

Verizon  
UTS Lisa Mayer Podcast  
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>> Welcome back to Up To Speed, a Verizon podcast. For today's episode, Katie Regner sat down with Lisa Mayer, the founder and CEO of My Social Canvas, a social impact fashion technology brand on a mission to educate, inspire, and equip the next generation of high school and college girls to design the life and career they love.

>> KATIE REGNER: Hey, everyone. I'm so excited to be here with Lisa Mayer, founder and CEO of My Social Canvas. Lisa, thanks so much for being here today.

>> LISA MAYER: Thank you so much for having me, Katie. I'm so thrilled to be here.

>> KATIE REGNER: It should be fun. Let's get started. Tell me a little bit about your background.

>> LISA MAYER: Yeah. So my background. I grew up in a small town in Connecticut and I spent many of the summer days while I was growing up on a small farm. My family owned a farm. And it was something that I loved. I really loved helping my dad out around the farm. I would go in and collect eggs and bring them into the country store. It was such a big part of my life. And I loved that. I loved everything about, you know, growing up on a farm. But I've always been a city girl at heart. So although I loved my childhood, I loved being in New York City and building My Social Canvas and just loved the energy of it.

And a little bit more about me, I've always been very entrepreneurial. So even back to growing up on that farm, just helping out around the store, you know, setting up a little lemonade stand, even while I was in high school I started my own small business giving swim lessons at one of the pools in my town. And then made it into my own business, as well.

So I've always been very entrepreneurial, and just loved building things from scratch.

>> KATIE REGNER: Lisa, for those who may not be familiar, can you explain to us what My Social Canvas is, and what it looks like from start to finish as you build relationships?

>> LISA MAYER: Yeah, absolutely. So My Social Canvas, it is a fashion technology

company that involves college and high school students and kind of the next generation of women and girls in designing products for a cause. So one of our missions is to help women and girls design the life and career that they love. And really dream big and just pursue their passions, do things that they love. And one way that we do that is through design of our products. So we love to involve these women and girls in the design of our products as well as just sharing the story of our brand on their campus. So when we would launch a product, we'll partner with a college woman or a high school woman and she'll get involved in designing that product. And then when we launch it, we actually share their story. So it's about My Social Canvas. It's branded as our company. But I really love to say that it's so much more than that. It's more than our brand. It's really, you know, the girls and the women that are a part of our company. It's their company, too. When we sell the product, we share their story, their name, their school. Even one example that we have are these phone cases. So I brought them to show. And the phone cases, they're designed by Tatiana, Melanie, and Nadiya. And they worked together to create them. And when we launched them at Verizon stores, we actually have their photo on the box. You know, when someone picks up this phone case on the West Coast or maybe they're in Chicago or you never know where they're buying it, right, they'll actually get to pick up this phone case and see the story of these designers.

And that's why it's so special. So we're a fashion brand. We're a tech brand. But we're so much more than that. We're really about helping the next generation dream big, design the career that they love. We want to share their stories with the world.

>> KATIE REGNER: Okay. So before you got into My Social Canvas and founded that, what was your career like before you did?

>> LISA MAYER: Yeah. So I've actually worked a lot at other startups. I've worked at small businesses and startups. There was actually a startup that I worked at about six or seven years ago before I started My Social Canvas. I was company that gave me part of the idea for My Social Canvas. So that company did a lot with working with high school and college students, where those students would fundraise for scholarships and fundraise for things for their local school to give back. And at that company, you know, I was exposed to the fact that when you're at a startup, you have to do a little bit of everything. So I remember one day I would be meeting with the executive or V.P. of marketing at a major company. And then another day I would actually be printing the T-shirts, you know, making sure that we just get things done and putting in the work. So my background is definitely in the startup world and, you know, knowing that you just have to put a lot of work in when you're working at a small business. But it's definitely worth it in the end.

After that startup, I actually ended up working at a tech startup in Silicon Valley. And that was amazing! I was surrounded by so many brilliant people in technology and business and I remember working at that company and everybody was so brilliant, but also so kind and they worked together really well. And at that company one of my clients was Nordstrom. And this is a little bit of how I started My Social Canvas and

came up with the idea. At the time I was working with Nordstrom and brought on Nordstrom as a client to that company. And one thing they were trying to do was grow their scholarship program. Nordstrom does an amazing job of giving out scholarships and supporting students of the next generation. They gave out almost a million dollars every year to high school juniors and seniors. And, you know, they were asking how can we grow our scholarship program even more? How can we get more students to know about the scholarships we give out? And so it was at that moment actually I remember on a phone call where I said "What if we did something creative?" You know, Nordstrom you're selling amazing products. You sell to high school and college students, that demographic. And you work a lot with actually fashion students. They had a fashion board and mentorship program called at the time it was the B.P. Fashion Board. I said you love to mentor students. What if we did a design collaboration or a design contest to give students a chance to design the next collection or a product that could actually sell at Nordstrom? And the woman I spoke to at the time she goes "I love that idea. I think it's just brilliant." And she said but you're a tech company. Is that something that's really in line with what you do? She goes you should just go start that. You should start a company. And it was at that moment I thought maybe I will! Maybe I will go start a company.

So that's a little bit of my background working in startups and how part of the idea for My Social Canvas was born.

>> KATIE REGNER: All right. So when you decided to make that leap to leave your startup job and start My Social Canvas, what was that experience like? Did you feel like it was a huge risk for you?

>> LISA MAYER: It has always been a risk, but I never doubted my vision and, you know, I looked to other entrepreneurs that were successful in this space of starting a startup, but also doing something to give back. And building something with a purpose. And I looked to Blake, the founder of Tom Shoes, I read his book "Start Something that Matters." I looked at Hugh Evans with Global Poverty Project, and Global Citizen Festival. I looked at companies like War B. Parker. They give a pair of glasses to someone in need for every pair they sell. I was looking for inspiration. And every entrepreneur that I learned about and when I read their story, I saw that there was a time they could have given up. There was a time they were rejected, a time when they were told their idea might not be good enough to make it. And so I just decided to go for it. I thought if they can do it, I can do it, too.

>> KATIE REGNER: Mm-hmm. So talk to us about, I know you've written a little bit about your \$7 moment and how that was a defining period of your career. Tell me about that.

>> LISA MAYER: The \$7 moment. It happened actually just a few years ago. So it's not too far back that it occurred. And I was at a point where the company was starting to take off a little bit. But I was, you know, self-financing the company and really just

trying to grow it. And we actually did, we started getting orders in and growing and getting opportunities with some amazing companies and clients. But I was really bootstrapping it, which I'm sure many entrepreneurs will tell you that they've bootstrapped it at some point, right?

>> KATIE REGNER: Mm-hmm.

>> LISA MAYER: So there was a time we were waiting on invoices from some of our clients. And a lot of the time in this industry you have to manufacture the product in advance.

>> KATIE REGNER: Sure.

>> LISA MAYER: So you manufacture your product and you might wait 60 or 90 day to be paid. So that moment was a result of that. But, you know, I just kept going. I looked down. I remember looking down at my bank account and it said, I believe it said \$7.15. And I just decided to keep going. I almost did give up on it because, you know, there is always that doubt a little bit. Right?

>> KATIE REGNER: Sure.

>> LISA MAYER: But then I remember thinking of other really powerful women and entrepreneurs that have kept going. I thought of the fact that Oprah had even been fired one from one of her first jobs in Baltimore when she got into journalism and into TV. There are so many other stories. I remember hearing that Barbara Corcoran, who is one of the investors on Shark Tank. Barbara had said that, you know, people that get back up, she said it's actually not that successful people never fail, it's actually that they've fallen and failed so many times, but they just get back up. They just get back up every time. So that was something that just struck me and stayed with me. To be successful it's not about having everything perfect or having millions of dollars in the bank and having everything happen right away. It takes time. It takes patience. And so when I saw that \$7 moment, I actually decided to take a screen shot of it on my phone and I kept it as a reminder. And I thought you know what? I'm going to use this moment to remind myself not to give up and to use it to inspire other people when they have their own \$7 moment or a time that they could quit that, you know, remind them that it's never time to quit. Whether they have \$7 or \$7 million in the bank, you know, they can just keep going.

>> KATIE REGNER: Right. So talk to us about the moment from when that Nordstrom executive said this is an idea and this could be something. So talk to us about how that morphed into what My Social Canvas is today.

>> LISA MAYER: Yeah, that's a great question. My Social Canvas has really changed over the years. We've had to pivot at times. We've had to change our business model. There are times when we found something that didn't work. We realized this

is not the right path to take. You know, there is a different way to do it. So, by no means has it been an easy journey where we've just followed every step and the path was very straight. It's always been something that's been adapting and changing with roadblocks like the \$7 moment and so many other roadblocks. There was actually a time where all in one week I was sitting on a warehouse floor manually attaching price tags to these tote bags. We were launching tote bags and lunch bags at Whole Foods Market. Whole Foods was one of our first clients. I had researched and saw that companies like Tom Shoes and others that are on a mission to make a difference, that they had also conducted with Whole Foods and they supported their mission. So I had researched which clients could we start working with, even as a startup, and a small business to get the word out. And I saw Whole Foods had worked a lot with small business owners. You know, small companies, whether buying organic produce or food, or even making tote bags or lunch bags or things that give back like Toms.

So I approached Whole Foods and, you know, they actually loved the idea that I had proposed of us selling tote bags and lunch bags that support kids eating healthy and supporting girls to make healthy choices. And so we started, you know, manufacturing these lunch bags and then our vendor actually they sent these bags to whole foods with the wrong price tags on them.

>> KATIE REGNER: Oh my!

>> LISA MAYER: You know when you buy something and you pick up and you see the UPC code or the SCU, and that's how you ring it up?

>> KATIE REGNER: Sure.

>> LISA MAYER: At the store?

>> KATIE REGNER: Yeah.

>> LISA MAYER: They had attached the lunch bag price tag to the tote bag and vice versa.

>> KATIE REGNER: Oh no.

>> LISA MAYER: I'm just sharing this story to show you some of the journey that I faced. There was this one day where we realized we could wait a week and have all the product shipped back. Our vendor would actually handle the shipping. You know, it wouldn't be on our end. But we knew we couldn't wait.

>> KATIE REGNER: Mm-hmm.

>> LISA MAYER: So my team, we went out to all the Whole Foods in New York City and we just manually attached the correct price tags to those tote bags and lunch bags. And that was in the same week actually where we were invited to the White House. We went to a state dinner. I had actually been invited to go to the Change Maker Summit at the White House that Michelle Obama and her Council for Women and Girls were hosting for Women Change Makers. And all of that happened in one week. So it just shows you that is the journey of an entrepreneur. That's what it's like to start a business from scratch. One day you could be sitting on a warehouse floor with a small team attaching price tags to your bags. Or one day you could be going to an amazing meeting or getting honored, you know, at a summit. It's all part of the ride. It's all part of the journey.

>> KATIE REGNER: Lisa, you got involved with WITENY, Women in Technology and entrepreneurship in New York, of which Verizon is a founding member. So tell us how that partnership came about.

>> LISA MAYER: Great question. So yeah, WITENY has been a supporter of My Social Canvas and a partner for several years. And I had just started as the co-working space Verizon has on 140 West Street, which is now called Alley Powered by Verizon. It's amazing as far as a space. It's so much more than just an office space. It really represents a place where entrepreneurs like me can start something with an idea. You know, it starts as something small, and it starts as an idea. And they build it into something larger. And they've been a huge, huge supporter of ours. So I was working there at the co-working space and I met some incredible women that knew Judy Spitz who is the founding program director. And really, she created WITENY out of an idea. So they said you need to meet Judy. She would just love some of your ideas and what you're working on. And they set it up so we would have breakfast. So I remember meeting Judy for breakfast and coffee one morning. And this was all an idea of partnering with Verizon. At the time I was just working in Verizon's co-working space. There was no business plan. There was no -- we had never manufactured phone cases. We had never been in that industry. I think of the co-working space really as a family. I think of the Alley team as my family and our champions for My Social Canvas. They really just believe in our dreams and they're a part of helping bring our ideas to fruition.

>> KATIE REGNER: Tell us about the hack-a-thon you hosted that have brought these phone case to fruition and sitting in front of us today?

>> LISA MAYER: Yeah. So the hack-a-thon was something we hosted. We actually

hosted it at Verizon's co-working space. So the same place that this whole idea started is where the next phase of it came to life, where we hosted this event. We brought together college women from fashion, tech, and business. Brought them to the space. And had them design their products, design their phone cases, write their business plans, and just build their own website, really, to share their product with the world.

>> KATIE REGNER: So what was that experience like for you? Kind of seeing that come full circumstance until the same space?

>> LISA MAYER: It has been so surreal, the whole process. Since the beginning, I came up with this idea. And we had never manufactured phone cases or done a product like this before. And there's just so much that goes into it. And the whole process has really been so surreal. Verizon has been a huge supporter. They've really been one of our largest champions. Not just for this project, but for other initiatives. When I first started working at Verizon's co-working space and now it's Alley powered by Verizon, we were sitting there writing this idea down. We really didn't have a large business plan. And then to see the next phase of it where we're hosting this event in that same space where the idea started. And now fast forward to today we are about to launch these phone cases that started as an idea in the co-working space. The next phase was we created them with the students and now they're launching to the world. They're going to be at Verizon stores nationwide. And we get to tell the stories of those same women that were at the event. That were creating these cases. And we get to tell their story. We get to feature them and celebrate them. It's very special.

>> KATIE REGNER: So as you brought those students from diverse, varying background together, were there any ah-ha moments as you watched them collaborate over this 24-hour period to create a product?

>> LISA MAYER: There were so many ah-ha moments, but one thing I would say is actually the phone case that we are launching, we're launching a few phone cases actually, but the one that we're launching at Verizon with the code on it, that was one of the ah-ha moments. So it was so beautiful. We saw them starting to design this phone case and Nadia who is in fashion, she's brilliant. She's really, really talent. She was working with Melanie and Tatiana on this phone case. And to be able to see them work together and them all, you know, bring ideas to the table, part of the idea for this code, you know, putting code on the case with this amazing message was Tatiana's.

>> KATIE REGNER: Okay.

>> LISA MAYER: So Tatiana is in technology and that's her area. But she brought the idea of putting code into the aesthetic of the case. So she was a part of the design process just as much as Nadia was.

>> KATIE REGNER: Okay.

>> LISA MAYER: I thought that was so beautiful to watch them work together and this product is the result of them. It forced Tatiana to be creative and think in a different way.

>> KATIE REGNER: Lisa, you mentioned what you're passionate about is being able to share the stories of the girls and women who are part of My Social Canvas now. So, tell us a little bit about how you go about, you know, finding these participants or they come to you. Kind of tell us how people get involved.

>> LISA MAYER: In the beginning it was really organic. I just started sharing this vision and what the company was about with everybody I knew. I was so passionate about it. I would tell a friend or someone I knew from work about it. And they would say my daughter would love to be involved. And my daughter loves fashion and she loves giving back. Suddenly we get an e-mail and this amazing, brilliant college woman would reach out and say she wants to be involved. And we started to just get flooded with interest. We had e-mails left and right from all over the nation. I remember looking down and we had students all over the nation. Then we had students in Canada writing us. We recently had this amazing young woman that's graduating high school from Romania reach out and she is super passionate about education and, you know, making a difference. She's a part of Girl Up. They have their campus clubs around the world. And she reached out to us. So a lot of it is very organic. People will hear about it through their friends. They love to share, you know, students that are involved love to share it with people. So we'll just get e-mails and people are reaching out in all different ways to participate.

But another thing that we do is we partner with colleges and universities and organizations like WITENY and we've had involvement from Parsons, FIT, LIM, a lot of the major design and fashion schools.

We've had involvement from Cornell and Cornell Tech and universities all around the nation. It really depends on the project and people love to be involved.

Another thing we love to do is we love to give back to local schools. There's a school in Harlem that we've partnered with in the past and we'll go in and speak to the students. They have this GLAM Girls Club, which stands for Girls Learning to Achieve More. We've gone and worked with the students in that club and really mentored them.



There's a lot of other local initiatives that we've done in New York in the Bronx and Harlem and Brooklyn. We love to get involved and work with schools, as well.

>> KATIE REGNER: I believe I've seen you have a campus mentorship program as part of My Social Canvas. Talk to us a little bit about what that's like and what it entails.

>> LISA MAYER: So the mentorship program is something that just naturally came about through the company. Like I said, when I started My Social Canvas, I knew that it was so much more than fashion. It has always been more than a product. More than a phone case. More than a T-shirt or a lunch bag, you know, that we sold at Whole Foods. It has been about helping women and girls, helping to educate them, and, you know, what gets me out of bed in the morning and makes me passionate about this is not the part about the product, to be honest. If I'm completely honest. The part that gets me out of bed and gets me excited and makes me not give up during that \$7 moment, you know, is being able to inspire the next generation. Being able to mentor them. So that's why we've had it since the beginning. We have a mentorship program. And we bring students around to different companies. We have our design the life you love career and job shadow days. These are always a huge hit. And we bring the college and high school women to companies to learn from amazing mentors. We brought them to NBC. NBC Universal to meet someone from their team. We've brought them to many fashion brands like Diane Von Furstenberg's studio. We've brought them to Rebecca Minkoff. We've brought them to Refinery 29 to learn about what they're doing from an editorial perspective. Brought them to Hurst, to meet with people from Elle Magazine and Seventeen Magazine. Many of them want to be in journalism or want to be a writer someday. And they love going behind the scenes at these companies. You know, they might get to see the fashion closet at a major magazine or meet with like the editor in chief of that magazine they've been reading since they were a teenager. You know, something that they've been exposed to for years and then get to see that office come to life is something they love. And we want them to be able to see that so they can know if they want to explore a career in that field. And talk to those mentors. You know, they might meet with someone at this magazine and they think it's very glamorous and it's their favorite magazine, but when they sit down with someone that works there that mentor will tell them how it is. They're honest. They say this takes hard work. They're like there are amazing days working here at this magazine. And yes, I get to go on the red carpet one day. Or I might get to meet a celebrity. But there are also days that I am just working my butt off.

>> KATIE REGNER: Right. Burning the midnight oil.

>> LISA MAYER: Right.

They're working long hours they might have to run an errand or specific something up or

do something that is not as glamorous.

>> KATIE REGNER: Right.

>> LISA MAYER: So we want these college and high school women to walk away from these experiences seeing the hard work it will take and seeing that no career is perfect. And just learning.

>> KATIE REGNER: So Lisa, what advice would you have for someone who maybe wants to start their own company? How do you impart your entrepreneurial spirit onto others?

>> LISA MAYER: My advice would be persistence, passion, and patience. When you start your own company everything takes longer than it would ever take at a large company. It actually is taking us a few years to get these phone cases launched. And it took, you know, a little bit of time to manufacture the first set of products that we made. And everything takes longer when you're a startup. When you're starting your own company. You don't have unlimited funds or budgets or unlimited talent to help you. It could just be you in the beginning! Right? You might have to sit on that warehouse floor one time and attach the price tags to your bags. But then there will be amazing days where it makes it all worth it. And so I would say just patience. Everything takes longer. Every dollar that you sell as a startup is something to celebrate. It might not be a million dollars right away. It might be just a few dollars. But keep at it. And show your passion because that's the only thing someone has to go on. Right? And then I would just say persistence. I mean so many people will tell you no. I mean there have been many people that have told me we couldn't make these phone cases, or we can't make this into a business. It has a beautiful story. But it's not a business. And I am here to tell them they are wrong. So you have to be persistent.

>> KATIE REGNER: What do you know now that you wish you would have known back when you started My Social Canvas.

>> LISA MAYER: Something that I wish I knew is that you have to be confident in what you're building and you can't let the fact that you are a small business or you are a startup or you're just one entrepreneur with a dream, you can't let that bring you down. You can't let that cause any insecurity. You have to just be confident in it. If you're confident in your idea, other people will have the confidence in that idea. So you just have to believe in it. Since you don't have an army of people behind you when you're starting something from scratch you have to be that army. You have to be that

confident in it. And just remember, other people, if you're meeting with the CEO of a company, they might have their days where they're insecure. They had a bad day that morning. Right? So just remember that anyone you're meeting with, don't be intimidated. Just be kind. Be passionate. And be persistent and don't give up.

>> KATIE REGNER: Lisa, thanks so much for being with us today. It was a pleasure to have you.

>> LISA MAYER: So thanks, Katie.

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