



Meet Mary Chong

Leaside Business Park Association

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

I co-founded Revelo Bikes. Our business is here in the Leaside Business Park on Industrial St. My home is also in Leaside where I raised my 3 boys and volunteer in the community. Our family immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong when I was 8 so I grew up appreciating the value of hard work and the opportunities available to us in Canada; one of my first jobs was helping my parents sew aprons - a "side hustle" they were able to do from home. In high school, I took a "Data Processing" course by chance and landed my first computer programming job when I was 17; I then went on to study Computer Science at Waterloo and enjoyed a fabulous 31-year career in software technology.

How did you start your business?

In 2012, my brother invented the LIFEbike, an electric personal transportation vehicle (ebike) for urban commuting. I was working at IBM on smart city solutions at the time also tackling the issues of transportation and environment. LIFEbike went on to win multiple awards so I decided to join my brother in starting up Revelo to transform how people travel in cities. LIFEbike was quite innovative and as a clean technology solution, was awarded several grants which gave us the seed money to develop the prototype into a tested, manufactured product. We stayed lean and agile and have slowly grown the business with a loyal customer following, multiple product SKUs, and partners in 3 continents.

What have been some of the challenges that you've faced?

Our biggest challenge as a start-up was bringing a solution to market before the market felt the pain of the problem. This was 9 years before the pandemic, before the preference for personal transportation, and before ebikes and scooters became more accepted forms of transport. That was why, early on, we pivoted from electric to pedal-power so we could still bring the Revelo folding bike design and enabling technologies to market, but in the pedal-bike format that was more familiar to the market.

What is your favourite thing about being a small business owner?

The direct contact with customers is definitely one of my favourite. To see and hear the stories from our customers of how our products have transformed their lives is the most satisfying thing about being an entrepreneur. We also have partners in the US, Belgium, and Singapore who depend on our product for their success. Being in a position to support other businesses is also very rewarding.



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What advice do you have for the next generation of women in business?

Firstly, for all women: continue to break down systemic barriers; because a rising tide lifts all boats - any systemic change that can benefit women (e.g., proportional representation, flexible working arrangements) will benefit others too (BIPOC, LGBTQ2S, people with disabilities).

Secondly, for working mothers, surround yourself with supportive life-partners - be it your spouse, your nanny, your sister, or "Aunt B" - someone of similar values with whom you can partner to achieve the work/life balance to stay mentally healthy.

Thirdly, "You don't get, if you don't ask!"; value your own contributions and ask for equal opportunities and compensation.

Lastly, Once you are in a position of influence, mentor and help bring others along; this also means that women in leadership need to check their own biases. I remember exhibiting at a major trade show and our product was to be shown on Breakfast Television by the trade show's CEO. I was asked to stay late to work with the CEO to ensure her demonstration was flawless. At the end of the show, I went up, standing a foot in front of her ready to "network". She would turn her head to speak with the person on her right, and then turn her head to speak to the person on her left, refusing to acknowledge my presence. We were both women, but I was Chinese.

Can you speak to the importance of having women in business?

Research has shown that diversity benefits the bottom line. Women bring different perspectives and lived experiences than men which can affect how products/services are designed, developed, and serviced; how employee, partner, and customer relationships are managed; and most importantly, influence the values and principles that guide the business