

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/a-proud-passion-for-fashion>

Susan Koger, co-founder and chief creative officer at ModCloth, an online retailer of women's fashion, describes becoming an entrepreneur because of her passion for vintage clothing, not for starting a business. She says that passion, and meeting the man who would later become her husband and co-founder, motivated her to learn the necessary skills and pursue her vision.



Transcript

I don't know that I was a born entrepreneur.. Like I wasn't that girl that was like selling lemonade, you know as soon as I could, and like trying to employ my friends like, make an extra buck.. But I am absolutely an entrepreneur through and through.. That's one thing that I would like love to share with you guys like, if you could take something away from this, like there is no right way to be an entrepreneur.. You know, as I have gone through this journey and as I have had the incredible opportunity to meet so many other amazing entrepreneurs like, yes there are those born entrepreneurs who, when you hear their stories you're like, oh my god like, basically as soon as you could talk, you are trying to sell something and to start a business.. And that's amazing and I really respect that but you can come to entrepreneurship, you can find your entrepreneurial path in many different ways.. And I think that I am a proof of that.. So, for me it starts with my passion for fashion and just loving clothes and I am not ashamed to admit it.. It might sound unintellectual but I've always like getting dressed and it's always something that I was drawn to and I was passionate about, and I had an eye for.. I didn't have a ton of disposable income growing up, so I started shopping at thrift stores and vintage stores like, basically I wanted to be able to stand out, and I wanted to be able to buy things that other people wouldn't have..

And, you know, the intersection of these two things like, a little bit of disposable income and wanting to stand out let me to vintage and thrift store shopping.. I grew up in South Florida, a suburb near Fort Lauderdale.. And you know, I was a Florida girl.. Like, I had seen snow once and when I was in high school like, I worked really hard I wanted to not be a Florida girl anymore, I got into Carnegie Mellon and decided to be a Business major because you know honestly I didn't really know exactly what I wanted to do, but I figured it like business maybe could lead the fashion, I actually didn't really know what job existed in the fashion industry other than this concept of being a fashion designer and I wasn't sure that I had the artistic skills to be a fashion designer.. So, I got into Carnegie Mellon, I had to move up to Pittsburgh and experienced my first winter ever, which is kind of daunting maybe you guys had an opposite experience, coming to beautiful sunny Stanford, from a place that was cold and snowy.. But you know, for me, like I couldn't, I had to buy a whole new wardrobe and I couldn't do that in South Florida.. You know, even if I had the disposable income to be able to go to mall and buy everything brand new, there isn't winter wear or even like autumn wear in the malls in South Florida in the summer time.. And so, I started going to thrift stores and looking for winter wear for the first time.. And I found a lot of amazing stuff and like, I think that was kind of the moment when I sort of started to become an entrepreneur like that like seed started to grow.. Like I was just like, I can't pass up these beautiful pieces of clothing, I know they're worth so much more than they, you know are kind of marked at just sitting here like, maybe this was like my innate merchant coming out..

And I found myself buying stuff even if it didn't fit me, and I would kind of say like, oh like I will give it to a friend or I will use the buttons for a craft project which would never happen or I learn it sew and I will tailor it to fit me, which also has not happened, I still don't know how to sew.. That's okay, but I was bringing all the stuff home like, trash bags, trash bags full of it, and I started dating this guy around the same time.. He was - his name is Eric, he is my husband today; he is my Co-Founder at ModCloth.. And he had actually started a web hosting business with two of his friends in high school.. I would say he is more of that born entrepreneur like, thinking about running a business from you know, aged four or whatever like as soon as he could talk and kind of think about what he wanted to do.. So, he and this web hosting business, he built a few e-commerce sites like, think about it this is like 2000/2001, it was sort of like, where these like young smart kids like, let's help you get on the inner webs like, he would go around to local business centers in South Florida area and kind of pitch them on like we'll help you get - you need a website to like, make your small business bigger.. And so, he had some experience and he

was actually the one that suggested that I build a website and sell some of these products that I was finding.. It was like one of a kind - these one-of-a-kind vintage pieces.. And I thought that it sounded like a fun challenge, I mean, quite honestly I also thought hey if I sell some of the stuff that means that I get to buy more stuff which sounds really cool.. And, it's, you know, again like thinking back to that time, right? Like, there weren't really any other options like, eBay was an option but I wasn't really finding designer goods and they didn't really think I could like build a brand on eBay, it seems like, if I was going to do it I wanted to be able to control the - and more of the customer experience and more of the shopping experience..

And you know, there wasn't Etsy, there wasn't any of these like easy to start up shopping carts, there was no Instagram to sell on.. Like, when I think about the entrepreneurs are starting today it's like, all you really need is a mobile phone and an Instagram account and you can be connected to, you know, you can be a tastemaker to a group of people that kind of look up to you and think that you have good taste...