



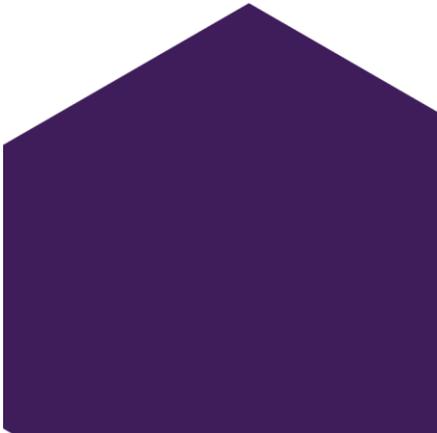
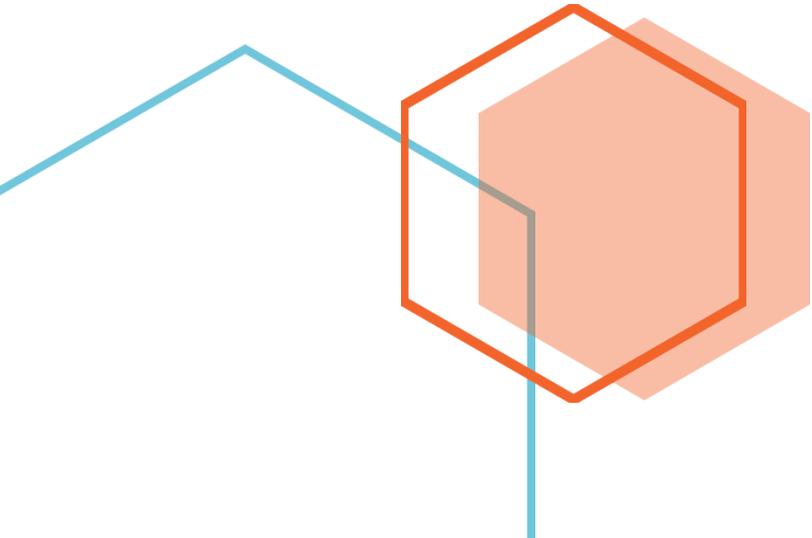
[Sara Blakely]



[United States of America]



"It's important to be willing to make mistakes. The worst thing that can happen is you become memorable."





Person's background

Ms. Sara TreleavenBlakely was born on February 27, 1971 in Clearwater, Florida, USA in the family of an artist and a trial attorney. She attended Clearwater High School and graduated from Florida State University with a communication degree. At first, she wished to start a career as a lawyer but reconsidered and accepted a job at Walt Disney World in Florida.

It is every woman's dream to wear something comfortable and flattering at the same time. Once upon a time, Sara was trying to fulfil that dream while searching for an undergarment that would look good when worn with white pants, but she could not find one. That is exactly what prompted her to come up with the idea to design and produce a signature body shape wear.

At the age of 27, Ms. Blakely decided to relocate to Atlanta, Georgia while selling fax machines and dedicated the next two years of her life and 5,000\$ to research for and develop her unique business idea. After numerous calls, she managed to get someone to approve of the prototype she created and invest in it. In 2000, at the age of 29, she founded Spanx from her apartment and till this day she owns it.

On paper, nothing from her past really suggested that she would become the youngest self-made female billionaire in history and the 93rd most powerful woman in the world as listed by Forbes. On the contrary, she failed a lot and spent several years selling fax machines.

Brief Introduction

Ms. Blakely was born on February 27, 1971 in Clearwater, Florida, USA in the family of an artist and a trial attorney. She attended Clearwater High School and graduated from Florida State University with a communication degree. At first, she wished to start a career as a lawyer but reconsidered and accepted a job at Walt Disney World in Florida. In 2000, at the age of 29, she founded Spanx from her apartment and till this day she owns it.

First steps in entrepreneurship and faced difficulties

Ms. Blakely tried to make a living as a stand-up comedian but failed. She also spent seven years selling fax machines but was faced with rejection daily. Ms. Blakely shared that people used to rip her business card in front of her and hang up on her cold calls. Rather than making her give up, all of this made her become more resilient and persistent. She got used to saying “no” and learned how to be more concise and tell people what they would benefit from if they buy the product she is selling in just a few words. Accepting those failures at an early age helped her learn not to take “no” personally and to think about how to reverse it instead.

Ms. Blakely did not share her idea about a new undergarment for women to be put under clothes for 1 year while she was making a prototype of it. After that she contacted numerous manufacturers and lawyers to help her patent the idea and create a successful prototype. All potential investors and manufacturers asked her the same questions:

- 1) Who are you?
- 2) Who are you with?
- 3) Who is supporting you?

After they heard that she was not representing any major company and had no one backing her, everybody was signing her off. That was until one manufacturer called her back a few weeks after she pitched him the idea for the unique undergarment and said “OK.” What changed his mind you might wonder? Well, he had gone home and told his daughters about the idea, and they said, “It’s brilliant!”.

How and why the person has succeeded, lessons learnt

First, Ms. Blakely experimented! She was searching for an undergarment that would look good when worn with white pants, but she could not find one. She had to wear pantyhose because of her sales role but disliked the appearance of the seamed foot while wearing open-toed shoes. Ms. Blakely started testing by cutting off the feet of her pantyhose while wearing them under her clothes. In this way she discovered that



the pantyhose rolled up her legs all the time but the effect she was looking for was achieved.

Continuing her experiments, she moved to Atlanta, Georgia at the age of 27 and spent all her savings on developing a prototype for her pantyhose idea in the next 2 years. Presenting the idea to manufacturers of hosiery in North Carolina had an almost devastating impact on her. Ms. Blakely's innovation was not accepted since all companies that she contacted seem to not really see any value in her idea. All but one. Two weeks after her presentation, she received a call from a mill operator based in Asheboro, North Carolina who had three daughters and they strongly supported Blakely's concept.

She later said that successfully explaining an idea to representatives of a business who is predominantly run by men was a great challenge since they had never tried the products on and were not using them. At first, Blakely's product was sold in seven shops of Neiman Marcus Group. Then, gradually her business grew more and more to Bloomingdales, Saks, etc. How did she manage to succeed even further? She was relentless.

Ms. Blakely was contacting all her acquaintances with the simple plea to seek out her product at department store in exchange for a check that she would send them by mail as "a token of appreciation". She also dealt with all matters regarding her business including the process of logistics, marketing, product positioning, choosing the location of Spanx next to shoes in retail outlets rather than in the hosiery section.

After Oprah named Spanx a "Favourite Thing" on her show in 2000, the sales of Spanx rose significantly which led to Blakely's resignation from selling fax machines. That's right – she was still working as a sales person of fax machines for several years while developing and running Spanx.

She was not afraid to fail. Even when it took a long time to get the prototype of her business idea ready for sale, Ms. Blakely did not stop working hard and chasing after her big goal. Waiting until her idea was clearer to her and fully shaped before talking about it to friends and family, she managed to accept the negative comments and move forward with what she thought was a viable innovation with potential for becoming a

successful business.

Lessons learned:

1) Failing is OKAY and necessary:

One of the most important influences in Ms. Blakely's life was her father. He was raising her following the philosophy that failing in a big way is okay and that is why Sara's father used to ask her every day not "What did you accomplish today?" but rather "What did you fail at today?". According to him, not failing meant that she was not trying, and she was staying in her comfort zone. If she said, she had failed that meant she tried to be better and different. Failing was the best teacher.

2) Your goals must be visualised:

Ms. Blakely pictures her big goals in a detailed way. She is a fan of Oprah, so she was visualising herself being a guest on Oprah's TV show one day. She was picturing the couch they were sitting on, the conversation they were having and was wondering exactly what they were talking about. The goal was achieved 15 years after she started picturing it. She simply refused to accept it would not become true. Everything she did from then on was just necessary steps to be taken to get there.

3) Clear the idea you have before you share it:

Until you have a clear concept about your idea do not share it with the rest of the world. You need to wait until you are fully committed. Ms. Blakely did not share her idea before 1 year, while she was making a prototype of it. Once the prototype was ready, she started telling people including family and friends about what she wanted to do. In her opinion, in this way she managed to save her idea and realize it. Sharing it before she developed a complete model meant the idea was not ready and too vulnerable to be presented to other people. When Ms. Blakely had the prototype finished and was sure of it, she was also in the right state of mind to receive negative feedback and to hear all the reasons why her business should fail from other people.

4) Never give up after hearing "No":

Ms. Blakely shared that people used to rip her business card in front of her and hang up on her cold calls. Rather than making her give up, all of this made her become more resilient and persistent. She got used to saying "no" and learned how to be





more concise and tell people what they would benefit from in a few words. Accepting those failures at an early age helped her learn not to take “no” personally and to think about how to reverse it instead.

5) Make a team consisting of people you trust and like:

As Head of Product Development and PR director, Ms. Blakely appointed two of her friends. They were not specialists in the areas, but both supported her tremendously, right from the start of the development of her idea. She believed in them and trusted that they would do great and she was not wrong!

6) There is no order of things. Make your own order!

Ms. Blakely did not go by the rules of product development. When she concluded a deal with Neiman Marcus about distributing her product in seven shops, she was not ready with the products. Ms. Blakely did not know how to mass produce hosiery, but she figured it out AFTER the deal was closed. When Oprah called her wishing to do a segment on her in a staff meeting, Ms. Blakely had not hired anybody yet and did not own an office, but she managed to resolve the situation. In the end, she did not follow any order of things but her own.

7) Everything is in your hands! You can learn to do anything!

Prior to the development of her undergarment business idea, Ms. Blakely did not possess any knowledge of undergarments or how to develop, patent, manufacture or market a product. What did she do? Extensive research! She figured out what she could do and for which activities she should hire people. Her enthusiasm and ambition were unstoppable. Do not discourage yourself from trying even if you don't know everything about a field.

8) You can start a business with a small amount of money!

Being rich is not a prerequisite to build a business. Ms. Blakely had only \$5,000 in savings when she came up with the idea of shapewear undergarment that can be unique to users. From that \$5,000, Ms. Blakely started the development of a prototype, attracted a manufacturer, managed to initiate the patenting process and found potential buyers. The moral of the story is that having a great amount of money is not what you need to move forward and set up your business.

9) Finding a new way to do something is a good thing!

Ms. Blakely did extensive research on undergarments for women prior to developing a prototype of her product idea. She discovered that the way undergarments for women were made for 50 years did not really match the needs of women. They were sewn only in one average waist measure without considering the garment's size. In addition, the products were not tested on people but only on mannequins. That is how Ms. Blakely came up with the solution to have insights from a real woman wearing those items to make a product that is useful, effective and comfortable. In this way, she developed a new approach to developing women's undergarments.

Present situation and tips for success

At 29, Ms. Blakely founded Spanx and till this day she owns it. After almost 19 years of existence of the brand, Ms. Blakely's many inventions are describing in the best way possible her current situation. She manufactures leggings, apparel, sports undergarments, shapewear, bras, panties, hosiery, maternity clothes, swimming suits and men underwear. If you watch an award show's red carpet, you should try and count how many times people mention Spanx. It is a product used in an ordinary person's daily life and a compulsory luxury item that is worn at official events, weddings, galas, etc.

Ms. Blakely owns 100% of her company and she is known for never taking outside investments or paying for traditional advertising. In the beginning of Spanx, she also managed to write her own patent and she even mastered how to trademark the Spanx brand, avoiding lawyer fees. Considering all that, it is no surprise that she became a millionaire by age 30 — and at 41, the world's youngest self-made female billionaire. Six years after founding Spanx, Ms. Blakely launched the Sara Blakely Foundation to support women with education and entrepreneurial training. Since Richard Branson was a mentor to Blakely, he gave her a check to start the foundation.

The net worth of Sara Blakely as of November 2017 is \$1.14 billion. What is in for Sara Blakely in the future? In October 2013, Ms. Blakely explained that her ambition is to design the world's most comfortable high-heel shoe prior to retirement. So, the innovations are yet to come!





Tips for success:

Believe in your idea, trust your instincts, and don't be afraid to fail. It took me two years from the time I had the idea for Spanx until the time I had a product in hand ready to sell into stores. I must have heard the word "no" a thousand times. If you believe in your idea 100%, don't let anyone stop you! Not being afraid to fail is a key part of the success of Spanx.

Conclusion

Sara Blakely proved that with a lot of enthusiasm, hard work and determination, a person can move mountains. She never gave up on herself and did not believe in what nay-sayers were telling her. Ms. Blakely was not afraid to fail and experimented with different designs and ideas, always trusting her gut. She managed to master running a business on her own and never stopped visualising her biggest goal. In the end, being fully committed to your idea and yourself, can be described as one of the most important steps towards success.