

Sister Act

Apparently you should never work with children or animals, but what about working with your sister? Is setting up a business with your sibling a recipe for disaster – or the key to success?

Sophie and Gracie Tyrell launched their healthy snack brand Squirrel Sisters in 2015. Their products are stocked in two supermarkets and they've also published a recipe book.

Life for the Squirrel Sisters started out as a hobby – a healthy-eating, wellness blog filled with beautiful imagery of their recipes. As their following grew on social media, they realised they had the makings of something bigger, and set about turning their hobby into a fully fledged business with their range of vegan, gluten-free and sugar-free snack bars. Their quirky title comes from the nickname they were landed with in childhood; fortunately it suits their business model as their products are made from – you've guessed it – fruit and nuts.

Finances are often the stumbling block when it comes to turning an idea into a viable business, but the sisters had some savings to kick things off. They also happened to be in a very fortunate position when it came to the design aspect of the brand, as Gracie explains.

“Sophie’s husband is a designer, so he was able to create our brand and packaging design. That meant we could launch without investment or a loan, which was fantastic.”

The branding – of the sisters themselves and the product packaging – is spot-on, and highlights the importance of getting that right first time. It’s a huge financial outlay for start-ups, and getting it wrong can have disastrous financial implications (you only have to watch *Dragons’ Den* to see how disastrous). The sisters worked from home for the first year to keep their overheads down,

attending trade shows and perfecting their recipes. Their hard work paid off when Waitrose and Morrisons agreed to stock their products; soon after, a publisher approached them to write a recipe book. The rest, as they say, is history, and they’re now in the process of securing investment as they head into new product development with their all-female team.

“We share the same vision and have the same values”

Did they ever have any doubts about working together? “No never,” insists Sophie. “We’re so similar with our goals and vision for the company, but it helps that our skills are very different, so we complement each other.”

“We’ve spilt our roles and responsibilities,” adds Gracie, “but we make all the big decisions together – we wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Find out more at squirrelsisters.com

THE SQUIRREL SISTERS' TOP TIPS FOR START-UPS

ALWAYS TRUST YOUR GUT

If something doesn't feel right then it probably isn't. At the start, we made a couple of decisions that we were unsure about and it left us in a bit of a sticky situation. Now we don't do anything unless we are both 100% happy about it.

WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO SHARE YOUR VALUES

We share the same vision and have the same values. We trust each other implicitly and complement each other perfectly because our skills are very different. We now only work with people who we feel that way about.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

We used to feel guilty if we took a lunch hour. There's this unrealistic pressure on business owners that you must be at your desk all day and night, but it's not productive and leads to burnout.

DON'T COMPARE YOUR BUSINESS TO OTHERS

It's all too easy with social media to compare yourselves to others and, as business owners, it can be dangerous.

People only post their best bits on Instagram and we're sensible enough to know that it's far removed from reality.

ENJOY IT

We've always said that if it ever got to a stage where we didn't love it anymore, we'd stop. If you've lost the passion for your business then there's no point in doing it.



Photo: Helen Murphy