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Your Start-Up Life: Advice on Work, Life, and Play

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Every Thursday at the Huffington Post, [Rana Florida](#), CEO of [The Creative Class Group](#), will answer readers' questions about how they can optimize their lives. She will feature conversations with successful entrepreneurs and thought leaders about how they manage their businesses, relationships, their careers and more.

This isn't your parents' world anymore -- its one constant is instability. We are staying single longer -- or "Going Solo," in the words of author in [Eric Klineberg](#), and choosing to live alone. Traditional families have been replaced by all sorts of new forms of partnerships and parenting.

We change our jobs and even our careers in a heartbeat (or at the whim of the economy); more and more of us are launching our own businesses. Author Dan Pink calls it the "Free Agent Nation." The entrepreneur Ben Casnocha wrote a book called *My Start-Up Life* in which he claims: "Each of us is CEO of Me, Inc." No company can grow and thrive without a business plan.

Our teachers, counselors, parents, and professors didn't prepare us with a business plan for our lives or for all the hiccups, pitfalls, and accidents that await us along the way. Start-ups are inherently risky ventures; many of them -- no, most of them -- fail. But what every successful entrepreneur learns is that when our path suddenly swerves, we have to as well; the best business plans have adaptability, resilience, and confidence built in.

Send me your questions about work, life, or relationships at rana@creativeclass.com.

A conversation with [Mario Batali](#), chef/author/entrepreneur

This week's conversation is with Mario Batali, who started out working in a pizza place, and the risks he took on his way to the top. Mario is not only one of the most recognized and respected chefs working in America today, but a thriving brand. He has created a successful restaurant and culinary empire in New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Singapore. Since 2008, the [Mario Batali Foundation](#) has been working to educate and empower children all over the world.

Mario offers great advice to people who are just starting out, whether in the culinary arts or some other creative field.



Q. What was your first job? What did you love or hate about it?

A. I worked as a pizza man at a place called "Stuff Yer Face" in New Brunswick, NJ. I loved working with a team, I loved the energy and the adrenaline rush of working toward a common goal with different job responsibilities, and I loved doing it at lightning speed. I hated cleaning the deep fryer fat, but I became very good at it.

Q. Did you have a business plan for your life and create your own opportunities or did you take advantage of circumstances?

A. I knew I wanted to cook professionally after I graduated college and I took advantage of the luck of finding myself in demand in New York City at a time when the business of food was becoming a national fixation.

Q. How important is location generally to business? How did it play a role in launching your career?

A. I attribute much of my success to the intensely educated, opinionated, and loyal New York City customer base. The proximity to the national food media made it easier for me to identify myself as an individual with my work.

Q. What inspires you about work?

A. People who love to eat, farmers who love to grow, fisherman who love to fish, winemakers who live to make wine, and hunters who love to hunt. I am inspired by the love of my family and simply by breathing every single day, but most of all I am inspired by the constantly evolving food world and the incredible people who are involved in it.

Q. What makes a successful entrepreneur?

A. I do not know. It seems to be smart people who are not afraid to be creative and are not averse to independent thinking or risk.

Q. What traits do you look for in friends, employees, and business partners?

A. Loyalty and a sense of humour. I'm drawn to people who read and are excited by art in any form.

Q. What skills are necessary for a leader to be successful?

A. The ability to do the job at hand, the ability to delegate to the right people, the habit of listening carefully, and a good command of workplace vocabulary.

Q. If you were 21 and heading out to the workforce now, what would you do?

A. I would go and do something to help someone else less fortunate for a year. Twenty-one is not the best age to make selfless decisions, but is a great time to learn life lessons about balance and strategy. I like the idea of helping others as a first step to understanding one's own strengths and potential.

Q. What advice do you have for today's job seekers?

A. Prove you can do something for someone else first and do not be afraid to work well below your pay potential to get essential experience at the ground level. I see many college and cooking school grads emerge hoping to quickly move to the top of a workplace. All great workplace leadership positions merit five years of practice, watching, and learning from someone more experienced.

Q. How important is creativity in work?

A. Creativity is essential in many jobs, but only when you have learned (and possibly unlearned) traditional methods and ideology. There is nothing worse in the workplace than someone who

wants to change something for the sake of novelty, except for someone who will not change out of laziness or habit when faced with a better way to do something.

Q. In today's economic climate, would you advise someone to leave a reliable job to start a business?

A. It would depend entirely on the startup's product and the place it might carve in the existing market. That said, hell yes!! Even at 51, I do not look back and regret anything I have tried, I regret only the things I have not...

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