

THE JOURNEY OF BRIAN OLIVER FRANCIS

“The journey of an entrepreneur is filled with struggle. Never give up.”

As you look at my photo, perhaps you see the face of a man filled with confidence and the attire that exemplifies success. But the meaning of success is not the same for everyone and the confidence in my eyes wasn't always there.

My childhood wasn't filled with lots of love and affection. I was often physically and verbally abused at the hands of my own mother, and was told I would never amount to anything. I'm Jamaican-born and Canadian raised. I was a soccer player and sprinter in school, and went to Central Technical High School in the '80s in Toronto, where I majored in Architectural drafting. In the '90s I went to George Brown College in Toronto where I majored in microcomputer studies. (Yeah, that's how ancient I am; nobody says "microcomputer studies" anymore, what the hell is that?)

It took me a long time to learn why such a good kid was so mistreated, and I eventually learned to forgive. I was just a regular kid with a regular education but my aspirations were more than regular. I dreamed of being a rich architect, an actor, and at times, an athlete. But by my late twenties I had already been working full-time for many years, and I was also a part-time entrepreneur. The hardships of my childhood, coupled with my great sense of humour and my willingness to express myself in the most aggressive way possible, pushed me to stand-up comedy. But if you know anything about the entertainment industry, you know that the average comedian is broke like like dishes at a Greek wedding. So I earned a living by working full time in the tech industry as a computer support analyst

and also did marketing solutions sales at fitness trade shows.

I often struggled with staying positive but I was blessed with good friendships and a very supportive wife. In 2003, I launched Creative Ideals Entertainment, a corporate entertainment provider and stand-up comedy production business, and after many years of also working full-time for someone else, I was determined to become a full-time business owner. In 2016, I retired from the entertainment business and restructured my business into a full-time email marketing service, which also wasn't a financially sustainable business idea. Just when I felt like quitting, I kept evolving and I finally came to the realization that with over 15 years in the events and marketing industry, I can create customized events that will help other businesses.

My business is now known as Creative Ideals. We create trade shows, expos, and business networking events that attract our clients' target audience, and provide them with the most enjoyable, creative, professional, and memorable experience imaginable. Direct marketing is undoubtedly one of the most powerful forms of marketing and that's what we create for our customers. Our clientele includes (but is not limited to) the Health and Fitness Industry, Financial Services, the Tech Industry, Real Estate, Car Dealerships, and Restaurants.

From 2016 to 2018, Creative Ideals grew from 900 event attendees to 2,300 subscribers and clients. My personal growth and journey to success has not reached its pinnacle; I continue to remain a student of life but also a teacher. I didn't become an athlete but I also use my 25 years of passion and experience in fitness to provide personal training

for clients. The healthier and fitter the body, the better the mind works.

My advice to future entrepreneurs is to create a business with the purpose of helping others, not just to get rich. If you're doing it because you love it and it will help people, you will be successful. Secondly, don't fear change, embrace it. If your business idea isn't working after a while, make changes. Always evolve and diversify. Perhaps there is something else you're good at that's a much better business idea. Surround yourself with positive, like-minded people, especially successful people. Being around negative people will bring you down. Being around people who aren't entrepreneurs who tell you your business is great when it's actually terrible is not good either. Grandma loves you and doesn't want to hurt your feelings, but nothing hurts a business more than not having any customers.

Finally, a great way to determine if you're in the right business is by asking yourself a simple and profound question. If you didn't need money would you still do it? Your answer should be the same as mine... a resounding "yes"! //



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