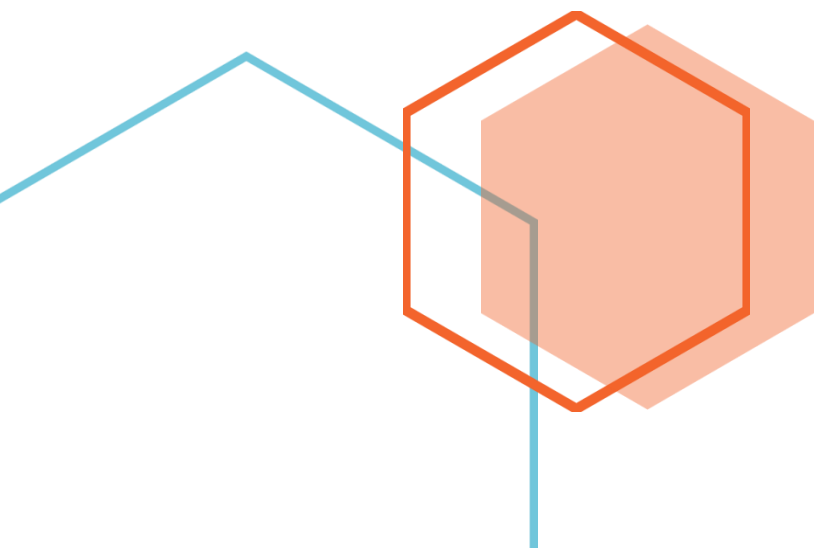




[Blazhka Dimtrova]

[Bulgaria]

"If developing a business becomes easy, then something is not right. Look for the next challenge!"





Person's background

Ms. Dimitrovawas raised in the family of a hairdresser who started her own business 15 years ago as a freelancer. She and her mother share the same qualities: being purposeful, consistent and fighters. Watching her mother take fearless and brave decisions while growing up, can be described as an important source of inspiration that led her to decide to start a catering business. In addition, her circle of friends is mostly made up of entrepreneurs who showed her the "good" side of entrepreneurship.

Ms.Dimitrova has aMaster's degree in National Security and defence from the Rakovski National Defence Academyand a Bachelor's degree in Public administration issued by "St. KlimentOhridski" University ofSofia.

Brief Introduction

Blazhka Dimitrova is the creator of "Blagichka – Kitchen with a cause" – a catering company that unites the love of food, faith in young generation(young people with disabilities are employed in the kitchen), healthy choicesand the strive for zero waste.In Blagichka you can find sweet muffins, cakes of various flavours,biscuits, creams, fruit salads, tarts, brownies, etc.salty treats including pizza, bruschetta, sandwiches,bites, etc.fresh food arrangements and healthy daily menus to provide food for the entire family.

For Blazhka, cooking is a ritual which brings joy and inspiration for making wonderful memories with food.Herentrepreneurial nature started to come out when she was a student and aspired to do something that had a direct effect on the society in which she lived in. Later, her work as a teacher with children helped her realize that she could find what she was really good at and what made her happy and content in the social sector.

First steps in entrepreneurship and faced difficulties

For Ms. Dimitrova, “entrepreneurship is the freedom to do what you believe in, what you want and what makes sense and leads to finding a solution to a problem of the society and the world.” Being an entrepreneur inspires her, helps her evolve and find new opportunities but she doesn't like to be defined as such. For her entrepreneurs are people who start a lot of initiatives and pass what they have learned to other people who continue developing the already commenced activities. She differs from them as Ms. Dimitrova is concentrated only on one main thing that she likes to do - cooking.

What motivated her to start up her own business? Getting the opportunity to be her own boss and have the freedom to decide. Ms. Dimitrova likes the thrill of working 24/7 for something that she believes in, loves and that inspires her. Having many responsibilities does not scare her but makes her feel alive. She shared the following with us: “I can honestly say that I am not working even though I do not stop completing tasks from dusk till dawn because I have chosen what I do, and I love it”. After she attended a two-day intensive seminar in 2014 on the topic of entrepreneurship and what responsibilities it requires, she got motivated to take the steps to found a business, as she learned from the seminar.

She started developing Blagichka while she was working in an office during day and was cooking in the evening. At one point, her family told her that she should quit her daily job and devote herself to cooking. This was the kind of support she needed to fully commit to her business idea. Ms. Dimitrova says that her catering company would not be as advanced as it is now, if she did not listen to her family. The first products that she placed on the market were muffins. From the moment she left her office job, everything started falling into place. It has been 4 years now (2018) since she decided to take up that challenge.

One of the difficulties she faced was the return on money. She still invests more than she is gaining which is not the ideal situation, but she believes the tide will turn. Ms. Dimitrova thinks that it is more important to be able to develop and be a leader than to pursue the option to be an employee which will bring her more money but 0% satisfaction.





She has thought about being an employee again and that it would be a much more secure position in terms of money and free time but considering all other factors mentioned above, she would not return to that life.

In 2011, Ms. Dimitrova was involved in the “Zaedno v chas” (“Together in class”) programme sponsored by “America for Bulgaria” foundation. Within the programme, a person becomes a teacher in schools all over Bulgaria for 2 years. As a teacher, she was devoted to giving the best education possible to her students, so she taught entrepreneurship as an extracurricular activity. “Academy of Entrepreneurship” was the first entrepreneurial venture in which she was involved. The academy was aimed at teaching young children what entrepreneurship takes and what it involves. She developed a curriculum based on all the materials and books she read on the topic.

What did she learn from the experience? That the team of people with whom you develop an idea is very important. If the team is not motivated enough or for the right reasons, then the idea would shortly fail. In the “Academy of Entrepreneurship” she had to be in a team where there were very strong individual characters gathered, which made it harder to take decisions and having a lot of arguments. In addition, the team spent 1.5 years just to develop the materials and make them perfect without applying them in practice. Looking for perfection stifled the enthusiasm and since entrepreneurship is all about action, they missed the opportunity to test their content and refine it based on the received feedback.

What worked well? All the team members were teachers and the aim was to help transform 12-13-year-old students into individuals with entrepreneurial mindsets who will change the society and the world for better.

How and why the person has succeeded, lessons learnt

It happened naturally. Ms. Dimitrova was very interested in the subject and read a lot about it. She also attended seminars and so on. She failed but she got back on her feet again. Failure

was only teaching her what to do better in a different way. Up until 2014, cooking was only her hobby and when she concluded she could make it her basic income, she started Blagichka. In January 2016, she quit her office job and focused on setting up her catering company. From then on, Ms. Dimitrova never took another employment and believed that she could make it.

Ms. Dimitrova managed to succeed because of the kind of person she is. Nobody could convince her that Blagichka would not prosper. Plenty of people have told her that she could not make it but her belief in herself and the idea persisted. She is absolutely certain that behind all great businesses, there is a person or a team who had 1000% faith in the idea. Ms. Dimitrova had little moments of doubt but she always knew that Blagichka is something big and it is THE dream. She made a lot of mistakes (for example, in accounting) but nothing that wrecked her business or led to forming a bad reputation.

Ms. Dimitrova does not like the word “success”. She does not describe her business as successful. It seems like for her success is not a destination, but a continuous process and the company is getting there. She knows that Blagichka could become so much more, develop in various ways and grow on a different scale. Having that in mind, she does not think the company is successful. There is always something more that she could do to make it perform better in social, financial and other aspects. For example, she said she could hire more people with disabilities and disadvantages and help them improve their skills. Also, her current philosophy from the beginning of 2018 has been to cook in the kitchen and produce zero waste. After reaching these two goals, she says she might start feeling that her business has become successful but there is a long road ahead of her.

Lessons learned:

- The motivation of your team is crucial.
- Take action! Pay attention to the bigger picture and don't go into details when developing your idea.
- Ask people what they think. Don't spend months refining your idea and presenting it to an audience just at the end. Perfection is overrated.
- One of the most important lessons she learned is that you





should have faith in your idea.

- Time is a very valuable resource. Save it! At first, Blazhka delivered catering on her own with her own car because she wanted to meet the clients but later, she realized that it takes up a lot of her time and stopped.
- Basic knowledge of accounting is crucial. This does not mean that she started doing her own accounting, but she gained knowledge on how the bills are formed, organized and so on.

Present situation and tips for success

Her current philosophy is to cook in the kitchen and produce zero waste. That philosophy is shared by a lot of her clients who are serious about nature and have enough finances to care for it. In the last few years, "zero waste" has become part of the mission of plenty of businesses and that is why, Blagichka aims at transforming her kitchen into a waste less one. This has almost become true since Blagichka is about to open a restaurant/café with a composter which will limit the waste produced while cooking, to a minimum. All the food will be saved and delivered in glass containers, no plastic bags will be used. Her mission is also to show her clients and teach them that this is the right way to handle and conserve food to benefit the environment and the people around us.

Currently, Blagichka employs 4 people but there are more to be hired when the new establishment is opened. One of the employees has a hearing disability and another one is in a wheelchair. Last year her aim was to employ people from foster homes.

Tips for success:

- A successful business or person is one who takes actions which have a direct impact on the world or society s/he lives in. S/he must also be an example of a sensible and a responsible person.
- If you are developing a business and at a point you stop developing because you start feeling satisfied with what you have achieved, be certain that your business will start going down. Don't stop pushing forward and keep up the pace!

- If developing your business feels too easy, something is not right. Look for the next challenge!
- Start doing what you love and “test” your idea immediately by talking to as many people as possible within 2 to 4 weeks after coming up with the idea! Watch out for the reactions of the people and their feedback. Talk, talk, talk! Otherwise, you might wake up one day and realize that you have wasted your time on an idea that is not going to work.
- Don't hide your idea, thinking that its implementation is more important!
- To the people who failed already: Do not wonder whether to start again but just take action! The more times you failed, the better. Failure is a wonderful thing and the earlier you fail, the better. That belief that failure is OK, gave Blazhka the freedom to make plenty of mistakes.
- The entrepreneurship ecosystem in Bulgaria is still timid. Entrepreneurs repeat to themselves that it is OK to fail but they do not really believe it and the fear of failure is very strong. In 90% of the cases this belief leads to not even trying, which is the biggest oversight of people. There are numerous niches on the Bulgarian market that are underdeveloped and right now Bulgaria is THE place to be an entrepreneur and invest. Wanna-be entrepreneurs should just find where there is a problem and what could be the solution and act on it!

Conclusion

Blagichka is an example of a hobby that grew into a prosperous business. It has evolved into that thanks to the strong character of the entrepreneur behind it – BlazhkaDimitrova. She was fierce and took brave decisions and made choices which sometimes led to failure, other times to success but most importantly, she never gave up and continued making them. Having spent only 10\$ for marketing since she founded Blagichka, Ms. Dimitrova is the definition of a purposeful person who does not shy from taking actions even if they do not turn out to be the best possible. According to her, the entrepreneurial mindset and character lay the foundations of growing a successful business.

