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# THE NEXT WOMEN

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BUSINESS MAGAZINE

## The Vineyard Entrepreneur Turned Investor in Gen Y Tech Startups



Lauren has invested in 7 startups on behalf of GenY Capital

Lauren Maillian Bias is a serial entrepreneur; she is the Founder and CEO of **Luxury Market Branding**, a strategic marketing company, and is a Founding Partner at **Gen Y Capital Partners**, an early stage venture firm focused on investments in mobile and consumer facing technology enabled companies.

At age 19, Lauren founded a boutique winery that quickly became an internationally recognized award-winning wine brand, making her the youngest self-made winery owner in the country. She served as the Chief Operating Officer of the company from inception through the brand's acquisition in 2011.

Lauren often speaks about entrepreneurship, female leadership, marketing, branding, business development and early stage venture at various conferences. She has spoken at prestigious institutions including Harvard, Columbia

University, Cornell and the University of Virginia. She is a large supporter of entrepreneurship and judges the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship's (NFTE) business plan competition and the incoming classes of Start Up Chile, an incubator program in support of entrepreneurship sponsored by the Chilean Government. Lauren is an active advisor to several startups and is a mentor to the Women Innovate Mobile Accelerator.

LAUREN MAILLIAN

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Laura spoke to Lauren about being the youngest self-made winery owner in the US; about exiting her first company to found her current venture; and investing in Gen Y's innovative tech startups.

**LG: What advice would you give to women entrepreneurs just out in this industry? (I ask every interviewee this same question, love the replies – helps a great deal!)**

LM: I always encourage women to be inquisitive of those they look up to in the field, to attend as many conferences and events as possible, to build a network and show commitment to being knowledgeable about industry practices. Also, ask for as many opportunities you can practically handle. It's amazing how much you can learn by immersing yourself into the industry, being a sponge and learning by trial and error. You don't know unless you try, and when you try, give it your all.

**LG: Did you self-fund Sugarleaf Winery? If so, what advice do you have for women looking to self-fund a business?**

LM: Yes, the winery was self-funded. For women who are self-funding their business, my advice is the same as it would be to those who have investors behind them – make smart decisions, spend your money wisely, have a clear plan for failure and success, and hire people who respect your business as if it were their own. If you are good with operations and accounting, then I recommend doing your own books in the early stages of your company to ensure strict compliance and oversight that you trust (you can always hire someone to double check your work).

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**LG: In 2011, Sugarleaf Vineyards was acquired, how did that make you feel? At what point were you ready to move onwards to launch your second company, Luxury Market Branding?**

LM:

“ The acquisition of the winery was bittersweet — it was when I first realized that I was the typical first time entrepreneur who was emotionally attached to her business. ”

That was a rude, yet necessary, awakening! Once I got over being emotionally attached to my business, I quickly embraced other opportunities to start something new and exciting, and I founded Luxury Market Branding.

By the time Luxury Market Branding was off and running I knew I was ready to detach from the wine business as I had known it. With detaching came an amazing sense of pride, accomplishment and relief to know I had made and negotiated an excellent exit that would give me significant liquidity to explore other passions and ventures.

**LG: Luxury Market Branding was founded in 2011 to help companies gain more market share, create brand awareness and build strategic alliances that align the client's mission and revenue goals. What was one of the early challenges you faced starting this business?**

LM: The challenge that I faced early on in the business was being able to keep up with the interest and demand of the market. We had more business than we could take on with our approach, which was to essentially incubate our clients' companies and act as their in-house marketing department. Most businesses face this challenge of figuring out the right amount of human capital and time that needs to be expended to get a project from point a to b.

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**LG: You're definitely a woman wearing many hats and playing different roles. One of the companies you're involved with is Gen Y Capital. What sparked this incredible mission? How many companies have you invested in to date?**

LM:

“ Gen Y Capital was founded with the purpose of identifying, supporting and investing in the next generation of innovative technology startups founded by young entrepreneurs. ”

I have invested in 7 startups on behalf of the fund to date.

**LG: You mentioned during one interview at the 2011 Empact100 conference that you are “big into consistency and big into detail”. Why are these two elements so important for businesses?**

LM: Your reputation and that of your company is predicated on being consistent and the ability to deliver – to meet deadlines, surpass milestones and (occasionally) exceed expectations. None of these initiatives can be realized without being a good operator and paying attention to how one detail affects another and ultimately impacts the future of your company's success.

**LG: Do you have mentors? Why are they so important?**

LM:

“ I have a select group of people who I admire professionally and who can help me see my professional roadmap and best advise me on how to get there. ”

I value their participation in my life, because the fact that they have accomplished so much and are well respected, yet they take time out of their busy schedules to invest their time in me and ultimately put their social capital behind me speaks immeasurable volumes to the professional world.

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**LG: You have reached so many remarkable milestones at such a young age. What's next for you?**

LM: I work hard to share the fruits of my labor with my children, so next is definitely spending more time exploring the world with them and focusing on my book that is coming out at the beginning of 2014.

**LG: What blogs, websites and books inspire you most?**

LM: I am most inspired by books that shed light on different perspectives around the highly debated issues – right now that could be everything from work-life balance, to women in the workplace, to technology and innovation, to venture capital returns at the seed stage, and how successful people think differently.

**LG: As a hardworking mother of two, how do you find balance within your days?**

LM:

“ I am very clear on how I want to live my life and I never settle for less than I deserve. ”

I always optimize for happiness which is not always a balance of my time, but it makes me happy and ultimately benefits my children.

LAUREN MAILLIAN