

## The unlikely path to entrepreneurship

Written by Dedrick Muhammad, Sr. Director of NAACP Economic Department  
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The path to a career in the early 21st century is anything but a straight line. The very idea that you will just have one career is becoming increasingly antiquated. We have to be creative in our plans for economic sustainability. This means building upon success and, even as you go for your dreams, having a practical means to meet the demands of your economic reality.

Diana St. Louis' transformation from a prestigious lawyer to a successful entrepreneur is the perfect example of the versatility and mixture of realism and optimism needed. St. Louis left a stable position as a lawyer to open her own business, Bijte Lingerie -- a successful store that sells lingerie for full-busted women. "It's a journey that's going to be long, but ultimately, fulfilling if that's what you really want to do," St. Louis says.

Though her passion lay elsewhere, St. Louis earned a law degree and worked at a law firm for five years before striking it out on her own. "For me, lawyering was a means to end. I knew I would always have it -- it's one of those things where it could have gone either way. I wanted to create as many options as possible," says St. Louis. Her lucrative position helped her save up a sizeable nest egg for her business. And having a Plan B if something went wrong was important. "I needed to do this so I have a basic foundation I can go back to if something goes wrong," she says.

When she was finally ready to take the leap, she did her homework by learning as much about the industry as possible. But research doesn't just mean looking up the risks -- it means checking in with yourself to make sure you're emotionally ready for a long, unpredictable and sometimes scary journey.

"Figure out how deeply you desire to have your own business -- you have to be prepared for anything good, bad or ugly." Beyond that, St. Louis suggests planning out a business trajectory. "Will it remain a hobby or will it become your primary source of income? Either way, you need to know how your business should develop in the future," she says.

St. Louis was also fortunate enough to have the guidance of an industry mentor, though she found the mentor relatively late in her entrepreneurial journey. Having the guidance and help of an industry mentor is absolutely pivotal when starting your own business, she says. "Even if that person can't answer a question, they will at least know individuals who can," she says. She also found it helpful to set up a support system of people to vent to -- whether that's a fellow business owner you can commiserate with, or, as she puts it, "people who might think you're crazy but who still support you."

St. Louis also has advice for students who are trying to figure out their career path: Don't get stuck on a track too early, and don't be afraid of inventing or combining job positions. "Talk to as many people as possible and learn more about the jobs that are out there," she says. She stresses the importance of pursuing all your interests: "So much of it is about really making a point of enjoying every experience, even if it doesn't turn into a billion dollar opportunity," she adds.

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