



PUT YOURSELF FORWARD AND TAKE OPPORTUNITIES

“IF YOU THINK
SOMETHING CAN BE
DONE BETTER, THEN
DO IT YOURSELF”

Stephane at Lifeline business training, wearing one of his designed t-shirts

LIFELINE MENTEE Q + A

TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF

My name is Stephane and I'm 19 years old. I was born in London, I lived there until I was in secondary school, so spent most of my teenage and adult life in Birmingham. The whole time I was in school I wanted to be an artist, in the traditional way – selling murals, paintings, canvas and that kind of stuff – then when I got older I realised I didn't want to do that, but I wanted to still sell art for a living but I wanted to think about how to do it. Then I saw loads of t-shirts and hoodies and stuff coming out and I didn't like how they were designed, I thought they were cheap and could be designed a lot better. So my mum said “if you think something can be done better, then do it yourself”, and that's what I've done. I thought “I can design better t-shirts than that, I can make clothing with an inspirational theme to it with a better quality that people would want to buy”, so that's what I'm aiming to do.

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WHAT WOULD YOUR FRIENDS SAY ARE YOUR BEST QUALITIES?

I'm a weirdo! In the sense that if I have an idea I follow it through, I go through with it, I don't really wait for anyone to tell me to do it I just get on with it myself.

WHAT'S YOUR BUSINESS IDEA?

I've got a few that I kind of mashed together, so overall it's kind of an inspirational company – so what I want to do is communicate inspirational messaging through clothing, having positive messages on t-shirts and hoodies supporting healthy living, healthy mentality and lifestyle. At the same time I'd like to start running poetry workshops as well (and workshops in general), for the same reason, to get people to think about their mind-set and think about their path a little bit more. Especially for teenagers that are in communities that aren't as good as others, to give them an opportunity and give them a different outlet in life and give them more of an equal opportunity. Being someone that was close to that environment myself I feel that I need to give back, so putting them both together is what I'll aim to do. And then I'd also set up events as well. So all together I'd have the events, the workshops and the clothing, but right now I'm mainly focusing on the clothing side of things.

WHAT INTERESTS YOU MOST ABOUT STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS?

I love the idea that it's mine. No one can tell me how to run it because it's mine. I don't like the idea of working for someone, especially if you don't agree with what they stand for. So the fact that you can create something you can stand for, and then live by it is something I find amazing. Ever since I was younger I always wanted to have something to call mine, so to have a business that's mine is amazing. It's what I want it to be and it's having the impact I want it to have, and if it's not then it's down to me to change it, not to rely on someone else, that's what I love most about the business.

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

I think I need a little bit of a nag sometimes. Now I work full time at City Year when I get back I can just feel drained and like I want to go to sleep, so sometimes I need a bit of a kick like 'you know what you need to do', because if I'm honest I do know what I need to do it's just another thing to actually do it! I need to get my time management a bit more defined because to be honest I'm not great with time management. And I think also organising myself, because as much as I have the ideas, I can sometimes trip over myself with ideas – too many ideas! Like with the clothing, I've got three projects in mind, but I can't do all three because the commitments will clash, so it's a matter of focusing on one and making that the best it can be before moving on to the next one.

HOW DO YOU KEEP YOURSELF MOTIVATED?

I stay with my mates because they're like me, they want to work for themselves as well. I watch videos and keep up with stuff I am interested in, so I go to poetry events, I look at different clothing artists and styles of clothing, just to keep fresh ideas going. Also discipline is really important, I don't want to do it sometimes but I force myself to do it because it has to be done!

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 5 YEARS' TIME?

I think I'd like my business to be excelling, so definitely have regular clients and customers coming in and buying t-shirts, have workshops happening on a bit more of a regular basis. And also I'd like to be a mentor, so maybe have a mentoring role as well.

WHY SET UP YOUR OWN BUSINESS RATHER THAN WORK FOR SOMEONE ELSE?

People have good ideas and good intentions, but whether it is portrayed through what they do is a different thing, and I notice there are a lot of times that in society there are a lot of things I don't agree with, and the jobs I go into there are always holes in the system, no matter how much I love what they do. And so to create a business, to go inside that hole and to fix it is something I'm aiming to do. For example the education system is great, but I do see a few holes in there, and I think the way to fix some of those holes is by creating poetry workshops over the school holiday time, so that will get kids to not just always learn from a book, but to learn in their own way. So it's kind of making my own mark, rather than following someone else's dream, and having more impact hopefully.

WHAT DO YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY THINK OF YOUR PLANS?

A lot of them agree with what I'm doing, there are a few of them that would like me to just get a job and get money coming in, but it doesn't matter what they say because my mum says I'm allowed to do it so I can do it! *laughs*. It's true actually because growing up I always wanted to be an artist and most parents would have said no but the fact that my mum could see I was always drawn into it, I would sleep, talk, think art, always thinking of new ideas. So when I said to my mum that I wanted to pursue a career in it and set up my own business she could see that I was doing it myself and taking the initiative, she sees me working towards it and then she can't say no. I know people who say they want to do this and that, "I want to be a footballer" but I don't see them training to be a footballer. So mum says yeah you can do it, and now I can live in her house and do what I need to do, there's a few sacrifices I have to make obviously, money's a problem, but in my mum's house it's ok for me to make mistakes, she's there to catch me. Having that opportunity given to me is definitely a great thing.

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

Be a yes man. Say yes to every opportunity that comes your way, regardless of whether you like it or not, for the reason that you don't know what you actually like or not until you've done it. So by taking every opportunity at least you can say 'I don't like that, I'm not going to do it again' or you might do something that you didn't like and you actually really enjoy it. And also look for the opportunities, opportunities aren't going to find you, no one is going to Google some random name that no one knows. You've got to be there so when they're thinking they can be like "that guy's eager I want to choose him". Put yourself forward and take the opportunities that are coming your way.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF LIFELINE SO FAR?

It's an amazing opportunity, I didn't expect it would take me this far but it has. I initially thought it would be two days of a lecture, I'd take some notes and take them with me, but I had the opposite experience, and I think without it I wouldn't be in the position I am today. So I have Lifeline to thank for the movement I've made so far.

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