

INDUSTRYINSIDER

Deanna Rosolen

Melanie Tingley, CEO, Tingley Fresh Food Products

Melanie Tingley is one of a new breed of entrepreneur – she’s a mompreneur, a label that’s appearing more often these days. She was home on maternity leave about four years ago when she realized she didn’t want to go back to her job in the insurance industry. At the time she was also preparing homemade purées for her son’s meals and finding that when she wanted a break from cooking there were no acceptable alternatives on the market. So with the encouragement of her parents, she started her own frozen baby food company, based in Lantz, Nova Scotia. Today Tingley has five products sold under the Baby’s Harvest Purées brand and is in more than 50 stores in Atlantic Canada.



Q&A

What do you love most about your job?

“I love everything, really. But my favourite thing would probably be going out and doing [in-store] demos and interacting with customers. I like interacting with people because I spend a lot of time planning.”

What is your management philosophy?

“Well I’m 27, and I had no training, background or experience in management before I started this company, so I’m learning as I go. I haven’t actually formulated a management philosophy, but what I’ve learned is that you need to be organized, with a written plan. Absolutely every aspect is important – financing, production, marketing, sales. I’ve found people with the expertise to help me in the areas where I might not have it, and I’m definitely learning. You also have to want it; you have to want it bad, so bad that nothing’s going to stop you. You have to put in 110 per cent and be 110 per cent committed to it, even in the face of disappointment. Whether this company makes it or not is completely dependent on me. Sometimes I have to remind myself of that and then identify what I have to do and just get it done.”

What is the most challenging part of your job?

“It’s no different for most people. I find there are certain things about running a company that I don’t enjoy. I really don’t enjoy accounting. Talking yourself into it and getting it done because you have to – that’s the challenging part.”

What issues is your sector facing?

“Getting the word out that there is now an alternative. Consumers were looking for the product that I have and it wasn’t offered. So getting the word out that it’s here is a challenge. People are now more aware of obesity and other health issues and they’re starting to connect the fact that what we put in our bodies is the reason we’re 10 lbs or 100 lbs overweight. It’s nice to see that they’re paying attention, but marketing is expensive and it’s difficult.”

What about opportunities opening up in your sector?

“This is my third year in business. I started in just a few local Halifax stores and expanded to Atlantic Canada in late January. There’s also the opportunity to get into the New England market. And there are other opportunities with my product. It’s not just for babies it’s for all ages, and so marketing and packaging it for both purposes is very exciting. Anyone can eat this because it’s natural, with no additives. It’s a healthier choice for a little snack and comes pre-portioned. So there are definitely all kinds of opportunities for this product.”

INTHESPOTLIGHT

FIRST INDUSTRY JOB: “This one.”

FAVOURITE FOOD: “I don’t really have a favourite, but any fruit or vegetable.”

INDUSTRY MENTOR: “I have a number of mentors, and they provide me with financial, legal, production, marketing and sales advice. My main mentor owns a large successful company and has been in the food business for 30 years. This person has provided me with excellent mentoring.”