Story 5, Quarter 2 - 2023

MY JOURNEY TO SELF EMPLOYMENT

Tom Delaney, Ould Crafty

Introduce yourself and your business

I'm **Tom Delaney**, the proud owner of **Ould Crafty**. I specialise in crafting and selling handwoven baskets. Additionally, I create a wide range of hand-woven outdoor products including plant supports, bird feeders, traditional Irish skibs, St. Brigid's crosses, baby rattlers, and fencing. You can find my hand-crafted products available for purchase through online platforms, local markets, festivals and trade shows. My business is based in the beautiful locality of Mayo Abbey, in County Mayo.

Why did you decide to go self-employed?

The decision to go on the road to self-employment was influenced by various factors in my life journey. Previously, I had been living and working in the UK as an archaeologist for the Museum of London, which involved travelling across the country. However, I really wanted to be back home in Mayo. Basket making was a hobby of mine, a creative outlet that accompanied me on my archaeological adventures. Yet, I began to recognise a market for my skill and passion. This craft perfectly aligned with this objective, as it allowed me to carry my craft wherever the road took me and my ambitions of being back home in Ireland.

What is your business?

I craft and sell baskets and outdoor products catering to customers in Ireland and internationally. I have recently embarked on conducting training workshops in the skill of basket making, specifically with community groups in Mayo. These workshops foster a highly interactive environment and have been enthusiastically received by participants.

What advice would you give to someone starting a new business?

Most people are organised and know what they want to a certain degree. Coupling this with a strong will and desire to achieve something you will be successful. However, I would suggest that a useful attribute to have; is to be afraid of nothing. When you are fearless and give something your whole heart the world finds a way of rewarding that. It should also be said that if your business does not take off you can always go back to work as normal.

TOMS TOP THREE TIPS

1. Hard Work
2. Be Afraid Of Nothing
3. Enjoy Yourself

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What challenges have you faced?
I had some difficulty setting up a website but that was due to my own lack of IT skills. However, I made a connection with a web designer who was able to assist me in setting up my very own website.
Obtaining raw materials such as willow rods for basket making proved to be a stumbling block as buying willow in Ireland can be challenging, and established growers are often unwilling to sell to new start-ups. To overcome this hurdle, I have managed to acquire willow by sourcing it from the roadside and growing my own supply.
Initially, I was unaware of the strategies involved in selling to shops and I was outwitted by shopkeepers on a few occasions. However, I have learned valuable lessons from those experiences.

What supports have you received to assist you with your self-employment set up?
I received funding for training courses which were vital to my business in the early stages and I hope to attend many more of these courses as the years go on. I have completed Start Your Own Business, Trading Online, Marketing For The Creative Sector, and Train The Trainer. I am truly grateful to South West Mayo Development Company for their business mentoring and training supports. These courses are vital to upskill and advance my business.

Your top three tips:
Work hard: *"A dream does not become reality through magic. It takes sweat, hard work and determination."* Colin Powell

Be afraid of nothing: *"One of the greatest discoveries a man makes, is to find he can do what he was afraid he couldn't do."* Henry Ford

Enjoy Yourself: *"People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing."* Dale Carnegie

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