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“Just try it, you can always go back. But you are probably going to move forward”

Karmen Koren
Slovenia



*This story has been developed within the project
“SkillsXcellerate: Empowering youth on their path to independence through entrepreneurship”
This material was developed as part of WP2 A2 Best practices*

SkillsXcellerate



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Project code: 2023-2-SE02-KA220-YOU-000171087

HOW AND WHEN KARMEN STARTED HER BUSINESS

Karmen was 28 when she founded her company Reinkarmika, a sustainable clothing brand, and opened doors to her shop that sells vintage and upcycled clothing items together with handmade products of other Slovenian makers.

Her fascination with clothes started when she was a little girl and grew bigger as she grew older. This led her to study at the College of Design in Ljubljana, she later participated in Ljubljana Fashion Week and even had her clothes shown at New York Fashion Week. As an assistant costume designer, she worked on various sets for commercials, TV shows, and movies. Although she liked her job very much, she felt like this just was not something she wanted to do for the rest of her life. One day an idea came to her mind; she decided to open her vintage shop where she could have a place to sew whatever she wanted and show all those beautiful items she collected through the years and were taking up all the space in her house. She followed her feelings, moved from Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia to her home village, and opened a vintage shop in the nearby small town of Kobarid. She did not have big savings to start her business but found out there is an initiative for women who are starting a business and have a university degree. So, she applied and got accepted. The money and basic business training she received during this course helped her with the initial costs of starting a business.

HOW KARMEN DEVELOPED HER BUSINESS

On the opening day of her store, many of her friends and family came to see what she had done with the place she rented and decided to make it her studio and store. On her first day, she sold quite a lot of things and got super excited but then the next days and weeks came when there were almost no customers and she could only dream of her first-day income. But she never for a second doubted or considered giving up. She soon found out that she was selling her creations – T-shirts – too cheap; she thought that the price was ok because she only used old fabric leftovers and that the price should reflect that. She did not think about the value of her own work; once she considered this, a funny thing happened, people were much more interested in buying these, higher-priced t-shirts. She soon learned an important lesson that stayed with her to this day: one should value oneself.



She worked in her store for three years from 9 AM to 9 PM, enjoying having her place where she could sew, meet interesting people, and sell vintage clothes. Although things started looking up the income was still not very big. She spent what seemed to be a small fortune every month during winter on heating and other costs that needed to be paid every month. And then something happened that affected Karmen`s financial situation – her wallet was stolen. Together with all of the nostalgic artifacts that she kept in there, she also had her money for the next month of business payments stolen. Although this event made Karmen sad and worried about how to survive the upcoming months, she did not let it get her down. She took it as a challenge; she rolled up her sleeves and started doing clothing repairs in her store – something that she always avoided doing – and soon earned enough to cover her loss. Another thing she was pretty declined to was her participation in social networks (like FB and Instagram), particularly the thought of filming herself did not appeal to her. In one of the trainings she took (as a part of a business competition named Entrepreneurial Primorska), it was said that this part can be very important for entrepreneurs. So, she tried it, found a way of doing it that made her comfortable, and after initial hesitation became very skilled in this aspect. She achieved a wider reach and gained much more recognition through network presence which helped her sell more items. Something that she was very declined to at the beginning turned out to be very important for her business and she was flexible enough to try it.

WHAT ARE KARMEN'S PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

For the future, Karmen is considering making some changes and has a few ideas for new additions to her business. She is thinking of offering a sewing course where the participants would choose some of the quality clothing pieces that Karmen owns but are not her style and redesign them to their liking. She is also thinking of hiring another employee because the store has become pretty busy, especially during summer. She is also thinking about writing a book that would include her many strange but wonderful encounters that happened in her store during all these years and she already has an offer from the publishing house. She is also a big supporter of people who decide to walk on the path of entrepreneurship and is always willing to share her knowledge and experiences with others.

WHAT ARE KARMEN'S SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WILLING TO START THEIR BUSINESS

If Karmen could travel in time she would decide on the same path, just sooner. She highly recommends this experience to others because if you make a job out of your hobby you will always want to go to work, she says. And continues, that because this is your business you are dependable only on yourself and therefore freer, furthermore, because you are doing something that you like you find more meaning in your work. There are two virtues she thinks are worth emphasizing if one wants to become an entrepreneur, first one is perseverance (she thinks that one should persist for at least two years before giving up) and the other one is self-motivation. She has two pieces of advice for young people who are considering starting their own business, the first one goes like this »Just try it, you can always go back. But you are probably going to move forward« and a similar saying: »We regret things that we do not do more than the things we do«.



Image source: all pictures used in this story are from Karmen's personal archive.

We wish good luck to **Karmen!**

If you are interested in learning more about Karmen's business or to get in touch with her, you can contact her by

Email: karmen@reinkarmika.com

FB: <https://www.facebook.com/reinkarmika>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/reinkarmika/>

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