

PERSISTENCE, PIVOTS AND GAME CHANGERS

Turning Challenges Into Opportunities

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Choose Bravery, Not Perfection

Marie Kim Williams is a multifaceted consultant who utilizes her legal, psychological, and real estate experience to take managers, senior sales executives, and their sales teams to the next level. Co-founder of HPA Academy and co-creator of the Pillars of Persuasion Sales Training System and the Sales Managers' Playbook, she has helped individuals in real estate achieve financial freedom.

Choose Bravery

As I listened to Reshma Saujani's TedTalk "Teach Girls Bravery, Not Perfection," I found myself wondering whether I chose bravery over being perfect in my life. My answer surely would determine how my daughter would one day perceive herself.

I rarely dressed my baby girl in pink dresses and bows. In fact, there were times she was mistaken for a "he" as she climbed the jungle gym in leggings and t-shirts. I encouraged her to get dirty, and when she fell, I watched as she picked herself up and did it again. As she grew, I encouraged her enjoyment of playing with Legos, and when she started looking at videos showing children, all male, programming code to make their Lego creations move, I enrolled her in beginner robotics classes at the local library. Why was I making these decisions? After listening to Saujani's TedTalk and reading her book, *Brave, Not Perfect*, I realized I was making these decisions because I wanted to ensure my daughter would choose to be brave.

Looking back upon my life, I realize my choices did make me brave rather than perfect.

It Starts at Home

My mother was my first role model for bravery. Her choice in loving my father, an African-American soldier stationed in South Korea, was a brave act in itself. I was born in a small town in South Korea. My father had recently completed his second tour of Vietnam and found himself stationed in South Korea, when he met my mother.

Much of my early childhood was spent playing with other kids whose fathers were Army servicemen married to Korean women living close to the military base where our fathers worked. I was a precocious daddy's girl who wandered the neighborhood visiting the local market in search of treats. It wasn't until I left my cocoon that I realized how lucky I had been. There was no distinction

made because of the shade of your skin, the texture of your hair, or your accent. We were all the same.

I don't remember much about the day I left South Korea. It was March 1977, and one of the only pictures of my youth shows me wearing my winter coat with a look of sadness as I sat with my grandmother, aunt, and uncles. I was going to America, the land of opportunity, but my mother was losing her family, her home, and her country. My father received orders to report to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. We traveled 18 hours with three suitcases to arrive in New Orleans, Louisiana, where my American grandmother lived.

Like many immigrants, I didn't speak English. I had resisted my mother's encouragement to learn the language of my father because I felt I was Korean, therefore speaking English was unnecessary. I was not allowed to enroll in kindergarten until I learned to speak English. It became my mother's mission to get me in school. I now see that my qualities of persistence and focus came from my mother. This was my first lesson in learning how to accomplish a goal.

Speaking English became mandatory in our home. There were many times my mother didn't know a word, or whole phrases, so she would reference her Korean to English dictionary. She and I worked together, and in the following year, I entered kindergarten speaking perfect, unaccented English.

My mother and I remained alone in San Antonio for two years after coming to America while my father completed a tour in Germany. He returned with orders to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

My mother decided she didn't want to be a single parent anymore, so we moved to Oklahoma. I experienced my first tornado, stepped on a scorpion, and had one of the only African-American teachers of my long school career. Her name was Mrs. Brown. She was a tall woman who ruled her classroom with discipline and order. I started my third-grade year with her. Within the first two weeks of school, I noticed I was given extra worksheets. I never complained or asked any questions; I dutifully completed them.

One day, I was given a note to take home to my parents. It was from Mrs. Brown asking permission for me to be tested for the gifted and talented program. My mom didn't know what that meant, so we asked my father what he thought when he got home. He explained it sounded like I would be taught at a faster pace, so if the teacher thought it was a good idea, I should do it.

I started being pulled from class each week to be with other "gifted and talented" kids and got a lot more homework. I left Fort Sill, Oklahoma with the distinction of "gifted and talented," so when I returned to San Antonio for sixth grade, it was "advanced placement" throughout middle and high school for me.

Some classes came easier than others, but throughout the semesters, I rose to each challenge.

Neither my mother or father went to college, but the push to excel in all things academic was there. The way to a better life was through a college degree. The way to an exceptional life was through an advanced degree. I worked with these goals always in mind. I entered the University of Texas at Austin as a psychology/pre-med student. With an exceptional high school transcript behind me, earning my first C in organic chemistry was a bitter pill. I dropped the pre-med and focused on the classes in which I could earn that coveted A.

Thinking back, I really didn't want to go to medical school, so it was the right decision. With medical school out of the equation, I now had to do something else, because I wanted an exceptional life.

I took the law school entrance exam, submitted applications, and gained acceptance into the University of Texas School of Law in 1995. My years in law school upped my bravery quotient immensely. As one of four hundred first years, divided into four classes of a hundred, my introduction to competition and stress was like nothing I had experienced before. I was in class with people who had dreamed of law school since childhood or came from family legacies, where obtaining a law degree was a ticket of admission to a prestigious position.

Constitutional law was the first class I failed in my academic career. I did all the things to be successful. In spite of my actions, my grade did not reflect my effort. A semester's worth of effort was reduced to a grade on one test. The dejection and embarrassment of my failure put me in a place where I wanted to quit. I started thinking I didn't even want to be there. I definitely didn't have the intelligence to be there, so why go back?

It would have been easier to take this failure as a sign I was not cut out for law school, but I did not quit.

I learned another lesson about being brave. You may have to rely on other people's belief in you when you fail. All you see is what you didn't accomplish, but those who have traveled on the journey with you see all that you have accomplished. My boyfriend from college inspired me to not quit. He told me that one grade on one test did not reflect what I was capable of. Now that I had experienced this professor, there was no reason I couldn't do better in their class the next time.

First-year constitutional law was only offered in the spring semester, so I had to wait until the next year to retake it. I volunteered with a non-profit legal advocacy group my first summer and returned the next fall semester with a

new sense of purpose. I was going to graduate from law school, pass the bar exam, and become an attorney.

My years in law school were the most impactful for my personal growth. I learned to think critically, problem solve, and anticipate possible outcomes. The ability to communicate with various types of individuals and work through conflict became part of the skill set I still use today. I built lifelong relationships which keep me grounded.

I graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 1998 and became a member of the Texas State Bar later that year. I passed the one test that did matter the first time!

Take a Risk

Being brave means you have to break out of your comfort zone. I began my real estate career as a weekend receptionist for an upscale condominium property in Dallas, Texas. I was practicing law at the time, but a friend needed weekend help for the property for which he was the sales manager. I answered the phones, got customers refreshments while they waited for a sales representative, and kept track of all new lead information. One day, a prospect walked in for a tour. I called the sales representative who was next in rotation. She didn't answer, so I called the second associate, who informed me that he and the other associate were together and would not be able to get back to the property for at least 30 minutes.

I had seated juries, tried a few cases, and made presentations regarding updates in special education law to hundreds of teachers and administrators by this point, but the thought of taking this woman on a tour was frightening. Still, away we went. Afterwards, I turned the prospect over to the sales manager, at which point, she informed him I had given her one of the best presentations she had ever experienced. She ended up being one of the top luxury real estate brokers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. She was there looking for something for herself and eventually bought a beautiful residence.

Be Comfortable with Being Uncomfortable

I became disillusioned with the practice of law, so I took another chance and moved to Miami Beach, Florida. I applied to the clinical psychology program at Barry University and worked as a real estate salesperson to pay the bills.

My first sales position was in Fisher Island, Florida, which was considered one of the richest zip codes in the United States. I later worked at a master-planned community, which was to be built on a 214-acre Superfund site with a 99-year land lease. Within three years of starting my real estate sales career, I was offered the opportunity to be the sales manager of a \$400 million

marina condominium community in Miami, Florida. The developer wasn't too keen on having me at first. He informed me he thought I was too young and inexperienced. But since my broker assured him I was the best candidate for the position, the developer went along with it. I had to hire an administrative staff and sales associates. I had to make sure everyone was trained along with keeping track of prospects and completing sales agreements.

After two years of selling over \$300 million worth of real estate, the recession of 2008 forced all my hard work to evaporate. My \$1 million in commissions, which was to be paid at the completion of the community, disappeared. Along with my commissions, I lost my position. I eventually lost my home to foreclosure.

As you practice choosing bravery, you begin to see each adversity as an opportunity to become a better version of yourself. Much like how I grieved my failure in my constitutional law class, I allowed myself to mourn the loss of all the dreams I had for the money and my position. My opportunity for financial independence had evaporated along with the prestige of being the director of sales of a luxury community in Miami.

Having a positive mindset helped me focus on what I gained over those two years and not what I lost. I experienced working with a developer on all aspects of sales and marketing. My participation in financial meetings gave me insight into how developments happen. I worked with architects and interior designers to design my sales office and model apartment. I would never lose the knowledge I acquired because my mind had expanded.

A person gains a positive mindset by practicing gratitude. Secondary things like my good health and my positive familial relationships became more important as the negative emotions associated with failure began creeping into my psyche each day. Having a plan of two or three "must dos" for each day kept me focused on my goals. While working as a sales manager and after the loss of the opportunity, I continued to volunteer my counseling services to women living with HIV/AIDS through the non-profit organization I came to as a master's degree candidate. It sometimes takes having empathy for others to see your bounty.

I went to the brokerage office every day, knowing others knew of my situation, willing to assist others with their projects. Doing this helped me practice the concept of "yet." Psychologist Carol Dweck writes in her book *Mindset, The New Psychology of Success* that declarations like, "I am not financially independent" or "I am not a risk-taker" take on a new meaning by adding the phrase "yet." I started my positive self-talk each morning, "I am not financially independent yet."

After confirming the developer was filing for bankruptcy, my broker came to me with a new opportunity. How would I like to work on the newest account the office acquired? The building was to be built in the country of Panama. By keeping a positive mindset, I was able to step into the role offered to me immediately!

I went on to help manage the pre-construction sales of the largest mixed-use building in Latin America with 1004 units, seventy floors, and 2,710,000 square feet of space. Originally marketed and sold as the Trump International Hotel and Tower Panama, this property was sold to buyers around the globe.

With over 85% of the building presold, the construction loan was obtained and the building was built. It stands today because of the vision and creative sales and marketing strategies I participated in. I finally became financially independent because of my involvement with this project.

Practice Makes Bravery

Being brave means you never stop practicing bravery. Do something you've never done before. Start a new business without being 100% ready.

I started a consulting business shortly after moving back to Texas. I didn't want to sell real estate anymore. With my experience, the one thing I knew I could do is teach and motivate others to learn how to sell better.

To teach this to my clients, I created the HPA System. The HPA System is based on the premise that success can be achieved with a plan for taking a person's visions and creating long and short-term goals, which then convert to specific needs that motivate action.

The HPA System is written for sales managers and senior sales executives who want to increase their company's sales. The accountability portion of the system keeps sales associates focused on activities that get them face to face with individuals who can buy what they are selling. The sales training portion provides scripts that sales associates use to create professional sales presentations. The HPA System encompasses the years of knowledge and experience my partner and I have acquired.

Sales is a profession that can provide huge financial rewards, but if the salesperson does not have a goal to be financially "free," they will always be in debt. I have seen the positive impact the HPA System has had on clients over the years. I have helped developers create a replicable system of accountability for their sales organizations resulting in increased sales. I have worked with salespeople who were living in debt or living commission check to check and helped them become debt free while doubling and tripling their commission income each year.

I have tried to live my life being brave and not perfect so I can be my daughter's first role model, as my mother was for me. I am the person who can help a client gain the confidence to exercise bravery in their life. Watching a client initially hired as a marketing consultant for \$3,000 a month evolve into the top-producer earning over \$600,000 in commissions after the pandemic is priceless.



Marie Kim Williams can help you become financially free and get to the next level of professional sales. For more information about the HPA Academy System, visit www.hpa8020.com. For a free consultation, send her an email describing your situation—marie@hpa8020.com. Follow her on LinkedIn www.linkedin.com/in/mariekimwilliams.



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