

NURTURING A FOODIE DREAM FROM IDEA TO PRODUCT

NOMIKU ENTREPRENEUR'S SPOTLIGHT



At first glance, Lisa Fetterman seems an unlikely prospect to become CEO of a fast-rising hardware company with a big mission. But, the full story reveals a tenacious attitude, a willingness to take risks when the rewards appear worthwhile, and a partner—her husband, Abe Fetterman—who shared the dream and contributed steady resolve and technical chops to the enterprise. Together, teamed with industrial designer Bam Suppipat, they successfully built a company, Nomiku, and introduced an innovative sous vide machine to the market. The Nomiku immersion circulator simplifies cooking, creating a flow of water around a vacuum-sealed food container at a precise temperature, slowly cooking the ingredients while maintaining the flavors and natural juices. For the uninitiated, sous vide (pronounced soo-veed, French for “under vacuum”) originated in an upscale restaurant two decades ago and has since become a favored culinary technique for top chefs.

UNCERTAIN BEGINNINGS

Asked about the entrepreneurial origins of Nomiku, Lisa responds, “We are graduates of Y Combinator, the preeminent accelerator for tech companies in the world. I am one of the top-ten women to watch in hardware, according to Forbes, and we have made over \$2.5 million in revenue since we started shipping.”

The idea for the Nomiku immersion circulator arose out of a conversation on their first date. With a shared passion for fine food, Lisa and Abe were conversing about sous vide and mutually decided to build a compact home-kitchen version of a sous vide machine at a time when commercial versions cost thousands of dollars. The first DIY kit they introduced set the idea in motion. “We just hacked it together from hardware finds and some stuff we bought off the Internet,” Lisa says.

Investors they discussed the Nomiku with were skeptical. “We couldn’t raise any capital without proving a market. I went to investors and their common gem was, ‘I don’t see it, so I don’t get it.’ Then we put it on Kickstarter, and we became the number-one, most-funded project in the food category.”

To expand their entrepreneurial expertise, Lisa and Abe investigated hardware accelerators. “The first accelerator was three years ago, and it’s called HAX Accelerator [formerly HAXLR8R]. It was the first ever hardware accelerator. It was in Shenzhen, and we lived in China for three months, and that’s how we built our prototype. It was a very thrilling time.”

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— Lisa Fetterman, CEO

YEARS OF BUILDING PROTOTYPES

On a trip to Thailand to recharge their batteries after the stress of Shenzhen, Lisa and Abe met with a friend, Bam Suppipat, who had a degree in industrial design as well as a deep interest in low-temperature cooking. After some excited conversations about the design of the Nomiku immersion circulator, Bam became part of the team.

Lisa noted that Nomiku uses SOLIDWORKS® as the design tool of choice. “SOLIDWORKS is crucial to design,” she says. “It’s how we test before we make our prototypes. When it came down in price, SOLIDWORKS was a revolutionary tool for makers everywhere.”

The iterative design process continued for months, punctuated by sessions of field-testing in the kitchens where improvements were incorporated into the first-generation Nomiku, now shipping, and the second-generation Wi-Fi-controlled Nomiku, which is in the manufacturing stage. Sales are brisk, and interest in the product is growing.



LESSONS LEARNED

Lisa has accumulated a vast store of knowledge about nurturing a startup from idea to shipping product. When asked about advice for budding entrepreneurs, she says, "Number one is to sell something now. Whatever you can sell now, sell it. If it's a DIY kit, if it's your service list, you have to meet a customer immediately. In sales, they say that the easiest customer to make is one that you have already. Create a customer base now. The second one is control your emotions. When you are growing a startup, you lead the culture even if people don't react to the way you react to something—it's equally so as an organization. You have to be well aware. Number three would be take care of yourself. You might think, 'Oh, working a twelve-hour day is the bomb!' You can't burn out. You're in this for the long haul."

THE WAY EVERYBODY IS GOING TO COOK

Lisa's enthusiasm for the enterprise is infectious. "We started this movement," she says. "We created the source as a home-based, sous vide immersion circulator. I've just seen it grow exponentially. Our revenue doubles every year. When Steve Jobs and Wozniak first made the home computer, everybody was saying, 'I would never use a home computer. A computer at home, what is this?' Now everybody is glued to their computers—it's in their hands. That's why I'm so excited. This is the way everybody is going to cook. It starts now."



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