



**VIRGINIA**

# How to Create your Own Business

## Lessons from a Swiss Entrepreneur in the US

Shortly after beginning my MBA at Georgetown University in 2002, I decided to start my own business, an expansion of my family's Swiss skin care business, Alchimie Forever SARL, based in Geneva, Switzerland ([www.alchimie-forever.com](http://www.alchimie-forever.com)). Here are some of the lessons I learned.

**Just do it!**

There are two lines of thought as to when to start your own venture:

1. Start as early as possible and "just do it."
2. Gain experience in your specific industry while being paid, and then leave to set up your own firm, taking with you as many existing clients as possible.

I decided to go with strategy number one. Many suggested I first work at L'Oreal or Estee Lauder, but for me, there were three key reasons not to:

- You never know everything there is to know about your industry, so when do you decide you have learned enough and can now set

out on your own?

- I was afraid of getting used to the paychecks, benefits, and lifestyle of a corporate job and not wanting to give them up.

- I had much less to lose right after business school than I would at age 40, a mother of three with a nice house and the accompanying mortgage.

**Write a business plan**

My first idea was to open a medical spa in the US. I wrote a 50 page business plan and then decided it was not an appealing project. This realization came *after* I wrote the business plan, *not* before, and not during the first 10 pages. Putting thoughts on paper and examining the marketplace in black and white is hard, but it is one of best ways to prepare for success.

**It is better to have tried and failed than to never try at all...**

For me, this is perhaps the most significant cultural difference between the US and Switzerland. In the US, future prospective employ-

ers would, if I chose them well, appreciate the fact that I tried my own venture as a sign of initiative and creativity. In Switzerland, a "failed" business venture and the ensuing bankruptcy remain something to be ashamed of, hidden from friends and family, and certainly not discussed in the professional arena.

**Made in Switzerland**

As a Swiss entrepreneur in the US, I have been able to gain marketing advantages from the fact that our skin care products are 100% made in Switzerland. Alchimie Forever is part of Swisscos, a Swiss association whose mission is to protect the "Made in Switzerland" label in cosmetics, which typically evokes feelings of high-quality, nature, and luxury in the consumers' minds.

**Working 16 hour days for yourself so you don't have to work 8 for a boss...**

Of all the definitions of entrepre-



**Ada proudly showing off her products**

neurship, this is the one I most relate to. Creating my own business has entailed more work than almost any other possible career. But the benefits are immeasurable, including control, independence, responsibility, flexibility, glamour, constant challenges, and last but not least the potential to make a lot of money. Having my own business is the most fulfilling and exciting professional choice I have made to date. When I can't truthfully say that anymore, it will be time for me to go work for corporate America.

Until then, I remain a Swiss entrepreneur in the US pursuing my own version of the "American dream."

*Ada Polla Tray, MBA, President, Alchimie Forever LLC*

[ada@alchimie-forever.com](mailto:ada@alchimie-forever.com)

Photos: Lars Tray Photograph