



People First

Melissa Lentz Shares How Focusing on Relationships First Has Been the Key to Her Success

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of Mjach Designs this year, founder Melissa Lentz began her business with a dream, a computer and a lot of support from mentors and friends. Today her passion for others and her team is also evident in her community involvement. We spent some time getting to know more about how and why Melissa does it all, from her passion for fitness and real estate to mentoring, teaching, serving and supporting others.

WHERE ARE YOU ORIGINALLY FROM?

I am originally from Reno, Nevada. My dad was a pilot in the U.S. Air Force and my mom worked for the city. When I was around six years old, my parents divorced and we eventually moved to Hartford County (my mom was hired by Aberdeen Proving Ground.) I lived in Aberdeen and went to high school. I started working around 14 years old. My mom worked several jobs to support us, and got married a few times. I grew up in domestic violence. So, it made me a worker, a fighter and a very strong person.

When I was 17, I got two jobs, and worked my way through community college. I was in college for seven years. It was a safe place. All the teachers and counselors knew me and helped me. I

ended up earning two degrees because I didn't want to leave. Then, one of my teachers told me that it was time to go.

HOW DID YOU START MJACH DESIGNS?

I ended up working for Business and Economic Development for the State of Maryland. They saw potential in me and gave me a lot of confidence...I launched the marketing team and rebranded the State of Maryland...While working for the State, I envisioned owning my own full-service firm, giving each client the customer service and care they deserve, while simultaneously building a team of young talent that would thrive in a creative and nurturing environment.

...I could always see myself starting my business. It was inside of me. I had a strong vision for what I'm doing today. I followed my gut...I had my computer, my clothes and \$1200. I rented a room from a woman I didn't know for \$500/month...She ended up being a mentor. I quit my job at the State and started Mjach Designs in Baltimore...I lived on canned soup for about a year because I couldn't afford to buy food...I always mentored and supported college students. My mentee helped me get my paperwork together to get certified as a minority

ARTICLE BY KRISTEN WOJDAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DR. LAURA SHERWOOD AND BRAD BARNWELL





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woman-owned business with the State of Maryland. Since I had worked with the State, I knew the benefits of it...That’s when people started finding Mjach and we started getting contracts.

WHEN YOU FIRST LAUNCHED MJACH DESIGNS, WHAT WERE YOUR MISSION AND VISION?

That’s a great question because when I was in community college, I went to school for Fine Arts. Computers weren’t in the schools yet. So, when I got halfway through, the computers came in. (That’s why I said when I could see myself doing what I am doing today—today really didn’t exist with graphics.) My teachers supported me and said, “You can do it! Keep your vision and your dream in front of you!”

I graduated with a Fine Art and Graphics Degree. I started Mjach as a graphic design firm. Then, in 2007-2008, when I opened my first office (the economy was going down), we earned our first contract with Veolia (now Transdev), the largest private sector operator of multiple modes of transit in North America... They asked Mjach to help launch the first clean energy, hybrid service in the nation in Baltimore: The Charm City Circulator and The Water Taxi Harbor Connectors. Mjach went from one to thirteen people within a year...We created and deployed a naming campaign. We worked with the Mayor’s office and the Downtown Partnership in Baltimore. We created all of the logos, graphics, branding and wayfinding signage. We also launched the second social media app in Maryland.

HOW HAS MJACH EVOLVED OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS?

The industry is always evolving and changing. We went from a graphic design firm to a marketing firm...helping Transdev privatize transportation with business versus government...which led us to Long Island, New York. [Transdev] was starting a corporate program and asked us to spearhead the project and figure it out. So, we did. It was successful and launched across the United States and Canada.

Mjach still creates marketing needs for businesses, including logos, brochures and overall B2B and consumer marketing. We like to help small businesses, churches and non-profits to do that work affordably. Our core work is specializing in customer service and mystery traveling/shopping. Having excellent customer service is what keeps businesses thriving.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN FREDERICK?

I was in Baltimore for over 20 years. The first time I visited Frederick was for a business meeting at La Paz. I fell in love with Frederick and decided I wanted to move here. I’ve been here 16 years.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR PASSION FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND HOW YOU BECAME INVOLVED WITH WISH.

My heart has always been focused on people. Even the tagline for Mjach is “People First.” I never focused on the money...I always focused on the people first—the clients and the employees. And everything else comes from that positive place.

So, I decided to teach Zumba. I had never wanted to be in front of anybody, but I saw how people loved the music and the air. It wasn’t just working out, but it was releasing and having a good time...I got my initial certification to teach Zumba over ten years ago.

...WISH was founded in early 2010 by Kathy Schultze of State Farm Insurance and Meghan Butler of Ceresville Mansion. It started as a networking group...Only one person from each industry could join the group...I was lucky to be the marketing person...I was tasked to create the logo and name the group...I went through everything that we enjoyed as a group and it was about the people: Women Inspiring Supporting and Helping (WISH)...We believe that when women support each other, there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

...100% of the dues for WISH go to donations. Last year, part of the WISH dues money collected was donated to Soles of Love. We are a big fan of Julie Gaver and her spirit of giving back...Through a “walk and talk,” she asked for WISH to help with the fall event in 2023...there are kids in Frederick County who do not have warm shoes or boots to wear. In the spirit of inspiring, supporting and helping and taking care of people...it is an obvious thing to do!

WHAT IS A “WALK AND TALK”?

During the pandemic—with all of our lives changing so much—I saw a need for myself to get outside. And, so many people were going through struggles because there wasn’t anyone there that they could talk to. So, we started walking and talking. We’ve continued even today. If I get a sense that someone is having a hard time, I’ll text them and invite them to walk and talk. It’s a great way to communicate with people, to breathe fresh air, to look at nature and think things through...So if we leave here and someone texts me, I’ll be there to walk!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS?

I would say to follow your heart and passion and vision and that will lead you to where you’re supposed to be...Get up every day and be grateful and follow your passion. Work hard. Everything else will come...And, don’t give up! Literally! I think the reason for my success was several failures. So many times I have failed and I learned. Take that failure and learn from it and grow. And, don’t give up!