

She Began Her Entrepreneurial Journey At Age 11. This Is What She's Doing Now.

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***Author's Blurp:** Prior to working at Vulcan Post, I had little to no knowledge about (nor any interest in) startups and entrepreneurship. I had a pretty late start getting introduced to this world, in comparison to many other Malaysians, some of who become entrepreneurs while they're still in university.*

Then there are some who had an even earlier start. One such example is Harsha Ravindran, who began her foray into the entrepreneurial world at the tender age of 11.

She was the kind of student who didn't have much of a direction at all, much less the passion for entrepreneurship.

But that all changed when she followed her mother to a weekly talk show that was held by a social business incubator called ET Ideas.

There she met all sorts of people, from those who ran million-dollar businesses to young entrepreneurs beginning their own journeys.

What she learnt there would set her on a path to maturity that many of us (read: me) would probably only learn in our early twenties.

Centred around the philosophy that in order to succeed in anything, a person needed to have the right values, mindset and skills first, ET Ideas taught her how one's subconscious mind works, how to respond and not blindly react in tense, emotional situations, and how to set and achieve goals, amongst other things.

"Slowly, I began applying these lessons in my day to day life at school and started seeing changes in my life," Harsha told Vulcan Post.

“I became a top-scorer in my class, improved my communication with my friends, family and teachers, became a distinct representative in various competitions and sports tournaments, and even received a scholarship to study at an international school, worth RM 150,000, all by age 12.”

And That Was Only The Start

Other youngsters at ET Ideas who were around her age began experiencing the same thing—they began excelling academically and even started working on turning their passion into sustainable careers despite still being in school.

“Wanting to share what we had learnt with our friends, we invited them to join us as well, but many of them weren’t able to be a part of it as they had transport issues, amongst other issues,” Harsha recalled.

“So, at age 13, I and the other youths at ET Ideas (who were only slightly older) formed Ascendance with the aim to provide the same platform, guidance, knowledge and experiences we gained to every youth out there.”



Harsha and her team at StartMyName, which comprises other youths too
/ Image Credit: StartMyName

In essence, Ascendance acts as an extension of ET Ideas that’s catered specifically to youths.

But while I was struggling in school with academics alone, I wondered how Harsha juggled both entrepreneurship and scholarship.

“To the disbelief of many—including myself at first—I began to perform better academically after becoming a young entrepreneur,” she revealed.

Her mentors at ET Ideas would consistently remind her that what she was learning in school could be applied concurrently in her work, and from there on, it became a habit for her to do so.

“At the same time, the skills I was learning from running a startup, such as time management, communication, problem-solving, responsibility, etc. started spilling over into the way I handled school and studying,” Harsha shared.

This became the training ground for her to learn how to become more efficient.

She would go on to become a speaker at several different TEDx talks like TEDxYouth@SKIS, TEDxMonash University Malaysia and TEDxIMU, sharing her experience with other youths.

Today, not only is she involved in Ascendance as its Chief Marketing Officer, but she also founded and runs StartMyName, a startup that designs, builds and maintains websites.

Turning A Newfound Passion Into Business

Harsha's been making websites since she was 13. It began during her internship with a company that didn't have much to do with IT.

One day, its CEO was to be interviewed on a prominent news channel and they needed to revamp the company website before then.

The only person who was free to work on it at that moment was Harsha—a student who had no experience in anything related to web development and IT.

But that was how she learnt to make fast, professional websites and fell in love with the idea of helping people express themselves online.

To her, having your own website is a boost to one's credibility and enables you to share your stories with newer audiences.

However, getting it professionally made can be costly, especially for those who are just starting their careers or want to simply share passions and experiences.

“Many times, it becomes a decision between having a quality website and spending a fortune vs saving money and being unable to update or design your website at a professional standard,” Harsha observed.

This is where StartMyName exists to bridge that gap.

A Young Entrepreneur's Challenges

“In the beginning, many people were wary that I wouldn't be able to handle the work or know how to build and design websites properly,” Harsha recalled.

“As a young entrepreneur, it was hard to gain the confidence and trust of clients, and I started off by learning online and from Mr. Edward Boey from Newwave Synchronizer.”



Harsha and Edward Boey / Image Credit: StartMyName

Ultimately though, she required the trust of clients to progress, and thankfully, she managed to cinch a few who entrusted their websites to her and even spread the word about it.

Eventually, StartMyName was backed by Newwave Synchronizer, and this remains one of Harsha's proudest personal achievements to date.

“To see such an established industry player back a startup that is run by a teenager was truly touching and showed me that people truly cared to invest in the ideas of the young.”

With her journey so far, I had to ask if entrepreneurship was something that Harsha would recommend more children learn.

She replied that in the beginning, it gave her a sense of creative freedom and excitement that she believes many children long for.

“I believe that being an entrepreneur gives students the opportunity to experience how the world works while they are still students, thus giving them an edge in the long run.”

“But more than recommending children to learn entrepreneurship, I would urge them to ask themselves what they want to try out now and think about how they can turn what they love into a career while they are still in school,” she concluded.

What's important to Harsha is that they do what they love and are able to see everything that happens to them as a lesson and learn the other (often unspoken) skills from experiences, such as managing emotions, communicating, being truthful, etc.

As for what's next with Harsha, she's just been admitted as a distance student to the University of Pennsylvania where she'll be working to see how they can replicate Ascendance and StartMyName's work at an international level.

***Bottom Line:** For Harsha, it would seem like her entrepreneurial journey was filled with self-discovery and self-development. I think this reminded me that entrepreneurship is sometimes not all about the technical stuff like revenue, metrics or valuation, but also about personal journeys where one can learn a lot about themselves and improve from there.*

You can read about other Malaysian startups [here](#).

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