

Every Step is an Accomplishment

I have grown up with a family of entrepreneurs – small business owners. My parents, grandparents, great grandparents, all had a small business of some sort. My business, a car detailing service, was the next point in the line of business owners in my family, and it began five years ago.

It was just a grey summer day. I looked out my living room window, across my front lawn, and at the street, where the parked cars of all my neighbors sat. They're all looking... dull, I thought to myself. The wheels were covered in brake dust on some, others had dusty paint. I thought, maybe I'll start my own car detailing business. I started on a piece of construction paper and a few markers that were laying around, and, soon enough, the poster then became an advertisement for what was originally called "Wind Cleaning." My prices and services were laid out, hours, and my attractive description – "Your car will be so clean, you'll see reflections of your reflections."

When my parents saw this, they both smiled. They were proud of this first step. But maybe, they were proud of more than my first step in entrepreneurship. I now think that the grins were also of accomplishment – not just in taking the first step forward in entrepreneurship, but also taking steps back in history. In their lifetimes, and possibly even more in my grandparents' lifetimes, being a black entrepreneur was very rare. It was unheard of. And to think, my grandparents are very willing to tell their stories of being segregated in the lunchroom during class trips, or being denied entrance to bowling alleys. Their lifetimes continue to thrive today. So, this first step is not only the first step in being an entrepreneur, but being a *black* entrepreneur. This first step is to break stereotypes that my own grandparents heard during their lifetimes.

Family and friends were told of my car detailing business, and I washed their cars to make them look like they just rolled off the assembly line. Then, came the next step: expanding. One of my mom's close friends sent her information about a program for young entrepreneurs, and I took part.

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I entered this program, thinking that we would be studying business plans of companies, looking at how they deal with finances, examining what goes into making advertisements so that the customer is convinced into buying a product or service. And, I was right!

We would be looking at how other businesses made their business plans, deal with finances, and make advertisements.

“So, next class, be prepared to meet your mentors and start building your very own business plans!” said the instructor in a cheerful tone.

Some students exclaimed “What!?” or “Huh?” I was caught by surprise, as well.

And, sure enough, the next week, we shook hands with mentors who were entrepreneurs themselves. My mentor sat down next to me, asked me what my business idea was, and we set to work on the plans. Shortly afterwards, we prepared presentations. Finally, I also met a graphic designer, who helped me think of ideas for catch phrases and a logo.

None of these processes had went as I had initially thought, and maybe that was what I felt was tugging at my shoulders, just slightly. The fact that ideas didn’t seem to come to myself as fast as I wanted. Or, I didn’t think that the ideas for my business would be good. So, I didn’t say them at the time.

Nevertheless, our progress had proven very good. The time was nearing – the time where we would finally pitch our businesses to a panel of investors, who would help us get our businesses rolling.

I felt anxious. I was going up in front of an audience of investors, program directors, my parents, families of my fellow classmates. I kept telling myself to breathe, but that didn’t seem to help. So, I just waited. I watched my classmates’ presentations. I thought about my progress as an entrepreneur. I thought about my progress as a *black* entrepreneur.

Then, my name was called.

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The moment I stepped up on stage and in front of the microphone, I was instantly blinded by the bright stage lights. Well, at least this meant I couldn't see the intimidating audience size.

The presentation went by in a snap. I didn't even know why I felt so nervous at first. Maybe thinking back through my family. Their experiences as entrepreneurs, or even not as entrepreneurs. I had realized how much of an accomplishment this really was.

From a simple car detailing business created in my dining room, it grew, and will continue growing – it could even change to a completely different business. But anything that you consider an idea is always an accomplishment. It doesn't even have to be major. It could be a small step in a much larger idea. Each step is an accomplishment, and with each new step, you are making new accomplishments.