seeing the tool hanging on pegs was almost like seeing years of my life hanging on pegs. I will never forget that day, a "Kodak" moment.

WHAT ARE FIVE TIPS THAT YOU WOULD GIVE A MOMPREENEUR INTERESTED IN STARTING A BUSINESS? Five tips only?

1. Be extremely passionate about what you do. Passion is what will keep you going day after day.
2. Trust your gut and your instincts and don't be afraid to ask for a second, third or fourth opinion if you have to.
3. Surround yourself with outstanding, competent people with knowledge and expertise you don't have.
4. Don't give up! Success doesn't come overnight. When tired, stop, have a good cry, take a break, kick the can if you need to, pick yourself up and get back to work.
5. Stay away from negative people, spend time with friends and family who believe in you and will support you no matter what.
6. Surprise.....You're not a superwoman, you can't do it all so ask for help when you need it.

AS JUNE IS FATHER'S DAY, I HAVE TO ASK - WHAT HAS YOUR FATHER TAUGHT YOU THAT HAS HELPED YOU IN YOUR BUSINESS?

My father built a very successful business. After fifty years of dedicated work he sold his business and retired. The new owner almost went bankrupt within a year of purchasing my dad's business. My father taught us to "always treat everybody with respect" no matter what their status is; employees, customers, buyers, sales people, or delivery people because THEY are your business. Unfortunately the new owner didn't share my dad's philosophy.

"Treat everybody the way you would want to be treated". 

