



Nicole at Lifeline 'Meet the Mentor' event

LIFE, NICOLE & THE UNI-VERSE

LIFELINE MENTEE Q + A

TELL ME A FEW THINGS ABOUT YOURSELF

My name's Nicole, I'm 25, and I have a five year old son. I've always lived in Birmingham and at the moment I live in Erdington. I completed my degree in Planning and Development in 2012 and since then I've been working in a range of administration and customer service jobs.

WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS IDEA AND HOW FAR HAVE YOU GOT WITH IT?

My business is called Uni-verse. The idea is quite simple really. People spend a lot of money on books for university – I know I did! – so my idea is to create a platform where people can resell their used books. It's still mainly in the development phase; I'm still trying to get the website sorted more than anything. That's been the most difficult part, but it's also where brap has been the most helpful. I feel as if even if the business falls through, at least I know that I actually tried. That's really important to me.

WHY ARE YOU LOOKING TO DEVELOP AN ONLINE BUSINESS?

Developing an online business is something that I've wanted to do for around four years now, ever since I had the original idea at uni. I want to be able to be self-reliant, with the knowledge that I'm working towards something with real potential to better myself and my family. Since leaving university I have found that I am only able to secure quite basic jobs that have no real hope in progressing into a meaningful career, so I see the chance to start an online business as almost my only hope of making a success of myself.

WHAT KIND OF HELP DO YOU NEED MOST TO GET STARTED?

Everything! I had no idea how to do anything! For example, where you even *start* with a business? The training brap provided at the start was really helpful just to understand what you actually need to do to get to the stage of being self-employed and being able to run your own business. At the moment, though, the web design support has just been amazing. I wouldn't be able to do that myself at all.

WHAT ARE YOUR AMBITIONS OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Well, for the business I'm running at the moment I want it to expand nationally. I also want to branch into different areas – all within the same student/university kind of thing, but within different sectors.

WHAT DO YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY THINK OF YOUR PLANS?

They think it's good but at the same time they're not really too sure! They're kind of like, 'shouldn't you just get a proper job?' But I always say, 'I really want to do this'. So yes, they are supportive but... I guess when it actually takes off (hopefully it will) then they'll understand it more.

HAVE YOU TOLD YOUR SON ABOUT IT AND EXPLAINED TO HIM?

I tried! He just said, 'are you going to be a billionaire?!'

IF YOU WERE ABLE TO GIVE SOMEONE IN SCHOOL ADVICE ABOUT THE FUTURE WHAT WOULD IT BE?

If you've got a passion, follow it. It doesn't matter what anybody else says, if you've got something that you really, really want to do then just go for it. You never know what the results might be. Even if you're from a poor background or whatever, I still feel that you can make something of yourself. It doesn't matter where you started from – you can go wherever you want to. But you have to put the work in to be able to get there, and you have to know where you want to go.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF LIFELINE SO FAR?

It's been really, really good. It's been very helpful to get an understanding of what you actually need to do, where you can build your business to, and what you can do if you go for it. I have to say I've really enjoyed it!

WHERE ARE YOU NOW? ONE YEAR LATER

HOW ARE YOU GETTING ON WITH YOUR BUSINESS?

I'm still unsure about a few things to do with running the business, but generally things are going ok. I'm yet to actually launch the business and website as I wanted to wait until the start of the next university term. I felt if I launched it any earlier I would be rushing things.

WHAT HAS SLOWED YOUR PROGRESS?

Progress does feel as though it has been a bit slow since the last time we chatted. I think this was a combination of having less time to work on the business than I wanted and also being unsure as to where I should be directing my time and what I should be doing. I have found, though, that whenever I get an update from Tiger Bam, the website developers, I do feel a renewed sense of excitement to get things done. But perhaps more than anything I think it's my motivation that has slowed me down. I know what I want to do, I know what I want it to look like, but as I don't really know how to get to that stage and haven't made the connections that I wish I had with people who are in the institutions I need to connect with, I am slightly lost as to what to do next.

WHAT HAS HELPED YOU TO PROGRESS?

All the help I have had from my mentor and others on the Lifeline Project.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO HAVE GOT TO WITH THE BUSINESS IN 12 MONTHS?

I hope I'm doing good business! I also need to be in touch with brap, my mentor, and Tiger Bam more. The project is running additional skills sessions and I need to look out for these as they really help you stay motivated.

You can find more information about Lifeline on our website at www.brap.org.uk/lifeline or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/braplifeline.

