Brown Sugar Cookie Company & Catering

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Sakile Mitchell is one of those entrepreneurs that can trace her business idea back to a single pivotal moment.

When she was eight years old, her mom surprised her on Christmas with an Easy-Bake Oven.

"It was a little bit of trial and error at first," she says, laughing. "I kept burning things."

The oven sparked a lifelong passion for food. She picked up basic kitchen skills during her first job at Chipotle. After that she got hired at another Portland restaurant as a line cook, and took on various kitchen jobs for a span of seven years.

Culinary school was out of reach for her budget. "I thought I'd get paid to learn instead of paying for classes to teach me how to learn," she says.

Fast forward to today, and Mitchell is now the owner of [Brown Sugar Cookie Company & Catering]. Her company has provided baked goods to high-class institutions like the Portland Center for the Arts, the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, and the Keller Auditorium.

Mitchell is already dreaming of a storefront. She says her cookies have sold out at every market she's participated in thus far.

But if it wasn't for some financial help from a friend, starting a business wouldn't have been possible. Her credit score prevented her from qualifying for a bank loan. She didn't have any savings.

A security guard at a Mexican restaurant she worked at offered to give her some startup capital. So she wrote up a business plan and jumped on the opportunity. "Luckily I had someone who believed in me," she reflects.

She used that money to buy supplies and prepare for her debut at My People's Market, a farmers-market-style event in Portland where all the vendors are people of color. Her cookies were such a hit that she took the next step and paid to register her business with the state.

Mitchell's entry into the food manufacturing space echoes what the Urban Manufacturing Alliance found through its [State of Urban Manufacturing research], which looks at manufacturing ecosystems in six U.S. cities. Forty percent of small manufacturers in Portland said that access to capital was one of their top-three biggest challenges. And one-fourth of manufacturers that forewent sales in 2017 did so because they couldn't get the capital they needed to match production demands.

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These findings resonated across all six *State of Urban Manufacturing* cities. In Detroit in particular, access to capital was [unevenly distributed by ethnicity]. About one-fifth of African American respondents had accessed personal lines of credit or venture capital to start their

businesses. Meanwhile, nearly four-fifths of white respondents had accessed these sources.

Mitchell likes to joke that the only business mentor she had access to was Google. Whenever she had a question about running a company, she'd use the search engine to dig up tales of entrepreneurship across the web.

Today, advisors at Portland Mercato, a business development organization that provides shared commercial space to food entrepreneurs, help her plan her pricing. She also takes low-cost business management classes at Mercy Corps Northwest in downtown Portland.

She may have started with zero business prospects. But every time someone refers a new customer to her, she feels grateful that she took the leap into entrepreneurship. "It just lets me know I'm doing my job right."
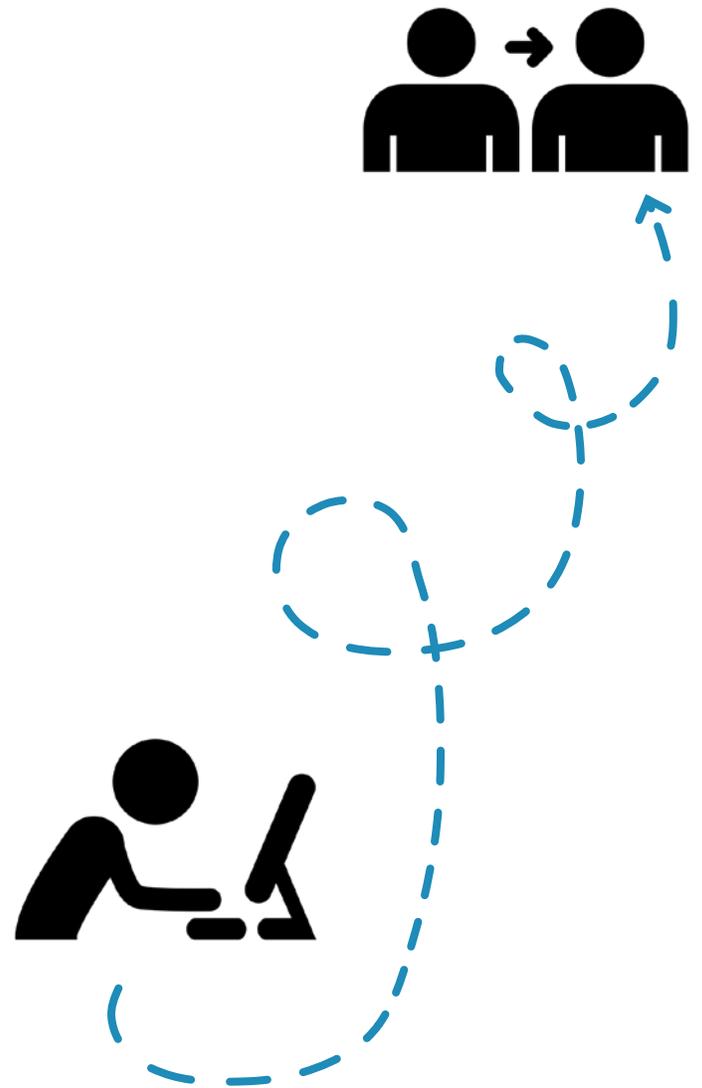
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