

## In brief: Mary Mazzio and Accidental Entrepreneurship

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When Mary Mazzio, award-winning documentary filmmaker and former U.S. Olympian, recently spoke as part of Cambridge Trust Company's Thought Series,<sup>SM</sup> she focused on her evolution as an "Accidental Entrepreneur."

She described her path to entrepreneurship as "accidental" because, unlike some of the well-known entrepreneurs she has profiled in her films, she did not set out to be one. Nevertheless, as she illustrated with a number of amusing anecdotes, she learned the key lessons of entrepreneurial success: Think outside the box, seize opportunities, and never give up.

Her decision to become a filmmaker was itself an instance of outside the box thinking. Already a practicing lawyer when she returned from the Olympics in 1992, she was thinking about heading off in an entirely new direction and considering whether to go into politics or film. Given her natural gift for story-telling and belief that film could be "a powerful tool for social change," she chose the latter.

In this crusading spirit Mazzio made her first film, *A Hero for Daisy*. The film provides an irreverent and inspiring portrait of Olympic gold medalist Chris Ernst, who became legendary in the mid-70s for staging a protest at Yale, calling for the university's full compliance with Title IX. Mazzio met Ernst while

training for the Olympics in the mid-80s and the encounter "changed her life," because Chris Ernst taught her what every entrepreneur knows implicitly: You have to be absolutely committed to your goal, even though you may very well (and probably will) fail.

*A Hero for Daisy* was shown on ESPN and was a big hit. Soon after, the network asked Mary Mazzio to make another film. She was excited by the prospect and told them of her plans to make a movie about Billie Jean King, another trailblazing sports figure.

There was a problem, however. The network pointed out that their primary demographic was men and asked Mary to come up with something else, ideally something involving celebrities. Undaunted, she had a very novel idea. In order to meet the needs of the network while continuing to explore issues of gender equality, she proposed a film focused on the important role mothers play in the lives of famous athletes like Shaquille O'Neal, Drew Bledsoe, Grant Hill, and others.

Not only was the resulting film, *Apple Pie*, a success, it taught Mary another lesson about entrepreneurship: Take advantage of the opportunities that come your way.

As it turned out, this focus on motherhood actually led to Mazzio's next major project, *Lemonade Stories*. Made in collaboration with Babson College,

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*Lemonade Stories* looks at the impact mothers had on a diverse set of entrepreneurs including Arthur Blank, co-founder of Home Depot; Kay Koplovitz, CEO of USA Network; the Godfather of hip-hop, Russell Simmons; and even a fifth grader, Kelly Reinhart, who started a million-dollar business out of her home.

The question at the heart of *Lemonade Stories* is this: Are entrepreneurs born or made? While the film provides no definitive answer to that question, it did get Mazzio thinking about how parents and society at large could provide children with the tools necessary to succeed in life, as entrepreneurs and individuals.

These thoughts were the driving force behind her most recent film, the widely acclaimed *TEN9EIGHT*. Following a number of inner city teens as they take part in a national business plan competition, the message of the film is clear: Entrepreneurial education changes lives. Praised by everyone from the *New York Times*' Thomas Friedman to Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, the film has become a rallying point for people across the political

spectrum looking for meaningful ways to address social inequality.

Mazzio's own perspective on this is characteristically straightforward. "This education needs to be everywhere because we're going to lose as a nation unless we're entrepreneurial."

At the end of her presentation Mary Mazzio fielded a number of questions. Chief among them was, "What are you going to do next?"

In keeping with her original impulse to become a filmmaker, she responded that the projects with the most appeal to her are those with the greatest potential to "have an impact." Ideally, she wants to continue to help "young people think differently about their destinies."

And as her own life attests, getting them to think like entrepreneurs, even accidental ones, can do just that.

### RELATED LINKS

To learn about 50 EGGS, Inc., Mary Mazzio's independent film production company, and the films she's produced, visit: <http://www.50eggs.com/> ▶▶

Stay updated on what Mary has to say by reading her blog: <http://marymazzio.blogspot.com/> ▶▶

Read about Mary's latest film, *TEN9EIGHT*: <http://ten9eight.com> ▶▶

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