

## 028 Create Your Own Luck and Build an 8 Figure Empire with Mahisha Dellinger



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Rachel Rodgers**

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Mahisha: Despite what he tried to do, you know, I'm still thriving here and talking about my raise and everything. I'm so happy that not everyone at Intel is as closed-minded as you are. And god bless, y'all left it at that. He read it and then deleted it – he just read it and didn't reply. And then I found him about four years ago on Facebook. We had mutual friends from Intel that we're still friends – I'm still friends with. And I sent him a DM with two words: Google me.

Welcome to *The Million Dollar Badass Podcast*. I'm your host, Rachel Rodgers, wife, mother to four children, lover of Beyoncé, coffee drinker, and afro wearer, and I just happen to be the CEO of a seven-figure business. I am on a mission to help every woman I meet become a millionaire. If you want to make more money, you are in the right place. Let's get it going.

Hello, friends, and welcome to *The Million Dollar Badass Podcast*. I am delighted to bring you an amazing interview today with the one and only Mahisha Dellinger. If you don't know who she is, you're going to find out today. She is the founder of CURLS, which is a natural hair care company that she started back in 2002 and has built to a \$15 million empire and growing.

And in addition to that, she is also now mentoring other, especially black, women entrepreneurs. She wrote a book called *Against All Odds: From the Projects to the Penthouse*. That's right, Mahisha grew up in the hood in Northern California and had everything around her sort of pointing to the fact that success wasn't likely to happen to her. It wasn't happening for the people around her, but she did have some extended family where she saw examples of success and what success could look like for a black person.

And that enabled her to, you know, be a hard worker, be excited about what is possible for her. And she built a very successful business, CURLS.

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She also now has a show on OWN called Mind Your Business with Mahisha. There are eight episodes from the first season where you could see Mahisha mentoring other women entrepreneurs who have started successful businesses and want to grow and scale. And she comes in and coaches them and mentors them and shows them what is required to next-level.

So I highly recommend that you check out her show. Definitely check out her book. And you're going to enjoy really hearing her story on this interview. We talk about the dichotomy that's he saw growing up between poverty and wealth, why she was focused on education as a young woman.

She shares, in her journey, how she became a single mother, she got pregnant with her daughter the second year of college and how that sort of affected her journey going on. And, you know, the work that she did in corporate America, at Intel is the main place that she worked, and some of the racism and challenges that's he experienced in corporate America that inspired her to start her own company.

And so she talks about how she started CURLS, exactly what was the first thing that she spent money on, what did she invest in, how did she market her product early on? And then we talk about what that journey was like going from a brand-new business that is pretty much making nothing to getting to that first million dollars and then getting to that next couple of million and what that big breakthrough was for her and when it arrived.

And so she gives a ton of advice. We also talk about some of the challenges and what needed to change for her in order to become someone who could go from growing a six-figure business to growing a seven-figure business and what needed to change for her to go from a seven-figure business to an eight-figure business. So we talk about that and she shares some of her tips on that.

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So, I highly recommend that you shut down all other distractions and enjoy this lesson from Mahisha Dellinger.

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Rachel: Alrighty, I am here with Mahisha Dellinger. I am so thrilled to have you here on the podcast today. Thank you for being here.

Mahisha: Of course, I'm so happy to be here.

Rachel: Yay, you are such an inspiration to women, especially black women entrepreneurs, women of color, and women really of all kinds who want to build a really successful business, a multiple seven and eight-figure business. I think sometimes we think there's a limit on the amount of success we can have and the limit is really in our minds.

Mahisha: Right, 100%.

Rachel: So when you were a little girl, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Mahisha: I thought I was going to initially be an attorney. I thought, all the way up until about eighth grade, I thought I was going to be an attorney. And then I shifted gears very early on around ninth grade and really got interested in business, and marketing specifically. But yeah, for the longest time I thought surely I'm going to be an attorney.

Rachel: Yes, I thought so too. For me, it was watching – my mom used to watch crime dramas on TV and I would be like, "Yeah, I want to be that person who's representing the poor and the disadvantaged." I wanted to be an advocate. That's what drew me to that. And I followed through with it

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and then I was like, “Yeah, I’m over this.” So what interested you in business?

Mahisha: Well, initially it was all about marketing. And what drove me – it wasn’t initially to be an entrepreneur, but creativity around marketing was really energizing for me and I really love the psychology behind marketing, the control you can have based on how you position things and phrase things, connect with consumers. It was ever so interesting to me. And then that helped my business, of course.

Rachel: Yes, for sure. I agree. I think marketing and business in general is – it’s an opportunity for you to create something from scratch, which is really, I think we all have an innate human desire to create, which makes it really fun. So when did you decide that you would be a woman who makes bank? What was that moment or experience that you had where you were like, “Okay, I’m going to make a lot of money?”

Mahisha: You know, I hoped that I would. I certainly didn’t like my background and where I came from and living the way we lived. It was so uncomfortable. I’m like, I do not want this forever. So I don’t know when I knew I was going to. I just knew I was going to work hard not to be poor again. I don’t know when it clicked. I can’t even tell you when that shift happened because I just kept my head down and kept grinding, you know.

Rachel: Yes, and tell us a little bit about your background and what your childhood was like growing up in Northern California.

Mahisha: So, I’m from Sacramento, Northern California, born and raised in this neighborhood called Meadowview, AKA Danger Island. It rose in crime statistics back in the late 70s, 80s, and through the 90s. And that’s when the crack cocaine epidemic was coming about, like in the 80s. That meant a lot of drug addicts, you know, drug dealers, gang violence, drive by

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shootings, home invasions, everything you could imagine. A lot of my friends didn't make it to – my friends' brothers didn't make it to see 18 and a lot of my friends were pregnant by 15 and sometimes 16. So it wasn't a place to dream at all.

And my brother got caught up in that whole world. We lived under the same roof with the same mother, but he got swept away into that world. And even to this day, at the age of 50 years old, he still hasn't had a stable life. So the streets just did really eat him up. And that's the case with a lot of young black boys in the inner city, that they really don't have a father figure. So that was my background, really just desolate, and definitely not one where you – you weren't able to really dream. You didn't see success in your rearview mirror or in front of you. You just kind of tried to – for me, I used it as fuel to fuel my fire, to continue to shift things for me. I didn't like the status quo. And so what I always say is the hood can do two things to you. It can either break you or make you.

Rachel: Yes, I 100% agree with that and can totally relate to having friends at 15 and 16 get pregnant and have babies and, you know, sometimes I ask myself, like, what luck did I have? What was it that enabled me to not fall into that? I don't even know for sure. I definitely learned from some of the people around me and the mistakes they made, and being one of the younger ones in my crew and in the community, I had an older sister, so I think all of that helped. But for sure, you see things around you that are not very hopeful, you know. So yeah, I don't know what it was, I just had some kind of drive in me that was like, nope.

Mahisha: Exactly.

Rachel: Yes, this is what's happening right now, but this is not my future, you know, I'm going to have a different future.

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Mahisha: Right, and I don't know if I saw the light in the tunnel, I just knew I was going to work hard enough not to be in that position again. I don't know if I saw my life as it is today as a young girl because it wasn't even visible for me to even dream about.

Rachel: Yes, I totally agree. Like, I wanted a stable job and comfortable income and to, like, live somewhere comfortable. That's all you were hoping for is a standard of living that is...

Mahisha: That is better than that. And I hear people like P-Diddy or other people that say, "I knew I was going to be rich. I knew I was going to be this person or that person." I always go, wow that's amazing because I didn't know, but I knew I was going to work hard enough not to be what I was today, but I knew I had internal work ethic, a clock in me that was like, I'm never going to give up, but I knew I had that. I didn't know where that was going to take me, but I knew that an enterprising person – I know today, the enterprising people aren't typically broke if you're enterprising. But I didn't really have the words to verbalize that or even understand that, you know, that I was enterprising. I see it now.

I understand it now. But I know then what this internal clock inside of me is called. But it really is inside of me saying, a hustler mentality of sorts. And I think it has done me good, in a way. And that's one of my dear friends, Johnny Wimbrey, he's a motivational speaker and author and businessman, and his wife and I are really good friends. And his book is *The Hood Did Me Good*. And I'm sharing it because actually, when he says "The hood did me good," he's saying that it actually helped to create the person he is today and there's a bit of that hustle that really can carry you forward and tenacity and determination and grit that comes from being in a bad socioeconomic environment that will give you the hunger and the thirst to go after it, and that's what it's done for me.



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Rachel: Yes, I totally agree. And I tell, you know, women all the time, especially black women that, you know, we have such resilience as black women and just being a black woman in America will make you resilient, whether you grow up poor or not. But add poverty to that and that resilience will serve you so well in entrepreneurship because you get knocked down, you know, 1000 times and you get up 1001. You just have to keep doing it. And so I feel like actually black women are really positioned to win with entrepreneurship because we just know how to overcome. We know how to struggle. We don't expect things to necessarily be easy. We know we're going to fight with it a little bit to make it happen. So I think that that's an advantage that we have.

Mahisha: Yes, I agree, I totally agree and I feel a sneaking concern about my children a little bit, a little bit. I think my oldest has – I mean, she came up and saw the growth and evolution of the company and the shift in our lifestyle, and she has a little bit more of me, a lot more of me, in her. And a few others – I have four children, and a few of them have it too. The other two I kind of worry about a little bit.

Rachel: Yes, I know exactly what you mean. So I have four kids too and I agree with you, I have one who is very similar to me who I think she's going to grind no matter what because that's just her vibe, you know. That's just how she gets down. But the others, you know, you do kind of – when you grow up with that, you struggle, and therefore you learn certain things, you appreciate certain things. And these kids are growing up in this big beautiful house and going to private school and just having this whole experience that I did not grow up with, like, far from it, you know. So sometimes you worry, like, are you going to be a hard worker? Do you understand the value of a dollar? Do you have gratitude? All of those things. And I think we can still instill that. I think they can still get that message. But it is a little nerve-wracking when you have that generational shift, you know, that's happening.



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Mahisha: Yes, agree.

Rachel: So, tell me a little bit about what the journey was like with starting your career. Did you go to college? Tell me all about what that initial start was and then how you wound up getting into entrepreneurship.

Mahisha: Sure, so yes, I was the first to finish high school. Everyone that did get a diploma got GEDs in my family, on my mother's side. My father's side [inaudible 0:14:19.7] if we have time, but prominent that they never married. My father never married my mother because she came from the wrong side of the railroad tracks. So they had a tumultuous love affair. I was a byproduct of that love affair. And so I was able to see how the other side lived, the other half lived. That was very interesting to me.

A lot of exclusive invite-only clubs, you know, Jack and Jill, et cetera, Eric Holder is my cousin, the former Attorney General. On my father's side, Vivian Malone, the first black to graduate from the University of Alabama, all these wonderful things she's done with Martin Luther King, on my dad's side. A lot of those different levels of accomplished people in my dad's family.

And then my mother's family had another set. So I was able to see the dichotomy of the two and yet I was born with both of those genetic codes in my body. And I remember thinking, "Okay, I'm more comfortable around my mother's side but I want to be more like my father's side." So my father's actually gave me – when I did see him every other weekend, he gave me – I was able to see that, as a brown person, it's possible. And then my dad, he also went – again, when we were able to spend time together he would always talk about education. So that's what was important for him was for me to further my education. And that's what started my shift in my legacy because not only did I finish high school, but I also went onto college, and

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from there I went onto Intel corporation as an intern, which was a very prestigious company, as you know, and hard to get into.

So I was extremely proud to have been hired as an intern in my junior year and I was competing with about 10 other interns, they only had one position they were going to bring on part time for a year, and I actually got that coveted position. And at the time, I was a mother. I actually wound up, second year of college, getting pregnant with my oldest child, I had her. Her father left me six month pregnant, broke up with me. We were actually living together and everything and then he sent me back, packing to my mother, six months pregnant. It was one of those things where I knew I had to make it for her. As I'm at my desk, I've got a picture of the two of us together, she was two years old when I worked at Intel.

And when I got that position to continue on past that internship, I was thrilled. I knew, at that moment, I had the opportunity to, one, leave an impression on these people so they saw that. Number two, how invaluable I was, how important I was to the organization, how critical my job role and everything I did was to their success. So I made myself very present in front of the senior level executives. And upon graduation, I had two job offers after I graduated.

So I went from intern competing for a part-time job that would allow me to go to school based on my schedule until I graduated, and then, upon graduation, I received two job offers at Intel. And so I took one of the two jobs and positions there in sales and marketing and I was ready to take the Intel world by storm. I was going to climb up and rise up that corporate ladder quickly and as swiftly as possible because that's what I wanted to do. I was an Intel employee through and through. I was a good corporate citizen and worked my butt off and enjoyed it.

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And then I ran into this one situation where – an Intel, they like you to change jobs every 12 to 18 months inside Intel to get the full picture of the business. So I moved around a lot. So by the time I left, I'd had 10 different managers. I moved around and saw the different parts of the business. But one of the managers that I wound up starting to work for, it became evident that he had it in for me.

And it was extremely stressful because, number one, I had never experienced that before. I've always been a performer. I've always, you know, been a stellar employee. And I was also a single mother who was the head of the household. So when he decided to put me on a corrective action plan, which is Intel's way of getting rid of you and doing it for [inaudible 0:18:26.7], to support it for legal purposes, of course, I knew what his plan was for me. And despite the fact that I did everything that I did and was the star player in the team, I knew that it was more than something that was personal against me Mahisha Dellinger. I knew that this was racially motivated.

And that was what was disheartening for me because – and it wasn't about being a female because the group was full of women. We didn't have any guys in my group that I worked in. It was all women. So it wasn't a female-male thing. I was the only black woman. And so it was interesting going through that. But what happened here is what pushed me into my destiny.

I remember, he put me on that corrective action plan and I remember praying and going, "God, you have to move this man out," because once I got on that plan, I tried to interview out of his organization into others within Intel, outside of Intel, and everyone that called to get a reference or ask about me, he would bash my name and I could not escape. It was like I was trying to get away.

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And so I remember praying. And he came back a few weeks later and said that he's being considered for promotion at Intel Malaysia, and that he was going to try to talk his wife into moving. And if she wanted to move, he would leave. And I was praying, please move.

He wound up taking the promotion. I got a different Intel manager that took over his department. And we wound up, you know, working out well together. It was a great relationship. And I continue my moving forward in my position. But I did exit out of that organization. I went to a new Intel department.

And this is how I saw the full circle moment. I actually had my review. My review was at the end of the year, which is the end of December. And so I had been in the previous organization for the rest of the 11 months and just one month at my new organization. And so all my accomplishments that were rated and ranked were based on what I did with the manager who said I was not worthy of being at Intel.

Well, this other manager said you're rated faster than your peers, you're out-performing, you deserve a raise, stock options, and all these other things that came with being a stellar employee, which I knew, but it was my full circle moment to let me know what that was I saw with the other manager. And so that was my moment though. I went, okay, I got through this, I left that department, I have a new manager, they see my work, they understand, and this guy, the previous manager, was obviously misguided.

But at that moment, I realized, you know what, this could happen again. So instead of saying I'm going to stay here now, awesome, whoa, phew, dodged that bullet – no, it made me go, "I never want to feel that fear again," of having my financial destiny in the palm of their hands, even if it was for a few months, however long it was, I did not like it. And so I needed to take control. And that's when I started to do my research to see what

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kind of business I wanted to run for myself because I never wanted to be in that position again.

Rachel: Yes, and I'm sure that's a story that so many women of color can relate to, especially black women. I know my sister has experienced exactly that, working at a place where she feels like she's killing it and her manager keeps telling her she's not good enough and trying to create a paper trail of problems so that he could get her out. And they eventually did get her out. And that's actually what made her start to do into real estate, you know, so that she could do her own thing.

And I've heard so many stories, and I'm sure you have too, of black women being in corporate environments. I think that's exactly why we're the fastest growing segment of entrepreneurs, because black women are like, "Listen, I'm not safe here and I could pour all my time and energy and creativity into this position and they could still just kick me out one day." And while that's true for white people too – it could even happen to white men and it probably does – the truth of the matter is it's more likely to happen to us, you know.

So we just can't sit around waiting for that, especially when you have a family to take care of. When you've built up a life that is dependent on that paycheck and you realize that, like, all this could come crumbling down because somebody decides that I'm not good enough – and I've had this experience in law school as well with my professors, you know, telling me that I'm not doing a good enough job when I'm doing better than everybody else in there, you know.

And I remember having this moment where I was like, there will never, ever in my life be another old white man that has my destiny in the palm of his hands. Like, done, you know, never again. And it sounds like that was that moment for you too.

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Mahisha: Oh, it was. It was. And then he came back – he went to Malaysia and he came back and I saw him in the café. It was about six months later. In the meantime, I was working still at Intel working on my business plan and my website, getting my company going. Anyway, so I wind up running into him in the café and we were sitting down a few feet away from each other and he saw me, got up and moved. And he felt very uncomfortable.

But I sent him an intra-office email saying, “My how things have changed,” and told him how, despite what he tried to do, I’m still thriving here and talking about my raise and everything, I’m so happy that not everyone at Intel is as closed-minded as you are, and a couple of other things, god bless you, I left it at that. He read it and then just didn’t reply. And then I found him about four years ago on Facebook. We had mutual friends from Intel that I’m still friends with. And I sent him a DM with two words: Google me.

Rachel: I love it so much.

Mahisha: And he got it and then blocked me.

Rachel: Can’t block me from television though.

Mahisha: And that was my full circle moment.

Rachel: I love it so much. I’m about that life, okay. You had it, for me, yes, I have words for you, Google me. So good.

Mahisha: I probably shouldn’t have done that, but I just had to.

Rachel: Listen, I’m a big fan of when you’re dealing with – I just call them – haters of any kind, I’m a big fan of do what makes you feel better. So if you feel like being the, whatever, bigger person, that’s the language that people

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tell us, “Be the bigger person, don’t say anything,” if that what makes you feel good, cool. But if what makes you feel good is being, like, “Hey, ask about me,” then listen, do that.

Mahisha: This guy tried to take food out of my baby’s mouth, that’s how I took it. I took it personally.

Rachel: As you should because it is personal.

Mahisha: He could have ruined my reputation, which I worked so hard for.

Rachel: Oh no, yes, I’m all about that. I love it. I encourage it. Awesome, okay, so let’s talk about your entrepreneurial journey. And you know what, thank you, this man. I hope he’s listening to this podcast. And thanks to you, he was motivation for you.

Mahisha: He was motivation.

Rachel: Yes, it’s good for people to kind of push you a little bit because then it reminds you of, like, look at what I’m capable of, let me go out there and get it and stop playing small. Because right now, even being a celebrated employee at Intel was playing small for you, clearly, because you had so much more to do. So we can just thank the people along the way that pointed us in the right direction. So you started researching businesses and thinking about what kind of business did you want to start? What led you to natural hair care?

Mahisha: Well, I had a few ideas, actually, and I wasn’t sure which one I wanted to execute first. But I was a newly natural mother at the time. I had been natural for a little bit because, again, she was – when I worked at Intel she was two, so at the time, when I was pregnant with her, I started to look at other options besides relaxers. And I didn’t want to use what was on the



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market. You know, we had Jheri curl products, relaxers, what else, grease, you know. We didn't have a lot of options. And so I wanted something I could use in the mass isle, for the mass population, you know, nothing really worked for me.

I've got a handful of items, like I can use some of this or that, but it really wasn't the best for me. So that's what drove me to do it. My husband at the time was my fiancé, took me to Santa Barbra for my birthday to celebrate and we were at dinner overlooking the ocean and we were talking about what I wanted to do next and I mentioned it and he said, "Why don't you do something with hair care? You're always experimenting with products and you never found the right product you like, you always complain about them, why don't you do something in that space?" I'm like, that's a good idea, let me do my due diligence and see if there's an opportunity for a sustainable business.

And so I got back that Monday and started doing my research and found that there was definitely an opportunity and a sustainable business to go into natural hair care because there was a shift in relaxer sales. We started to see the decline in the market. More and more women of color were embracing their natural texture. So we came at the right time. We launched at the right time.

Rachel: I love that, yes. You were like in on the ground floor basically because now there's a lot more options, but back then, there really wasn't, and if you wanted to go natural – I feel like it was really based on your community. Most of the women I remember, either they had really short hair, close cut, or they had locks. But I don't really remember a lot of women wearing their natural curls out freely, you know.

Mahisha: You saw locks, right, and it was almost a different culture. It wasn't the norm to see women of color with dreads. They were an

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exception to the rule because I think we all felt, if you took a stance and wore dreads, that was even more difficult than natural hair in the workplace. Most people tried to steer away from that, except for those people who believe, this is me, love me or leave me. But a lot of us had to conform.

Rachel: Yes, exactly. I remember in law school, I graduated from law school in 2009. So I remember during law school, at the Black Law Students' Association, they had a conference and they would always have some kind of job fair thing or panel where you could talk to, like, the interviewers. And every single time, the topic of natural hair came up and, like, do you have to cut your locks. Like, there were men who were like, I had to cut my hair in order to be hired here. And women too. It's like, well you don't want to do that. And literally black women in these positions would be telling other black women, if you want to get hired here, you're going to have to conform, you know, which is ridiculous; absolutely ridiculous. Like, think about the message that that sends to women, like, okay the way your hair grows out of your head is unacceptable, so you need to fix that.

Mahisha: Yeah, unacceptable, and so what I would do all the time is just wear my hair back in a bun, not to be a distraction. I didn't want to be a distraction in my interview. And it took me – every job, Intel or even when I worked at Pfizer, I would wear my hair back in a bun until I got the job, and about a few months later, I would start wearing it down curly. Isn't that crazy?

Rachel: Yep, so tell me, how did you get started actually creating the product? Were you just kind of messing around in your kitchen? Did you hire a lab? What does that look like in the starting process?

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Mahisha: So I hired a cosmetic chemist to actually create my formulations. And so that was how – I initially was mixing stuff at home, of course, but I wasn't able to sell that. That was kind of me experimenting in the background. But I hired a cosmetic chemist to create my product for me. And I started with four items initially, just four. And that was the four basic items in the adult line; a shampoo, a conditioner, a daily curl refresher, and a cream, a curl cream.

Rachel: Awesome, yes, and that's smart, right, to just keep it simple initially and get started, instead of feeling like you have to have a whole extensive line before you launch.

Mahisha: Right.

Rachel: And what was that like? So I'm going to ask some nitty-gritty questions because I think people always feel like, you know, how do I pay for the cost of starting a new business? So you hired a cosmetic chemist. Obviously, you were working a fulltime job still, so did you take out a business loan? Was this your own funds that you used to get everything started?

Mahisha: Yeah, actually despite having exceptional personal credit, I could not get a small business loan to save my life. So I was not able to get a loan, so I had to start smaller than I expected. And it actually wound up being a blessing in disguise because I prefer now, and every time I mentor someone, I suggest that you use your own money as much as possible and avoid going into debt, especially in a new business because if something happens and you – because 80% of businesses fail in the first five years, you would hate to be in debt. So I suggest starting small, using your funds, growing it organically over time and reinvesting every dollar made back into the company and don't spend a dime of it for your personal purposes and just reinvest every dime back into the business.

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Rachel: I totally agree and I'm a big fan of that as well. And that's exactly what I did. I had some income from, like, it was a little bit of rental income, because I was renting out my house. I moved into a tiny apartment so that I could afford to start a business. And then my husband had some funds that he had saved. And so we lived off of that as well and really just kept our costs extremely low and then invested everything that we had, made from the business, back into the business to grow it slowly over time. So I totally agree with you. And the stats haven't changed much today. It's still very hard, especially for black women entrepreneurs, to get business loans even today.

It's ridiculous. And men get loans based on potential. They just have the potential to possibly make money. With women, and especially with black women, it's like let me see a whole extensive track record of you making tons of cash and then I still won't give it to you. Because I've actually applied for – it was like a line of credit of some kind – in the past couple of years where my business is making seven figures and they still were like, no. And I'm like, my profit margins are insane, what is your reason? Good credit, it's just like there's no – I think they just don't want to give us money, for whatever reason.

Black women can't be trusted, apparently. It's ridiculous. It really is. And that's why it's so exciting for me to see more black women entrepreneur mentors, like, becoming very well known, being seen and also being able to mentor. And even a lot of black women are creating investment funds and ways to invest in other black women's businesses. Like, we have to take care of ourselves, you know.

Mahisha: I agree 100%.

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Rachel: Yes, okay, so no business loan, which actually turned out to be a blessing. You got these initial four products. How did you get them out into the world? How did you start to sell them?

Mahisha: Well, this was pre social media days, so I couldn't hire influencers or pop on the Instagram app, promote. It really was grassroots. A lot of us going to where the consumer would be. So I would see African American women, we would be there event-wise and sample, engage that way. We couldn't afford TV commercials, so we did a lot of chat group ads and promotions that way. It was just really grassroots small and definitely finding ways, creative ways, to reach the market and the consumer without having social support.

Rachel: Yes, and how far were you in until you started to feel like you started to get some real traction, you were starting to get referrals and word of mouth and more and more people are talking about your products and using your products? What was that first breakthrough?

Mahisha: I think that first breakthrough for the brand for sure was the moment that we get a call from a Target buyer that wanted to meet with the brand. The buyer at the time, Linda Sullivan, blonde-haired blue-eyed buyer for ethnic hair...

Rachel: Fascinating, right?

Mahisha: And she was ahead of the curve though because she saw her relaxer sales declining and she wanted to do something about it, so she brought CURLS plus three other brands into create this new category. She actually was the person who created the whole buzz in the retail space. It was four of us, 105 Target stores, and that was a test. If we all do well, then we'll continue to move on and grow. If not, they were going to ship our products back and we'd be along our way.

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So we all did well. We went from 100 stores to 400 stores, then from 800 to 1600 and then to nationwide. And along the way, all the other retailers took notice of what Target was doing because they also had sales declining and we were up and coming, fresh, new, engaged with the consumer, and she was very into it. Five minutes into my meeting she said, "I'll take it all." And I thought wow, I've never had an easy pitch in my entire life, nothing has ever been easy. That was kind of like, "What, did I hear you right?" But that was when things shifted for me. That's when other doors opened for me.

Rachel: Yes, and how far was that into your entrepreneurial journey?

Mahisha: Year six or seven.

Rachel: Yes, okay, I think that's really important to highlight for listeners because I think sometimes we expect it all to just happen overnight. And I'm a big believer in create your own luck, and that's pretty much what you did there. You've been hustling for six or seven years, doing small actions, a little bit at a time, getting people excited about this product, using this product, and then that breakthrough happens and it happens easier than you think it should be because you're like, wait, what why is this so easy? Since when? And I just feel like that's usually how it is. It's a hustle for a while. It's a bit of a grind. And then something happens, something clicks, and there's a huge opportunity. So that's fascinating to me. And were you at seven figures at that point? Or was that the thing that took you to multimillions?

Mahisha: I had just – before we went into Target, I hit the million-dollar mark. But then after that it really catapulted forward after the Target launch.

Rachel: Yes, awesome. And was that a risk for you? Because I would imagine that if I'm an entrepreneur and I had to provide all of this product,

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you had to create all of that product and spend the money to create all of that product, deliver it to Target, and then if it doesn't work, it's coming back and now you've got to move it quickly to get your money back.

Mahisha: Yes, it definitely was a risk, but we started small because it was like our first purchase order with them was like \$30,000, that was worth of goods. So that was the value of the purchase order, so my cost was obviously much lower than that. But the value of their first purchase order was \$30,000. And so it was like, okay, and we just grew with them.

Rachel: Awesome, and tell me, what was that like? I like to think about – and I think it's important for listeners to hear – how did you need to change? And this is something that you touch on, on your show, I feel like, when you're mentoring the women on your Mind Your Business show on OWN, how did you need to change in order to go from six to seven figures and seven figures to eight? Did you need to shift what kind of leader you were? Did you need to fire people that you felt uncomfortable firing? What were those moves that you needed to make or how you needed to shift, as a human being, to become somebody who could be the owner of a full eight-figure empire?

Mahisha: Well yeah, one of the things I had to do was definitely shift my mindset as far as trying to hold onto every piece. I had to learn how to delegate. But part of that delegation was really about finding the right team. So that was important, that I could trust. So getting my team in order was important, and that's one of the most challenging things that you can find as an entrepreneur is finding and securing the right talent. That's critical to success and that's one of the things that continues to be.

Like, I have a host of people that are amazing, dedicated to the brand, and I wouldn't trade for the world. I have gone through a lot of bad frogs, kissed a lot of frogs going through getting to those people I have on my team now,



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you know, it hasn't been easy. So your talent pool can be detrimental to your success.

Rachel: I totally agree. And do you have any tips or do you feel like it's one of those things that you just have to do and learn along the way? Because I know that there have been times where I've hired for roles in my business and I didn't think I even knew what I really needed that person to do until I saw it being done poorly. And then I realized, oh, this is what I need, or this is who I really need, or this is the skill set I really need to hire for. So there's of, like, learning as you go. But do you think, is there a specific strategy that you use, or do you really think that it's something that you kind of have to learn along the way?

Mahisha: Well, I think, with the strategy, I think, trying to find the right people, I think it's one of those things you learn along the way. Besides getting help from a staff maybe to see, people can be the best interviewers and come together with the best resume and then you see the real person three months down the line. And so no one's a psychic. You can't tell. And it's like almost – some people can be great liars unfortunately, and so I think what I've learned along the way is that it's not always their job skill set that's on their resume but more about their ability to learn and if they're coachable, amiable, willing to learn, hard workers, and dedicated, then you can teach that person and go further with them than the educated person that's very experienced with a bad attitude and doesn't have – can't open up to receive input and grow. So I would rather go with the person who needs more training.

Rachel: Yes. I think I totally agree with you there. What I hear you saying is hire for values. Hire for that person's personal values because that's the stuff that you can't change, right? Whether you're the type of person who's a hard worker no matter what you're doing or not. Those are – do you agree with what the brand stands for? Are you a dedicated person? Do you

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have a positive attitude? Do you love to learn? Those are some of the things like, you're really hiring for values rather than just skill set because like you said, people can have the skill set and be a nightmare to work with.

Mahisha: Absolutely.

Rachel: Awesome. Okay, so delegating was one of the big things that you had to do more of in order to step into that next level, and that obviously involves finding and securing the right talent too, and trusting because it's your baby that you built from scratch. So that trust, it's scary but you have to do it in order to step into the next level because you can't be making deals with Target while also like, answering the phones or doing the smaller things.

You can't touch everything, approve everything. You know what I mean? It just becomes too much and you just can't. You have to let things go out the door without you having had your hands all over it and that's scary sometimes.

Mahisha: It can be. It certainly can be.

Rachel: And anything else? Any other kind of big shifts that you had to make personally to step into this next level?

Mahisha: Well yeah, the biggest thing, and there's an article that I wrote or was interviewed for in Forbes magazine about how to scale your business and the scalability of a business is important for growth. I did not want to stay as a \$500,000, one million dollar company. I wanted to grow. My goal was when I was at a million, to get to five. When I was at five, 10.

So you have to continue to find ways to scale your business and that can be the challenge. So I wrote a full article about that. The tips for scaling

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your business because that's what's going to be required of you to grow and not stay stagnant.

Rachel: Yes. I totally agree, and I'll link up that Forbes article in our show notes so everybody can check that out. I think scaling is one of the most challenging things. You can kind of get it to a place, and honestly, I feel like you could really hustle your ass off to get to a million, but then to get from a million to five, and then from five to 10, and I'm on the million to five million journey right now and it's very challenging and we got a new set of problems.

It's like, the old problems are easy to solve now. You have a lot of experience solving those problems, but now you got new problems. Like how do we make sure the quality of the product when you are creating so much more stays at the same level? Those are some of the things and just hiring more people, and hiring managers. You're not just hiring people to do things now. Now you're hiring managers to manage people who are doing things. It becomes a whole new experience for sure. Okay, so tell us about OWN and your show. Tell us how that all unfolded. How did that happen?

Mahisha: Sure. So I was interviewed by – someone contacted me, a producer, to do a show about female black-based beauty brands and I thought this is interesting, that could be very cool because it was a bunch of us in this space and it could be something interesting to show the world. And when that didn't fall through, the producers remembered me when OWN wanted to create a show helping black female business owners.

And so the producer remembered me from those set of interviews and suggested that they talk to me. So we went in, had a meeting, and the rest was history. They thought I was a unicorn. They didn't really believe I existed.

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Rachel: These unicorns exist.

Mahisha: And so I had to go in and meet. We talked. We spoke about my business, how I grew my background, and they were very, very interested in bringing me on the show. So we went straight from pilot to series, so we shot the pilot and went directly to series, which means there was no waiting to see how things go. Just instantly go from create the first look to go take for the season.

So that means they were really digging in. So that went well and then we did season one. We had eight episodes helping eight different female business owners achieve success, and seven of the ladies achieved growth and success. We had one knuckle-head that didn't want to listen to that's kind of life. We always have the one, you know.

Rachel: Yeah, that is so real. But it's just a testament like, not only are you creating entertainment but you're also – I know for me as an entrepreneur, it's really exciting to see those shows and there's all the Shark Tanks of the world and different shows like that, but nothing that's focused on black women other than Mind Your Business with Mahisha.

So I love that, that that's being seen and I'm sure it's going to inspire so many more women and black women especially to become entrepreneurs. And to see – I like that you're tough on them too and you're like, hey, you ain't prepared, what are you doing? You're not committed, which I think is great. They need to hear that tough love. Awesome. And so how has that shifted things for you? Has that changed things about your life or your business much or is it just like one of those things that you do?

Mahisha: It didn't change anything with the business. It really gave me a platform to help more on a bigger scale. So after the show wrapped, season one, I launched Black Girls Making Millions Academy, creating

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millionaires one black girl at a time, and that was to bring the show to life because I got lots of requests after we wrapped to do one-on-one personal mentoring.

And of course, I didn't have the time to mentor that many people one-on-one, so I created this academy, this event, this retreat to help women that are black and female business owners that need help growing and scaling. And so we had three tracks. The startup, brand new business that needs to know how to get going from the top to the bottom and get their business running. The come up, which is like the women on the show. They already have a business but they need help growing the business, they need help mentoring and they need help to push and get resources and all the other things you need to scale.

And then last track, which is the blow up was for women who want to pitch for funding. So we had investors there that they could pitch to get funding. So we had the three tracks, three days at a beautiful Terreneva Resort, full of workshops, conferences, lots of fun and excursions on the top of it, networking, engaging. It was one big sisterhood fest that was amazing.

Rachel: Awesome. I can only imagine because I know. I do a lot of events too and I think it's so important to bring women together in the same room just to be like – I think one of the intangible things that people really take away is just being seen. Like having your sister see you and say of course you could do that, yes, I see that for you. You know, yes, that's possible.

Because the whole world tells us it's not. The whole world is basically designed to tell us that we're not good enough, so being in a space where we're reminded of that and where we're seen as who we believe that we can be is so freaking important. I love it. And so you have another one coming up, don't you? Another one of these events?

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Mahisha: Yeah, we actually do a mid-year. The big one will be again, next year in June again, but we're doing a mid-year 2020 business check in and get one-on-one mentoring. This is going to be a smaller version of it. Very small for some of the alumni, and they're getting – some mix of new and alumni. So getting one-on-one business analysis, critiquing, which is important to get a real position and input on the status of your business.

Sometimes I realize that people will sometimes hold on to ideas way too long. What you need to hear from someone that tells you why this isn't going to work and how you can shift, but not just say I don't think this is going to work, but also saying come up with suggestions to do other things or get input as to how to make something not work work, or suggest something else, consider it. I saw that a lot, and so you have to be open-minded and that's what this is about. Really just coming down, concentrating, focusing, talking about getting ready for the top of the year for your business, one-on-one attention.

Rachel: Yes. I love that. And I totally agree. I always say that Stephen King quote, kill all your darlings. Like don't fall in love with some aspect of your idea, especially if the market's not in love with it. Like, just let it go and be successful.

Mahisha: That can be hard to do. Like on my show, we had cupcake sisters, a cupcakery and they won Cupcake Wars on the Food Network twice, two years in a row, they had this crazy stint of phenomenal success with their cupcakes and then that phase kind of went away. The cupcake craze went away and so they were still holding on to it. And we said we've evolved now, you have to move on. You have to evolve.

Rachel: Yes, exactly. You got to move where the market is going. I love that. Okay, awesome. So if people want to connect with you or come to one of your events, where should they look and find you?

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Mahisha: So for Black Girls Making Millions, find us on Facebook. Black Girls Making Millions and blackgirlsmakingmillions.com for our website. You can register for 2020. If there are any seats left for this December in Miami, you can also register there. And then also you could follow CURLS on Instagram and Facebook and Twitter at CURLS. And then Mahisha Dellinger on Instagram.

Rachel: Awesome. Thank you so much for spending the time with us. I learned a ton and I know my listeners will be so excited and so inspired by all the knowledge you dropped on us today.

Mahisha: Of course, and I look forward to coming back again sometime soon.

Rachel: Awesome.

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Okay guys, how amazing is Mahisha? I so enjoyed learning from her and I just think it is so important for us to see black women building multi-million-dollar businesses, to know that it exists. At one point Mahisha said the OWN network thought that she was a unicorn. Oh, this doesn't exist. It absolutely does and there are very successful black women out there beyond just Beyoncé and Oprah.

There are other black women out there who are doing what you want to be doing, and that is exactly why this podcast exists, to make those women more visible to you, and to introduce you to some of the women that you may not have heard of before. And even if you had, to hear more of their story of exactly how they built their multi-million-dollar empire.



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So definitely go out and check out Mahisha's book. Definitely check out her show, Mind Your Business with Mahisha. And you can follow her on @blackgirlsmakingmillions to learn more about her events and other content that she's creating. And it seems like a lot of her content is specifically focused on women who are growing businesses where they want to eventually take on maybe some investor money and also who are growing businesses where they're selling a product.

So definitely check her out and she's definitely an amazing source of inspiration. A few takeaways that I want you to kind of consider as you go about your day, a few things that I really want you to pay attention to that she recognized that there's no security in her corporate position. And what happened to her could happen to anyone, so if you feel like oh, I've got job security, no matter what you're doing, even if you're an entrepreneur in the early stages and you're doing all the work, maybe you're an attorney, maybe you're an accountant, whatever it is that you're doing for your clients, that job security really doesn't exist.

And if you're a freelancer and you do all the work and it's just you and your client and maybe an assistant, that's also similar to having a job, right? Then your boss becomes your clients and maybe your boss becomes your biggest client. If that large client were to walk away, what position would your business be in?

So I highly encourage you guys to build a business and to scale. To not think that just getting to six figures is sufficient and is going to provide all the security you need in life. For most of us, that's not the case. And one of the things Mahisha touched on was that you actually work less as you build your business and grow.

That's why she has the time to be able to do this amazing television show and to do the mentoring she's doing now. It's because her business has

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gotten to a certain place where she's got a team of amazing people doing a lot of the work that needs to be done in the business and she's not in there doing it all the time.

We have to step into the role as CEO and as visionary for the business. So if you're going to be the visionary, it's also hard to do all the work as well. So building your team is essential, and so that's another takeaway for you to take away. But number one, always be thinking about scaling and how you could grow and how you could get your business to not be beholden to one person, including you.

If something were to happen to you, what would happen to your business? You want to build a business that can have a legacy and that can go on without you. So that's number one. Number two, for sure, focus on building your team. Learn how to hire talent.

Hire for values. That was one of the biggest things that Mahisha shared is hire for values rather than hiring for oh, I just like this person, or this person has the skill set. You can train for the skill set. You cannot train personal values. That person is who they are going to be.

One of the things that I also wanted you to notice is that Mahisha kept a full-time job while she started her business and that is something that you could do as well. So don't feel like okay, I decided I want to become an entrepreneur, I have to quit this job before I start. No. Most of us, I know for me, I was working on my business behind the scenes before I launched on September 1<sup>st</sup> 2010.

I just celebrated my nine-year business anniversary a couple of days ago. But when I started September 1<sup>st</sup> 2010, I had already been sort of planning and working on the business and putting things in motion for a good, I don't know, almost a year before I launched. And I'm not saying you need to do

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that, you need to plan for a year. I'm just saying that you can be working on this business that you want to create and this side hustle while you're working a full-time job.

And even after I left my job, I was working for a judge as a judicial law clerk, when I left that job, I got another job for a couple of months. I only had it for maybe two, three months, but I had another job that sort of helped to bridge the gap and provide an income to me. And I would work early in the morning before I went to work, during my lunch break, when I came home from work in the evening, I would work on my business.

So it definitely takes some hustle to get that business off the ground for sure, and hustle is required throughout the whole journey. And that is something that Mahisha really touched on. You have to be willing to work hard. You've got to have batteries included.

So if you think everything's supposed to unfold easily, that's not how it works, and she talks about how her first breakthrough, her first big breakthrough came between year six and year seven of growing her business. So it's not necessarily going to be fast and the way that you survive that six or seven years is you enjoy the journey. You learn to enjoy the journey. And recognize too, you can be making money the whole way.

She had a seven-figure business at the time that she had her big breakthrough that took her to multi-millions. And so you can be making good money while you're on the journey of growing your business, so don't think that you have to suffer or be miserable for six or seven years but you will have to continue to grow and stretch yourself and do the hard work.

And the hard work isn't necessarily late nights all the time. Sometimes the hard work is firing somebody that you know you need to let go. Sometimes the hard work is launching that thing that you really want to be doing that

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scares the crap out of you, but you know that's the thing. Sometimes the hard work is investing in mentorship, spending money on things to invest in your business that feels really scary.

Sometimes the hard work is delegating and trusting somebody else on your team to do that work because you have to, so that you can focus on the things that are going to take you to the next level. So those are some of the takeaways that I took from that interview and that I hope that you will think about and ponder as you go on with your day.

Again, always a delight to be here with you and to have you as a listener. I appreciate you listening and I hope that this interview really inspired you. And I will see you guys next week. Bye-bye.

Hey guys, before you go, I just wanted to let you know about an exciting one-time opportunity called Handled. Handled is a four-month one-on-one opportunity to be coached by me. Now, I don't do a lot of one-on-one coaching outside of my Million Dollar Badass mastermind, but I am doing it this year.

So if you want to add some rocket fuel to your business and really end 2019 with very strong revenue and profit margins, then this opportunity is for you. So here's how you join. Go to [helloseven.co/apply](https://helloseven.co/apply). All you're going to do is fill out an application, book a call with me enrollment coach Grace, and she will talk to you about this opportunity and tell you all the details.

It does include eight one-on-one coaching sessions with me, which is unheard of, you guys, so this is a great, exciting opportunity. You'll also get a retreat with me in Kiawah Island, which is outside of Charleston and it's a really beautiful place. We rented a gorgeous mansion. Everyone will have their own room and bathroom so it'll be a great weekend experience. And

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you will also be in a small group with other amazing high-level women entrepreneurs and be able to connect with them as well.

So if you want to be in for this experience, just understand that it is a significant investment. I am not cheap. And there's a reason for that, because I help people get incredible results. In the past, my one-on-one coaching clients who have done Handled have grown their business, added another \$150,000 in revenue to their businesses within 60 days.

I've had people go from \$100,000 to a seven-figure business in the 12 months following our Handled experience. I've had women entrepreneurs make \$70,000 within 45 days of the experience. These are all true stats. So it is more common than not to make a ton of money following your Handled experience, and therefore it is a significant investment of my time and on your part as well.

So if you think that you want to be a part of this and you want to be coached one-on-one by me, this is your one opportunity. I am actually in the process of securing a book deal. I'm in the process of purchasing a building that will be the headquarters for Hello Seven. So I have some big things going on for 2020 and so I will not be offering this again probably ever, but definitely not next year or even probably the year after because the building and the book are going to take up a lot of time over the next two years.

Not to mention running my company as it is and being there for my mastermind members. So if you think you want to be in for this Handled experience, go to [helloseven.co/apply](https://helloseven.co/apply). All you have to do is book a call and fill out a short application with some details and Grace, my amazing enrollment coach will talk to you about it and give you all the details and you can decide if it's the right fit for you.

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There is no pressure if you book a call, we do not twist your arm. Our programs pretty much sell themselves. So we do not do any arm twisting. We're not used car salesmen. So all we're going to do is share details with you, learn more about you, and help you get to the right decision for you. So again, go to [helloseven.co/apply](https://helloseven.co/apply) to book a call now.