



Authority Magazine
Top Lessons. Top Authorities

Self Made Women: Bella Schneider On How She Started With Nothing and Became A Millionaire

An Interview With Sara Connell

Don't build loyalty through fear but through respect. It's one thing to scare people and something else to inspire them. People want to work for you when they're inspired by your role modeling. The loyalty I developed from my team was from those that wanted to work hard. People who respect hard work stayed with me because they saw that I work hard. I don't ask them for anything I'm not willing to do myself. Otherwise, you spend your time policing instead of growing your employees' strengths. When they feel safe, they take on more responsibility.



Some people were born with the proverbial silver spoon in their mouth. Even then, becoming a millionaire is still quite an accomplishment. But people who start from nothing, and especially women who start from nothing, who make it to the top to become millionaires, despite the pay inequalities based on gender, the confidence gap, with nothing but grit, hustle, resilience, and “stick-to-it-ness”, are on a whole new level. We want to share those stories and inspire other women. In this interview series, we're talking to “Self-Made” women leaders who started with nothing (i.e. started without investors or trust fund or capital or even people believing in them) and have become millionaires.

As a part of our series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Bella Schneider.

Bella Schneider is the innovative beauty guru, clinical esthetician, and cosmetic formulator behind Silicon Valley's premiere LaBelle Day Spas & Salons and international wholesale and retail cosmetic company Bella Schneider Beauty. Her multimillion-dollar business spans forty years, dozens of awards, hundreds of employees, and world recognition in the skincare field. She trains and supplies professional cosmetics to hundreds of salons around the world and is the recognized esthetician of famous Silicon Valley personalities in the political, educational, technology, and show biz spheres. She is a laureate of the esteemed LNE lifetime achievement Crystal Award for her contributions to beauty science.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Growing up, what were your early experiences and perspectives about money? Or we could say, what was the “money consciousness” in which you were raised? Can you please give an example of what you mean?

I was the primary breadwinner in a family of holocaust refugees, in addition, my parents were deaf and my brother was blind. Our money consciousness was one of lack. We had to maximize everything, and my father would always proudly tell me how he was able to subsist his entire life on one pair of shoes. I was determined to succeed on my own so that I could support them, not live with a feeling of lack, or be judged by others for what we didn't have.

Ok super. Thank you for that. Let's now jump to the primary focus of our interview. Let's talk about what you are doing now and how you achieved the success you currently enjoy. Can you tell our readers about the business you've created that helped you become a millionaire?

I opened my full-service spa- salons, LaBelle Day Spas & Salons as the first of their kind in the San Francisco Bay Area. My spas supply all beauty and relaxation services under one roof including skincare, haircare, nail care, massage, makeup, and medspa services. I formulate my own skincare products, that we use in the facial rooms, sell in our boutiques, and retail to spas around the country. My professional wholesale company, Bella Schneider Beauty, sells, distributes, and trains estheticians internationally on clinical esthetic protocols.

What was your vision when you started this business? What's the WHY behind the work that you do? (Please share a story about this if you can.)

I was always attracted to the beauty business. I knew that looking good was a strength, not something to be modest about. Women thought vanity was inappropriate. I realized I needed to help professional women overcome this self-imposed boundary. I wanted to empower women in the workplace to look and feel good so they could accomplish their personal and professional dreams. Over time this message has become more accepted to both women and men, which is a sign of the times. But originally, I knew that education is essential. Being a woman in the business world in the seventies was not a given. So, I decided to get a business education without knowing what the practical application would be. I worked at a department store for Estee Lauder and realized the market potential for European skincare; There was a real need for clean skin and simplicity rather than using makeup to cover up bad skin.

Can you share the most exciting story that happened to you since you began leading your company?

The most exciting moments are when success is effortless. My first spa took off immediately. Even though I was pregnant and financed the first location with sweat and tears, my appointment books (we had books back then), were completely full. Women were driving from an hour away to have our facials. Then my clients were begging me to open more locations and offering to help me secure the financing to do so. I've noticed this trend since my spas inception. When I make choices from my gut, success runs after me. I don't have to force it.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you started? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

In the beginning, I used to walk door to door with my publicist to introduce myself and network. She was old-school and taught me how to be more social in an American way. That automatic friendliness was just not part of my upbringing in communist-era Eastern Europe then war-recurring Israel. I was miserable and would look worn out after our block tours of the neighborhood. I once even had big sweat stains on my dress. Over time, I realized that you need to work hard but you also need to enjoy what you do. If you're unhappy it comes off fake

and isn't sustainable. I also learned that it's important to be gorgeous yet comfortable; Wear clothes that support and don't deter you!

We'd love to explore the traits that help you achieve your success. What were the mindset obstacles that you had to overcome to reach the place of consistently earning a million dollars a year and more? Can you tell us what you did to overcome them?

I had to expand to keep up with the needs and demands of my clientele. The Spa industry was a buzzword yet and despite this, my 700 hundred square-foot San Francisco salon was thriving. I wanted to open a more lucrative operation with extensive facilities including massage, hydrotherapy, facials, my brand of products, an entire nail salon, wardrobe consulting, and a skincare boutique. This is when I decided to add the spa concept to my salon. But I needed money to expand and add another location and getting a loan from a bank was virtually impossible as a woman in the beauty industry. I had to be willing to ask for help. Luckily one of my clients was a woman and she helped me get a loan. Thanks to my first location, with the help of my strong-willed female clients who were also breaking the glass ceiling in the banking industry, I opened a 3,000 square foot spa three years after my start. What I learned from this and have consistently applied since is that it's important to encircle yourself with qualified, trustworthy allies to meet your goals. I don't do everything myself. I focus on what I excel at which is creativity, innovation, beauty, and guts. I have a group of managers and employees that focus on what they're best at whether it be accounting or technology. I've had people working for me for over thirty years and I trust their work ethic. They are a huge part of my success.

What were the external obstacles you had to overcome in reaching these milestones? And how specifically did you overcome them? (Please share a story or example.)

Specifically, acquiring funding in a male-dominated society that didn't value beauty or wellness was a challenge. I had to rely on other women who understood these values but were already maneuvering the multi obstacles in the financial and business worlds and had the experience, connections, and know-how to help me acquire funding each so I could continue to grow and expand.

Was there ever a point where you wanted to give up on your journey to becoming a multimillionaire? How did you work through that panic point? Please share a story.

I never looked at my journey as one to become a multimillionaire. I always had fun with the process. I am a great gambler. BlackJack is my forte. However, I'm not reckless. I even supported myself at one point playing cards. Success to me has always been about picking challenges that excite me without investing myself in ways that were foolish. I take calculated risks. I don't put money in that I can't afford to lose. Nonetheless, I have had moments where I've been willing to live with very little for the sake of the future. In the beginning, I had days when I went without lunch or fancy furniture to invest my money in ways that could grow. But I wouldn't gamble with my child's school money. The way I work through anxiety is I don't allow anyone to intimidate me. I learned early on that there are people out there who will criticize you or take what you've earned if you let them. I don't give away my trust easily and I don't pay attention to other people's shenanigans. I have strong boundaries. At the end of the day, I invest in self-care, and so I never reach high levels of anxiety or panic when there are more challenges.

None of us can achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

I've had the same accountant since the inception of my business. Over time I put her in charge of all the financial aspects of my businesses to the point where I stopped overseeing everything she does. I just learned to trust her, and she has been my right hand since the beginning. We are very different, and I think that's why we are perfect

yin and yang. She's introverted and likes to work behind the scenes. Whereas I am a connoisseur of everything beauty, she's into animals and her horses.

What were the most critical resources, tools, affirmations, mindset strategies, or practices that you used to build your business to where it is today?

Especially since I'm in Silicon Valley, I've always had to stay in touch with technology. Given the number of years I'm in business, over 40 years, I've had to refresh and renew many times. I'm never afraid to reinvent my business. I don't sacrifice my core, a hard work ethic, and a can-do attitude. I shun negativity and always envision best-case scenarios. It doesn't matter if there is an earthquake or a pandemic, I know I can get back on my feet. One of my primary roles with my staff is motivation. They often need to be reminded of the end goals. I push my team to always envision a bright future. My family comes out of the holocaust. I was raised with my grandmother telling me that the only thing that's a real problem is living through the holocaust. When I remember that, it puts all difficulties into perspective.

Are there any books, podcasts, apps, tech, or other types of products that helped you reach your goals? Are these still used today? Please share specifically and why.

I am an avid consumer of books by strong women. I love stories about women from other cultures who succeed. I study their trajectories and learn how others achieve their dreams. I also believe that making time for fun helps you be more successful. Whether it's Netflix or Youtube, I always make space for me-time watching my favorite shows. I rely on my techies to tell me when there are new developments at which point I make a point of incorporating them, whether it's updated online booking or check-out systems, if something makes sense, I learn and adapt.

Out of all of the things you listed earlier if you only had one resource that would help you grow your business and reach your next financial milestone, which would it be and why?

People. You can't do anything without a good network and strong relationships. No matter what the technology, ultimately the beauty and wellness business is first and foremost about people helping people. You have to be reliable and consistent. So I would say the most important resource is having integrity in how you deal with people so that you are dependable.

What do you think is the greatest challenge for women and creating wealth/abundance? What advice would you have for someone feeling blocked by that obstacle?

A woman should strive for her independence no matter what. Even if she doesn't need money, abundance comes from her knowing how to take care of herself and having her own world to be content in. Especially now with this pandemic, we are all reminded how important it is to be able to entertain and keep yourself happy so outside forces don't bring you down. Wealth and abundance are relative to a person's individual needs. Be honest with yourself and unapologetic about what you need to be happy, then believe you have the power to give it to yourself. No one is going to do it for you.

Ok super. Here is the central question of our interview. What are your "5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Started" and why? (Please share a story or example for each.)

Looking back, I spent my working life being a perfectionist. I always drove myself hard and demanded the utmost excellence from my team. At times, I took the harder road. The 5 things I wish someone told me were:

1. Take it easy on yourself. If you don't, you'll burn out. Success needs to be a sustainable endeavor otherwise it's fleeting and won't last. In the beginning, I would never take real vacations, only working vacations. I micro-managed from afar. Constantly calling, having employees check in with me about every decision. It took me ten years to realize that I can trust my employees to run the business on their own. I realized that even if they make different decisions than I would, they'll learn in the process. Nothing is irreparable.

2. Ask employees to do things or to change with kindness. Be soft on your circle of devoted employees. They're doing their best and change isn't easy for anyone. If you are too hard on people, it's demotivating and creates an environment of constant fear. When I was too tough on my team, they wouldn't tell me the truth in difficult situations and then we couldn't grow or improve. In that kind of ambiance, people crack, pick up and leave. When you accept that no one is perfect and that at the core, everyone wants to do a good job besides a few outliers, it's much easier to react gently to situations.

3. Don't build loyalty through fear but through respect. It's one thing to scare people and something else to inspire them. People want to work for you when they're inspired by your role modeling. The loyalty I developed from my team was from those that wanted to work hard. People who respect hard work stayed with me because they saw that I work hard. I don't ask them for anything I'm not willing to do myself. Otherwise, you spend your time policing instead of growing your employees' strengths. When they feel safe, they take on more responsibility.

4. Passion is the key to success. Money will come afterward. In order to succeed, you have to be willing to work hard and enjoy it. You can only enjoy working hard on something that interests you. Remember your job is where you spend most of your time physically and emotionally. Even your friendships are often built through your work. So wouldn't you rather spend time with people you have commonality with? This is the heart of success. Be true to who you really are. Then working hard comes naturally and pleasurefully. If I had taken my economics degree and worked in banking, for instance, I wouldn't be happy and I would have failed. That's not me. I love beauty, fashion, women, and fun. It's easy for me to work consistently through goals even when there are struggles because it's the core of my essence.

5. A politician once used a famous Russian proverb, "Doverai, no proveryai," which means "trust but verify." Give people the benefit of the doubt. Start on the right foot and be pleasant with everyone. However, trust your gut and double-check before making decisions. No one will ever be able to tell you what the best decision is. You are your own best judge. This is true even of professionals. I have trusted contractors, scientists, managers, doctors, and lawyers. They are all a part of my success and have qualifications and talents that I don't have. But no matter what another person's title is, I listen to my gut because I know my goals best. I apply this to every aspect of my business and life. If I consult an architect and they tell me I can't have the fountain that I want at the entry to my spa, I won't take no for an answer. I have no problem saying, "Are you sure? Try a little harder. I think there's a way to make it work."

We are sure that you are not done. What comes next? What's your next big goal, and why? What plan have you put in place to achieve it? Why is it a stretch for you? What will acquiring it represent for you and others?

I am in a place where all I do is make choices that I enjoy. Money is no longer my motivation because I've achieved all that I wanted financially. Now, I focus more on how I invest my money, the future of my brand, and the happiness of my loyal employees. Once you've reached the top, it's important to use your success wisely. I have a trusted team of financial investors that helps me invest in stocks, funds, and real estate locally and internationally. I'm expanding certain aspects of my business. I'm adding a new hair salon to my existing Town & Country spa

remodeling it. Mostly, I focus on doing what I love most in terms of hours I work and which parts of the spa I put my energy into. This is a stretch for me because I used to value my life in terms of how productive I was instead of in terms of how fulfilled I was.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

Visit the press section of both my websites LaBelleDaySpas.com and BellaSchneiderBeauty.com.

Thank you so much for taking the time to share with us and our readers. We know that it will make a tremendous difference and impact thousands of lives. We are excited to connect further and we wish you so much joy in your next success.