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BOX

ALUMNI Innovators

By Ellen N. Woods

It all starts with a big idea. Creative thinkers share tips and success stories.

About 10 years ago, as a nurse practitioner working in the emergency department at Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, D.C., **Kelly Goodman, B.S.N. 1996**, had an idea. She didn't like some of the trends she was seeing in health care. "The hospitals were merging into conglomerates," she recalls. "Many primary care practices were coming under the umbrella of large health care systems. There was a trend toward concierge medicine."

When she discharged patients, Goodman asked about their plans for follow-up care. "More and more, we were seeing insured patients who didn't have primary care physicians because cost and access had become barriers," she says. "Many were using urgent care for their primary care. Patients often asked me, 'Can I see you for follow-up care?'"

That's when Goodman thought "why not?" Why couldn't an experienced nurse practitioner with a bachelor's degree from Catholic University and a master's degree from Georgetown University open her own independent primary care practice?

That was the start of Kelly Goodman, NP and Associates, a family primary care practice founded in 2009, which is run and staffed by nurse practitioners. At first, she sublet a small space within a podiatrist's practice in Northwest D.C. Today, she has 4,200 square feet of office space in Bethesda, Md., along with a second nurse practitioner-run practice, Promenade Primary Care, at L'Enfant Plaza.

"We do it all," says Goodman. "We are with our patients from start to finish. Each nurse practitioner does her own initial interview and information gathering and exam. We spend quality time with each patient and we offer same-day appointments."



CEO Says Innovation is Key



Tom O'Regan, B.A. 1998, graduated with a degree in financial management. "I took advantage of interactions with professors whenever I could. I viewed them as mentors. I'll never forget talking about stocks with a professor in 1996. He told me Apple was a company to watch," says O'Regan. "That stayed with me and it was the start of my interest in assessing businesses, looking at their financial statements, and learning to predict the future value of a company."

O'Regan, who is the CEO of Madison Logic, a global leader in account-based business-to-business marketing, says his parents were his earliest mentors. "I grew up in Westchester County, New York. My parents were very successful but we didn't live a lavish lifestyle. They were hard-working, humble, and they believed in giving back." He says their work ethic has provided a model for his career.

Before joining Madison Logic in 2014, O'Regan was CEO and principal of TOR Media Group, a boutique firm providing investment and programmatic trading solutions to clients in the tech industry. Before that, he was president and chief revenue officer of Martini Media.

As Madison Logic's CEO, O'Regan extended the company's global coverage to Asian and European markets. Last year they were acquired by Clarion Capital Partners, which was covered by financial news outlets including *Fortune*.

"Hard work leads to luck," he says. "And I was lucky to be starting my career in New York City during the dot-com boom. I worked hard and advanced quickly."

"But when the bubble collapsed in the early 2000s, that was the best thing that could have happened to my career," says O'Regan. "That's what made me an innovator. I realized you can never get comfortable. You always have to be thinking a few steps ahead. You always have to be looking at where the market is heading."

Innovation is not just key in starting up a new business, but for employees in any business as well, he says. "The employees who propose new ideas and different ways to do things, who are looking at what their employer needs to expand two, three years down the road — they are the ones who will get noticed and be successful."



Early in her career, **Arianne Bennett, B.A. 1995**, worked at the Ritz-Carlton hotel. "I found out quickly that I was drawn to the service industry. There is a joy to doing things for others."

While she and her husband, Scott, were traveling in Amsterdam, they fell in love with the city's top-it-yourself falafel shops. "They were the equivalent to pizza or sub shops in the United States. It was a simple idea — crispy, delicious falafel with a bar of fresh, healthy toppings."

The Bennetts had an idea. So they spent the next year crafting a detailed business plan for the Amsterdam Falafelshop in Washington, D.C. They worked out every detail needed to bring the flavors and aromas of Europe and the Middle East, along with the hip vibe of Amsterdam, to the Adams Morgan neighborhood. "Our goal was to bring something new to the community and to become part of the community, just like we experienced in Amsterdam," says Bennett. They now have franchise shops in D.C., Florida, and Massachusetts. Bennett says the first time it hit her that her restaurant was a success was when she walked into the shop one day and realized she didn't know anyone. "People other than my friends and family were filling the place!"

The big idea for **Brian Walsh, B.A. 1990**, started with a simple suggestion from his wife, Kara King Walsh, B.A. 1990. With the Sunday morning rush of trying to get three young children ready and the inevitable search for the offertory envelopes and checkbook, the Walsh family was often running late for Mass. Kara challenged her husband, a marketing and fund-raising entrepreneur, to come up with a more efficient way to make weekly gifts to their parish.

Walsh wasn't looking to start another company, but the idea of using his expertise to serve the Church was very appealing to him. So in 2005, Faith Direct, an electronic giving service designed specifically for the Catholic Church, began operations. "I knew there were other fintech companies out there that parishes were using,"

says Walsh. "We created a service that was different — one that allowed each parish to customize collections and giving campaigns to their own needs — and we provide full marketing support to our parishes, all for a flat fee instead of a percentage of contributions."

Walsh drew on contacts he had at several churches to get his foot in the door and pitch his services. "On the same day I received my first 'yes' from a parish, I received a 'no' from another parish that was considering Faith Direct," says Walsh. "That just made me work harder. Any new venture requires perseverance and a certain tolerance for risk."

In the company's first year of business, parishioners nationwide donated \$630,000 through Faith Direct to their churches. Recently, the company hit the milestone of \$1 billion in donations processed electronically, to more than 700 churches.

Walsh, who still personally visits parishes enrolled in Faith Direct, says his faith is an important factor in the company's success. "Of course, anyone who starts a new business wants to be profitable. But beyond that, you have to believe in what you are doing. We want to help the Church flourish. I think that comes through in each of our interactions with church staff and parish priests."

Angela Santomero's big idea was an adorable blue dog that revolutionized television programming for preschoolers. While at Catholic University, Santomero, B.A. 1990, majored in psychology with a minor in media studies. She went on to



Photo courtesy of Angela Santomero



Photo courtesy of Richard Blanch

earn a master's degree in child developmental psychology and instructional media and education from Teacher's College at Columbia University.

She drew on that education along with the latest research in early childhood learning when she began to develop *Blue's Clues* in 1994 for Nickelodeon, where she was working as a new producer. When the show first appeared on the station's "Nick Jr." weekday-morning time-block in 1996, it turned children's programming on its head.

In each episode, Steve, the show's host, introduces a puzzle to young viewers by talking directly to them and pausing to allow them to respond — often on their feet, shouting their answers back at the television. Blue, an animated dog, helps the preschoolers solve the puzzle by showing three clues in simple pictures that repeatedly appear on the screen.

With *Blue's Clues*, Santomero introduced interactive viewing before Wii and PlayStation became household mainstays.

"Growing up, I was a huge fan of *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*. Having Steve talk directly to the children was my homage to Fred Rogers," says Santomero. "We used the proven preschool teaching technique of repetition. Each show was structured the same way. The clues were repeated throughout each episode and the same episode was aired every day for a week so that by the end of the week the children's confidence was soaring. That was a new concept to pitch to network executives and they were skeptical," she says.

Santomero, who had been turned down when she applied for an internship at *Sesame Street*, helped make Nickelodeon a leader in early childhood programming. *Blue's Clues* is still

one of the most popular and successful children's programs of all time. Santomero went on to create other successful shows, including *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* and *Super Why!* on PBS, as well as *Creative Galaxy* and *Wishenpoof* on Amazon. She has a new book coming this spring, *Preschool Clues* (Touchstone/Simon and Schuster).

Richard Blanch, B.S. 2000, studied architecture at Catholic University. He says it was the creativity on display in the School of Architecture and Planning that inspired him to start his own marketing and advertising firm. While on photo shoots with stylists and makeup artists, he was exposed to a wide array of cosmetics, and he wasn't impressed with the quality. He remembers thinking, "There must be something better out there."

"My dad, who was a chemist, had a lot of patents. I worked in his labs during high school. I'm comfortable with chemistry," he says. "So I had an idea: What if I brought together top chemists, pharmacists, and medical doctors and we looked at skin care at the molecular level? We took our time with research and development. We developed products that deliver results before we ever spent time on packaging and marketing. My architecture training came in handy when we got into the design of the packaging."

Blanch is the CEO and founder of Le Metier de Beaute (which means craft of beauty). The luxury beauty brand launched in 2007 and now has over 300 products that can be found in department stores as well as on QVC.

HOW THE UNIVERSITY HELPED

Although he never became a practicing architect, Blanch says his education is directly related to his success as an entrepreneur. "The architecture and planning school was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. I had focused on science and math in high school. When I got to college, studying architecture awakened the creative side of my brain. I was surrounded by creative, talented people who thought outside the box, and that inspired me. We would generate design ideas, execute those designs, present them to juries, and receive feedback. This is the perfect model for operating any business."

Bennett says her psychology degree prepared her for life in general. "It taught me thoughtfulness and a connectedness to people," she says, "and that has helped me understand and support our staff. Helping your employees flourish is one of the joys of being a business owner."

Santomero, who also majored in psychology, worked in the child development center on campus. "That's where I fell in

love with preschoolers and became fascinated with how they learn," she says. "I was a member of the Psychology Club on campus and one of the seniors who was graduating was going to work at *Sesame Street*. I went to the career library and looked up jobs in television programming for children. That's when I set my sights on a career that blended my love of psychology, early childhood development, and media studies."

Before founding Faith Direct, Walsh majored in politics with a minor in philosophy. After graduation, he took a job with the Republican National Committee. When he left there, he found himself at a crossroads. He came back to his former professors and mentors for advice. "They helped me discover a career in marketing and fund-raising, which capitalized on my love of relationship building. And that takes me back to my study of philosophy — a discipline that trains you to listen to people, to understand and appreciate both sides to any argument. Studying philosophy provides you with a strong foundation as a small business owner, and really for most aspects of life," says Walsh.

FIRSTHAND ADVICE

"Innovation comes down to developing a product or service that solves a problem," says Walsh. "Does your idea have a unique quality? Does it address a true need? It can't just be about making money or it loses heart. Put a team together that shares your values and commitment to the idea."

In establishing her primary care practice, Goodman says, "My number one goal was to provide cost-effective access to quality health care in my community, to offer full service and convenience, and to treat both my staff and my patients with excellence. My first tip for being innovative is to find a need right in your own community. My second tip is to be willing to keep up with change. We've moved to electronic health records, patient portals, and telehealth. Change isn't always easy, but it keeps you at the top of your game."

"The biggest part of innovation is being able to share your vision with others," Bennett says. "When I was applying for a small business loan, I had to think about how I could help bankers buy into my vision without actually taking them to Amsterdam. While creativity is key to innovation, you also need a detailed, practical plan you can share with others."

"Allow enough time to cultivate your idea," says Blanch. "Allow yourself and others around you to fail (which is not the same as *being* a failure). Resiliency is the key to innovation."

When it comes to that big idea, Santomero's advice is pointed and simple. "Believe it. Live it. Put in the work." **CU**

Tips From Alumni Innovators

"To succeed in innovation, you need to understand what you know, what you don't know, and how to surround yourself with people who add value (even if they don't always agree), creating a team that challenges convention and strives for excellence. And without question, it is OK to screw up; it is not OK to give up. Learn from the mistakes, brush yourself off, and try it a different way."

— **Dave Shove-Brown, B.S.Arch. 1995**, is a lecturer in the School of Architecture and Planning and partner at 3877 architecture studio, which has been rated one of D.C.'s 50 great places to work.

"The best way to scale innovation is to collaborate with the right kinds of people, customers, or institutions. No one person or organization can think of everything, so a collaborative approach to innovation always works best."

— **Andrew Pace, M.S.I.S 1996**, is executive director, WorldShare Community Development.

"You cannot listen to the naysayers; you must listen to your heart. Your passion is contagious when it is real; infect others with it, and you can make it happen."

— **Ron Gavillet, J.D. 1985**, is a telecom executive and entrepreneur, and co-founder of Cenx, Inc., and Neutral Tandem, Inc.

"Innovation is about problem-solving and that rarely happens alone. Identify people who have the skills and expertise you need. Assemble a team that brings expertise and different perspectives. Make sure they share your commitment and are in it for the long haul."

— **Tom Stern, B.S. 1993**, started a company, Pneuma Respiratory, which developed a broad-based platform for inhaled drug delivery.

"Collaborate, believe in your vision, and be persistent. Work on things that matter — place the patient first. Are you addressing a meaningful problem? It has to be worth all of your time and energy. Medical device development can take years spent on research and development, clinical trials, and regulatory approvals. So we always consider if our solution will be sustainable and useful years from now."

— **Chris Danek, B.M.E. 1989**, is a medical device developer and inventor with more than 60 issued U.S. patents. He led the initial clinical development of bronchial thermoplasty, the first approved intervention to treat asthma. He also co-founded AtheroMed, Inc., where he built the team and led the development of a clinically and commercially successful treatment for peripheral arterial disease. He is currently an independent consultant, helping companies with the process of new product development.