

CHAPTER ONE:

# CAN ANYONE BE AN ENTREPRENEUR?

TO BE OR NOT TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR?

DATE: 2 NOVEMBER 1994

LOCATION: A DARK WINTER EVENING

IN A THAI RESTAURANT OFF THE KING'S ROAD, LONDON

**SAHAR:** *"I really miss the skinny cappuccinos and fat-free muffins from those New York espresso bars. They were so great. I can't believe there is nothing like them in London."*

**BOBBY:** *"You know, that is a great business idea. When I was at Lehman a colleague of mine put the prospectus of a US chain of coffee bars on my desk. There could be a real opportunity for them in London. Why don't we start one ourselves?"*

**SAHAR:** *"Because I'm a lawyer! I didn't say I wanted to start selling coffee, I just wanted it as a customer! I'm not a business person."*

**BOBBY:** *"Trust me, this a great business idea. Lets do it."*

**SAHAR:** *"You're starting to get on my nerves. I haven't studied hard all my life to chuck in the law and open a coffee bar. Get another of your business school friends to open one with you. You can rely on me as a customer every day, twice a day."*

Sahar never saw herself as an entrepreneur. In fact, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the thought of starting her own business had never even crossed her mind. The need she felt as a customer for a coffee concept turned her into something she

never imagined she'd be: an entrepreneur. Bobby, on the other hand, knew a lot about business and how to go about the steps involved in starting one. He lacked the single most important ingredient needed to become an entrepreneur: the great idea.

Both of us, then, arrived at entrepreneurship from quite different starting points. Sahar as a customer, Bobby with a burning desire to simply start his own business.

There is no one, straightforward path that all entrepreneurs have followed. You can stumble upon the path of entrepreneurship in different ways. It can start with a combination of:

- A BIG idea that just won't go away.
- A gap in the market you've spotted as a customer (Sahar's case).
- The deep desire to be captain of your own soul, master of your ship. (You've had enough of corporate politics.)
- An adversity (e.g. losing your job) may spur you on.
- An unexpected event can force you to almost accidentally stumble on a great business opportunity.
- Or just plain boredom with your status quo.

Whatever your motives, we believe a lot of people think it's not an option because they are led to believe that not just anybody can be an entrepreneur and that entrepreneurship is reserved only for superhuman visionaries. We want to prove to you that entrepreneurship is an option open to anybody. It's not born, it's bred. We all have the mettle within us if only we knew how to activate it.

### *Law 1: Forget about the swashbuckling 'Richard Branson' type*

A flick through any number of newspaper articles will be enough to give you the impression that everyone who starts a business is blessed with some sort of genius but we believe that this is a myth, and we desperately want to dispel it.

Legend and conventional wisdom has made us believe that unless you are a swashbuckling extrovert who has loved business since

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kindergarten (preferably making your first million selling sweets in the playground) and are somehow blessed with otherworldly skills, then starting up on your own is not an option for you. “Unless you’ve possessed amazing leadership qualities throughout your life then forget about entrepreneurship” is what people say. Worst of all, if you haven’t dropped out of school but are instead well educated and have had a conventional and moderately successful time on the career ladder then you can definitely cross out entrepreneurship as an option for your future.

Rubbish. The truth is that conventional wisdom should be discarded! It’s just not accurate. All sorts of people start businesses, and all sorts of people thrive after doing so. There is no such thing as an identikit entrepreneur. The only difference between those who’ve succeeded already and you is that they’ve chosen to deploy the same tools that you have in your possession in pursuit of their own dream, and not someone else’s. We blame popular misconceptions on what we call the ‘Richard Branson effect’. One look at him ballooning spectacularly around the world and you probably feel that deep down inside, someone like you hasn’t got what it takes. You believe entrepreneurship requires an alchemist’s formula reserved for the genius. Well, here’s the good news: it doesn’t! As surely as not every successful business is like Virgin, so every successful (and happy) entrepreneur does not need to have Bransonesque personal qualities to make their vision work.

Look around your local high street and most of the retail brands around you were once upon a time nothing more than entrepreneurial start-ups. What you don’t see is that the faces behind these start-ups were not business prodigies. Most of them knew nothing about business and few of them ever set out to become ‘entrepreneurs’. They just knew and loved their products, and their businesses were built on the back of their dedication to an ideal.

History is rich with entrepreneurs of all shapes and sizes. If you think about it, Christopher Columbus is one early example. His great idea was to find a faster route to Asia by sailing westwards

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instead of to the east and therefore making trade more profitable in the process. On the way he discovered America! It took Columbus six years to persuade King Ferdinand of Spain through his 'business plan' to finance his expedition.

Once Columbus got royal support and financial backing he bought ships, hired men (his 'management team') and set sail six months later ('establishing his business').

One hundred years after Columbus the first colonists had another great idea: go to America to tap the new market for gold, silver and jewels. Our unwary explorers faced the same task of any entrepreneur, that of finding funding for the venture either from the crown or a trading company. And so they, too, set sail into uncharted territories to establish their businesses. We think of these people as pioneers but their activities are really the root of what we call entrepreneurship today.

History is littered with successful people who recognised an opportunity and acted on it. They are all entrepreneurs. The word 'entrepreneur' itself may be an invention of our times, but the reality is as old as humanity.

### *Law 2: Entrepreneurship is not a personality trait*

The thing to understand is that there is no universal entrepreneurial type. There is no one set of common characteristics that can somehow define in advance whether, if you share those characteristics, your business is more likely to succeed. In entrepreneurship, we are talking about a 'discipline' that all people can learn. It is bred, not born.

In the words of the entrepreneurship guru Peter Drucker: *"It is not a personality trait: In thirty years I have seen people of most diverse personalities and temperaments perform well in entrepreneurial challenges. Some entrepreneurs are egocentric and others are painfully correct conformists. Some are fat and some are lean. Some entrepreneurs are worriers and some are relaxed...some have great charm and some have no more personality than a frozen mackerel!"*

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Peter Drucker's wife started her own business at the age of 80 when she saw a gap in the hearing aids market. How untypical is that?

A good answer we've heard to the question 'what is an entrepreneur?' is this: it's like an elephant. It's difficult to describe but you'll know one when you see one!

So the best and perhaps only definition that truly describes and captures all entrepreneurs is that they act in fundamentally the same way: they start and operate their own business. More widely, they identify an opportunity and have the courage to act on it.

*Law 3: Behaving like an entrepreneur is a process anyone can learn*

Since there is no one entrepreneurial personality type, anyone can take the actions and master the skills that will make them an entrepreneur. Peter Drucker notes that "anyone who can face up to decision making can learn to be an entrepreneur and behave entrepreneurially. Entrepreneurship is a behaviour rather than a personality trait."

We believe that once you have an idea and decide to pursue it, you start behaving entrepreneurially without even realising it. The one common denominator that all entrepreneurs share is a dream and a willingness to do whatever it takes to turn that dream into a reality. You visualise an end product and work backwards to make it happen.

It's also worth stressing that entrepreneurs are different from inventors. Inventors are the geniuses that come up with ideas while entrepreneurs make a business out of ideas (often those of other people). Inventors rely on their instinct and genius. They are the Thomas Edisons of this world and there are only a handful of them. Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, follow a process that may be intuitive to some but can be learned by all.

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All entrepreneurs go through basically the same process of taking the grain of an idea through to becoming an operating business. The steps involved are fairly straightforward and we cover these in the rest of this book (market research, business plan, raising money, implementation).

By following the process as you start, you can learn to behave entrepreneurially using tools we all have within us. Those tools are hard work, commitment, persistence and determination. All entrepreneurs rely on them. But the tools need to be activated. Your passion for your idea is what will do this.

Once that's happened, you will start behaving entrepreneurially in every aspect of your life, not just in business. You will start being more proactive in making sure the things you really want are within your reach. You will refuse to take 'no' for an answer on almost any issue.

#### *Law 4: Passion will activate your entrepreneurial qualities*

It's your fuel! A core prerequisite for behaving like an entrepreneur is having passion for your business idea. The 'entrepreneur within' will be activated through passion. So the key to bringing out the entrepreneur within you is getting as close as possible to something you can get passionate about. If you do, then passion becomes the fuel for your entrepreneurial journey; 'it makes the world go round'. That fire in your stomach will bring out all the qualities that you already have, but need to activate.

If the idea doesn't turn you on, you will find it very hard to motivate yourself to do all the hard work and overcome all the obstacles. If you don't love what you do, the long, arduous journey just won't be worth it. Hard work will just feel like hard work rather than something you just do as you pursue your dream. You are better off working nine to five.

Passion, in short, is what makes you behave entrepreneurially and triggers all the qualities you need along the way. Every single entrepreneur's story starts with the passion for an idea. And anyone can find something they can get passionate about.

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*Law 5: You don't need skills or expertise*

You might be surprised to learn that the majority of entrepreneurs were neither trained nor experienced in the field in which they launched their business. In fact most of them didn't have any serious business experience at all (like actually running a company) when they started out.

It seems that starting their business taught them everything they needed to know as they went along. The act of start-up, in other words, becomes the entrepreneur's greatest source of learning. It's a business school, located bang in the middle of the real world.

When we started to write our first business plan, Sahar believed that she couldn't succeed without getting an MBA. To which Bobby replied, "Sahar, you're about to go to the best business school in the world."

Sometimes, in fact, the lack of deep industry experience and knowledge acts to the entrepreneur's advantage. We call it 'the importance of being clueless' as this allows you to think only of the end product and to be blissfully unaware of the obstacles along the way. Conventional thinking forces you to think 'in the box' and as an entrepreneur you need 'out of the box' thinking. Your lack of deep industry background thus gives you the open mindedness you need to manage the uncertainty that others necessarily won't, and to work to achieve your goal.

That is not to say that you can get by without assessing your strengths and weaknesses. As you go along you should always try to learn the skills you need. Some you can teach yourself, for others you can hire people or use professionals to help you. Either way, you have to be realistic in your self-appraisal.

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*Law 6: Anyone can do it – but does everyone want to?*

*Is entrepreneurship your sort of thing?*

Although anyone can do it, we are not saying that starting a business is for everybody. You have to ask yourself the fundamental question: Am I sure that I really want to be an entrepreneur? It's wise to think long and hard about whether you want to embark on the journey. It's not a simple career choice. Starting a business is as much a personal concept as a business one. It's a lifestyle as much as a career.

It's something that reflects not just what you do, but also who you are. For entrepreneurs the two are often the same thing. They integrate their personal interests with their work. That is a double-edged sword. On the plus side you are doing something that fits you as an individual, you love it and you control your destiny. On the minus side, it brings huge uncertainty into your life and you can't ever shut off. At the beginning, at least, you and your business are one. That is an emotional commitment you have to be ready for.

An entrepreneur friend once told us "Starting a business is no different than starting anything else. The opportunity it presents as a path to self-realisation is one most often overlooked. Ultimately I feel this is its greatest benefit." We really believe that if measured in terms of self-realisation, every entrepreneur makes billions out of the journey itself, regardless of their degree of measurable success.

*Law 7: Warning: success is not all that easy to come by.*

*The failure rate is 99%*

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*"Many people dream of success. To me success can only be achieved through repeated failure and introspection. In fact, success represents one percent of your work which results from the 99 percent that is called failure."* - S. HONDA, JAPANESE INDUSTRIALIST

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The process of entrepreneurship is an enormously time and soul consuming project. Being an entrepreneur is hard work. You'll hear more rejections and discouragement than you could imagine, and you'll have to keep going in spite of the critics. And the critics will greet you at every turn. It will take longer to achieve your dreams than you think or hope. Everything that you dread might happen will almost certainly happen along the way. Nothing you do want to happen will happen easily. Every entrepreneur says that they had no idea at the beginning how difficult it would be.

But if you do go for it, we promise that it will be the best thing you will do in your life. None of those entrepreneurs who confronted the realities regret that they did so. With hindsight, they loved every minute of it. Most of them are almost nostalgic for the old days. Looking back, the hardships and the uphill climbs all seem so romantic now.

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*"I wish I could be who I was when I wanted to be who I am now."*

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*Law 8: So decide for yourself what to do. You have to make the decision and only you can do it*

There is nothing honourable about being an entrepreneur or dishonourable about working for someone else. It's all about what YOU want from your life and from your day. Entrepreneurship has got to be your kind of thing.

We suggest that you consider whether or not to proceed very carefully. Ignore books and entrepreneur checklists that ask questions like: Do you love failure? Do you anticipate rejections with glee? Do you have amazing leadership qualities? Are you super-creative? Are you exceptionally charismatic and good with people?

Such books are designed to reinforce the conventional image of the entrepreneur as a superhuman icon. They subtly suggest that not just anyone can be a successful entrepreneur. How, after all,

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can anyone love failure? How can you tell whether you're creative if you have studied law and worked in a law firm all your life, as Sahar did? How can you be a good leader if you've never been given the chance to lead?

The point about entrepreneurship is that with the fuel of passion in your tank, you will discover qualities that you never knew existed within you. If you were previously in a lacklustre job in an environment you hated then it stands to reason that you would be out of touch with the positive parts of your personality and might therefore lack self-belief.

But starting a business requires a more conscious decision than applying for a job. There are no recruiters or corporate headhunters. Since you can't go for a job interview, you have to interview yourself. Here are questions you can ask yourself before you embark on the journey.

#### **INTERVIEW YOURSELF: IS ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR YOU?**

- Are you ready to commit yourself entirely to get your idea off the ground?
- Is your personal life ready for you committing to your business?
- Do you have other responsibilities that prevent you committing to your new idea?
- Do you have enough staying power to keep at it until it works? Assume that it will always take longer than you expect.
- Are you willing to work extremely hard?
- Are you ready to say 'no' back when others say 'no' to you?
- Are you ready to roll up your sleeves and do everything yourself – however menial the task? Entrepreneurship is not about ideas alone.
- Do you have a deep, burning passion to make your idea work?

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If your answer to these questions is “yes”, then you possess the seed of the secret ingredient you’ll need to become a successful entrepreneur and create the life of your dreams. You show the first symptoms of commitment.

*Law 9: You can't be a half-hearted entrepreneur*

We don't believe in toe-dipping in entrepreneurship. You need to commit to it. We know that phrase sounds more than a little overused. Let's face it – everyone talks about commitment. But don't ignore commitment because it's become a cliché. It really is a key ingredient for success.

On the road between your great idea and your viable business lies a minefield of fears, obstacles, rejections and discouragements. The only way to make it through this minefield and the barriers within is commitment.

If passion is your fuel, commitment is your engine. It gives you the driving force to make it through the barriers and get to your destination. The stronger your passion, the more revved up your engine; that is what will steer you through the obstacles ahead, sometimes without even realising it. Once you are committed, little can stop you from achieving your goals.

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*“Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and endless plans: the moment you definitely commit yourself, then Providence moves. All sorts of things occur that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issue from the decision, raising in your favour all manner of unseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which you could never have dreamed would come your way. Whatever you can do or dream, you can. Begin it. Boldness has genius, power, magic to it.”*  
- GOETHE

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The great thing about commitment is that it exists on an ever-increasing curve. Don't expect to be fully committed at the outset.

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We will explain in Chapter 3 how, as you begin to work on turning your idea into a reality, you will get more and more committed. But at this stage all you need is the commitment to being an entrepreneur.

*Law 10: Don't bother if you're just in it for the cash*

Wanting to get rich isn't a good enough reason to start a business. Although the best way to make a fortune is to start your own business it should not be why you do it. If money is your only motivation, your business will almost certainly fail.

If you look at most entrepreneurs who have made a fortune it has been a result of achieving a specific non-financial goal. Bill Gates' mission statement was never 'to be the richest man in the world'. It was actually 'a PC on every desk and in every home'.

Our father taught us this maxim: "Don't chase after money. Let money chase after you." If you have a great idea and you're committed to implementing it the money will indeed chase after you.

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*"I usually can tell the difference between people who have that fire in their stomachs and those who see ideas primarily to get rich. I'm looking for entrepreneurs who ask 'how can I make this business a success?' not 'how do I make a fortune?'"*

- ARTHUR ROCK, *Harvard Business Review*

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**FORGET ABOUT IT:**

Entrepreneurship is definitely not for you if:

- You actually enjoy the structure of working nine to five.
  - You want a clear divide between your life and your work.
  - You hate responsibility.
  - You can't cope with uncertainty.
  - A 'no' puts you off.
  - You are lazy and proud of it!
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**PLUSES AND MINUSES OF BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR:**

- + *Flexible working hours.*
- + *You love what you do.*
- + *You are your own boss.*
- + *No more office politics.*
- + *No more commuting.*
- + *You can work from home.*
- + *It's fun and fulfilling to follow your dream.*
- *A 24-hour-a-day job.*
- *You're not getting paid for it at the beginning.*
- *You are responsible for others.*
- *You're quite lonely.*
- *You'll have all the mundane chores.*
- *Home will no longer be relaxing.*
- *Selling your dream is a real uphill struggle with uncertainty*



## *Our Story - how we got here*

**S**o far we have tried to prove that ‘anyone can do it’ and that you don’t have to have superhuman qualities to make things work. In taking this approach, we believe that we represent a new breed of entrepreneur who doesn’t fit the image from central casting. We were not born entrepreneurs. Instead, certain circumstances conspired to make us entrepreneurs. Here is how we came to our journey.

We are siblings. There are four years in age between us, with Bobby being the older.

**Entrepreneurship wasn’t in our genes.** We don’t come from a family of entrepreneurs. Our father was a corporate executive. Our mother was a full-time devoted mother. We have no connection whatsoever with retail, food brands or coffee in any shape or form. If anything, we are quite the reverse of the apocryphal entrepreneur who dropped out of school but whose genius could nevertheless not be constrained. We followed the path of education according to convention and instead of learning the laws of supply and demand by trading in the school playground, we spent the time playing instead. We were frighteningly average people.

**We were in no way exceptional.** Neither of us were overachievers or under-achievers either at school or in our hobbies. We didn’t necessarily stand out as having amazing talents or particular

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brilliance in anything requiring us to use our imaginations.



*Sahar's dog (aged 9)*

**Creative is something we were not.**

We were horribly 'normal' and to give you an example of our lack of creativity, we were both notoriously bad at drawing. In one art class, Sahar was asked to draw her dog and, after seeing the result, her teacher was left wondering if she really kept a Tyrannosaurus Rex at home!

**We didn't show any business flair in childhood.** We didn't earn a penny in Machiavellian ways. The thought of selling sweets or worms never even crossed our minds. Sahar's only commercial venture was selling Christmas trees door-to-door for charity. The first time either of us made any money was at university during summer internships: Sahar at a law firm, Bobby at an investment bank.

Not only were we not brought up to be entrepreneurs, we were taught to study 'useful subjects' and aim for a solid profession. So Bobby studied computer engineering and Sahar studied law.

If we got any training for entrepreneurship in our upbringing, then it was being taught the value of discipline and hard work. We were taught that the key to success was not a matter of inspiration but rather 'it's all about the perspiration.' What you put into something determines what you get out. Our parents' maxim was 'it's not about being the best, it's about doing your best.' They believed that if you put your head down, worked hard and persisted, you could achieve anything. That is the most important lesson we were ever taught.

Our other home advantage was that we were taught the value of having dreams. They are the seedlings of reality. Since the ages of twelve, Sahar knew that she wanted to be a lawyer and Bobby a financier.

**We'll now fast-forward to adulthood...**

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NEW YORK 1993

Bobby was working at Lehman Brothers Investment Banking, New York in the Mergers & Acquisitions department. He had always wanted to be a Wall Street investment banker working in exactly the type of place in which he found himself and living exactly the type of life he actually lived.

Bobby was persuaded to study computer engineering at university by our father, who felt it was the profession of the future and, truth be told, he hated every minute of it! Nevertheless, he never considered giving up his course for a minute. That said, when he finished his degree Bobby wanted to nothing more to do with the subject, preferring to return to his goal of joining the world of finance and business.

He started dabbling in the stock market the summer he graduated from university and with a few lucky hunches he quickly made some sound investments. He therefore boasted to our father that there was a quicker way to make money than working hard in an office. To teach him a lesson our father gave him £10,000 and challenged him to increase the sum ten fold over the summer. Within ten days Bobby had managed to lose it all, a lesson in humility and reality that he puts down as the most valuable he's ever learned – there's no such thing as easy money; you have to earn it.

He really discovered his true passion during his time studying for an MBA at Tuck Business School in Dartmouth, New Hampshire. It was two stimulating years of hard study and sturdy outdoor sports activities in the Vermont countryside, following which he joined Lehman Brothers. Bobby's lifestyle there was classic eighties New York, working all night more frequently than having a good night's sleep. His endurance record was working on a deal from 7 a.m. one Thursday morning right through until Monday morning with two red-eye flights thrown in for good measure!

Sahar came to visit him in New York one weekend but she never saw him as he didn't leave his office for two entire days except to come home once at 3 a.m. to change shirts – it was that gruelling. In fact, the monstrously disciplined investment banker played by Sigourney Weaver in the movie, *Working Girl* was based on Bobby's boss.

Still, these were also the heady days of investment banking. It was the *Bonfire of the Vanities* era. These were the times of company expense accounts and unashamed indulgence.

All of Bobby's friends were investment bankers. From within his cocoon the high life seemed normal and invigorating, save for a slight discomfort around bonus time that usually soon eased with the receipt of a six-figure cheque to erase the memories of the all nighters and temporarily replace them with new dreams of untold riches. It sounds extreme, but Bobby's life was typical of its kind.

Bobby and his friends would often sit in the oak-panelled boardrooms of New York dreaming of one day starting their own companies. They all had plenty of ideas they had carried in their hearts since business school; after all, most of them had read nearly every business biography ever written and they had all spent a lifetime training for entrepreneurship.

The only question in the minds of Bobby and his friends was when they would do it. The answer was always 'not today' as their dreams would be constantly interrupted by the demands of the high-powered deals they were shuffling.

Whether you're a high-flying investment banker or in a nine to five job that gives you little pleasure, the initial problem with entrepreneurship is the same: will you be able to find the courage to leave the safety of a reliable working life and start over for yourself with all the risk which that entails?

Unless they were 100% – or even 105% – sure that it was going to work, Bobby and his friends were never quite prepared to make the move.

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## LONDON 1993

At the same time as Bobby was working in New York, Sahar was a lawyer at the prestigious law firm of Frere Cholmeley in Lincoln's Inn Fields, London. It had been Sahar's dream to work there from the first moment she went to their presentation at Bristol University. Instead of the pasty-faced lawyers other firms sent out to recruit undergraduates, Frere Cholmeley had sent a more impressive collection of lawyers than even the producers of Ally McBeal might be able to muster. The firm represented almost all the leading names in the entertainment industry, and had offices in Paris and Monaco (as opposed to the more boring locations where law firms normally have offices). On top of that, they seemed to know how to enjoy life as well as work. For Sahar, the choice was instinctive.

What Sahar likes to forget now and again is that Frere Cholmeley rejected her three times (she applied to them twice for summer placements in her first and second years). But she didn't give up. She eased down on the university partying in her third year (after all, she had done it non-stop for two years) and cranked up on her studies, finally getting the required grades. She reapplied and got the job offer she wanted; her dream came true!

At first after she joined the firm, Frere Cholmeley totally lived up to Sahar's expectations. Her new colleagues worked hard and they played harder. Her strict regime of hard work during the last year of Bristol and the gruelling year of Law Society finals at Chancery Lane were worth it. Just as Bobby worked in investment banking's glory days, so Sahar's stint in the corridors of the law corresponded with a golden period of big deals, power suits, and the inexorable rise of the glamorous female lawyer. The skirts were short, the heels were high, and the shoulder pads could knock an American footballer over. The female partners were inspirational role models, and she thought she had found true professional happiness.

It got even better when Sahar was sent to Paris for six months, staying at the immense company apartments in the Marais and working from offices in a palatial building in Trocadero, overlooking the Eiffel Tower.

The first two years post law school are called ‘articles’, an on-the-job training period in which the fledging lawyer becomes a fullyfledged attorney. At this time the trainee is required to work six months in each department of the firm. Having returned from her Paris sojourn, Sahar was assigned to the litigation department where things got even better.

She was placed on the case dealing with Arthur Scargill. For those unfamiliar with him, he was head of the Miners’ Union that almost brought down Margaret Thatcher’s government during the infamous Miners’ Strike of the 1980s. To cut a long story short, on a balmy day in July 1989 Sahar was plastered all over the nation’s TV screens and tabloid newspapers as the glamorous mini-skirted lawyer who served a writ on the great socialist himself. Her 15 minutes of legal fame had happened before she’d even completed her articles!

After actually qualifying as a lawyer though, everything started to change. Frere Cholmeley offered her a much-coveted place in its prestigious entertainment group where Sahar found that apart from the group’s name, there wasn’t much entertainment going on. Being a lawyer was very different from being a trainee lawyer.

As a trainee you swanned in and out of departments and sections – a fast-paced existence long on excitement and short on drudgery. If you didn’t like things, you knew that you would be moving on to your next post soon enough. You would look good at meetings basking in the greatness of the senior lawyer to whom you were ‘articled’ for that week. Being a trainee lawyer you felt as if you were the best lawyer Britain had ever produced; almost by osmosis you took on the skills of the lawyers around you. In short, you had a manageable work load, no pressure, lots of reward, and even more fun.

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All that changes when you qualify as a lawyer. The music stops and you find yourself sitting in one chair behind one desk permanently. It amounts to payback time for all the glory you enjoyed as a trainee. The meetings, the fun and the glamour come to an abrupt end. Sahar spent her time drafting documents – and the longer the document the better for the firm. She swears now that she did not meet anyone or even leave her office for her first four months in the job proper. She was imprisoned in a room with only a post box for company; documents to process were slipped under her door and had to come back out with Sahar’s contribution included.

“No, no, NO,” she screamed to herself. Rapidly she decided that this was not the life for her. She would visit the offices of her peers lamenting the unimaginative nature of the work and being nostalgic for the good old days. She searched for university friends who had found their true vocation outside the law. But she found that they all loved the complex nitty-gritty of the legal world. She was alone in her chagrin.

One day in the depths of desperation and with a complex joint venture agreement taking up her time, a light bulb went on in Sahar’s head. She had found a way out. Having espied a group of glamorous American lawyers from the prestigious New York law firm Skadden Arps in the office, and having heard that one of the senior lawyers was returning from his secondment there, Sahar approached the partner in question with the solution to her quest for legal bliss. Although she acknowledged that she was aware that lawyers were not eligible for the New York place until their fourth year, she was ready for it immediately. She was ejected from the partner’s office even more swiftly than she’d entered, with the result that she could barely utter the words “New York” for months to come.

So the disillusionment of the naturally enthusiastic Sahar snowballed as days went by. Her intuition was telling her that she was not happy as a lawyer – but she didn’t want to listen to her negative inner voice, especially after so much hard work. How could she possibly not be a lawyer when it was a longstanding ambition for which she had studied all her life?

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**Then suddenly everything changed...**

In a moment, both our worlds were turned upside down. A life-changing moment.

On the night of 23 January 1993 our close-knit family of four was shattered with the sudden death of our father from a stroke at the age of sixty-two.

Earlier that day Bobby had enjoyed a wonderful phone conversation from New York with his father in London who was on great form as usual and was starting to get used to his new life in retirement.

Sahar made the dreaded call to Bobby at midnight from a London hospital explaining that their dad had passed away peacefully, and Bobby just managed to take the last British Airways flight out of New York. He never really went back to New York after that.

Our father's sudden death was a paradigm shift for both of us. It was the sort of event that shakes up every single supposition or plan you've ever made – the sort of shock that sees you putting on new lenses and looking at the world in a totally different light, where nothing that came before matters in the slightest way. The loss of a parent strips you from your comfort zone, making other drastic changes you once considered too risky much easier to undertake.

For Bobby, the investment banking routine lost its meaning. While his gruelling work schedule had not given him time to consider the life he wanted, he realised he needed to be closer to his mother and sister and the work schedule would never allow that if he stayed at Lehman. Lehman Brothers understood his predicament and, proving itself to be a truly great employer, gave Bobby a six month sabbatical followed by a transfer to London.

Sahar remained at her law firm for one more year but realised that being a lawyer was not going to make her happy in life. At first she thought that the solution to her career dilemma was to become an in-house lawyer for a major company. "I want to be close to the fruits of my labour," she used to repeat at interviews explaining why she wanted to go in-house, along with "I want my life and my work to mix". Sahar would relate being a lawyer to

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the following scenario: the client is the host inviting the guests, choosing the menu and entertaining while the lawyer is in the kitchen chopping the carrots and washing up but never getting to attend the dinner.

She thought being an in-house lawyer would solve this problem because you do feel more involved, and you do get invited to the feast. But although she was being interviewed by lots of companies Sahar never received a job offer. Now, of course, she knows why: in-house lawyers should be marked, measured, cautious and very prudent. She was none of those things and, to make it worse, she spoke and thought at breakneck speed. She was applying, in short, for a job totally ill-suited to her personality.

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*We had 'lost sight of the shore only to discover a new ocean'.*

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By January 1994, Sahar had decided to give herself a well-deserved break and pursue her ambition to take the gap year she had overlooked after graduation to go to Argentina and learn Spanish. This period ended up lasting four months. Having had an amazingly refreshing break on the Pampas, trekking the Andes on horseback and learning a decent amount of Spanish, she felt recharged, reprogrammed and ready to get back to London.

By the end of 1994 what we both didn't realise was that we had subconsciously made the big break from our comfort zones. We had cut the umbilical cord. Although we spent 1993 in a bit of a daze during a year of mixed emotions, questions, and ups and downs, by the end of 1994 we were fairly restored. We had made the changes in our personal outlooks that we had needed to make. Changes which had it not been for our father's death we probably would never have made.

Our time off also gave us time to clarify what we wanted out of life and our careers. Little did we know that by leaving the comfort zone and really thinking about our personal and career goals we had taken the first step in the journey of entrepreneurship. The truth is that we never thought for a moment that we would end up working together, let alone starting a business together. But you

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don't need a life-changing crisis to inspire the changes that you need to make. If you are unhappy with your status quo you can choose to leave your comfort zone at any time. The key is to be proactive. Don't rely exclusively on your left-brain capacity, which is the logical rational side. You need to tap into your rightbrain capacity, where creativity and intuition reside, to enable you to visualize what you want to do and to be in life.

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*"I never discovered anything with my rational mind."*

- ALBERT EINSTEIN

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