

5 ways to turn a crazy idea into an awesome reality



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Megan Miller wants to know: Why aren't you eating bugs yet?

That's because Megan is the co-founder and CEO of , an innovative artisanal snack brand that makes delicious cookies and snack chips from their signature cricket-based protein flour.

Megan, a digital-strategist-turned-food-pioneer, knows this might sound a little insane. Despite the fact that insects are eaten all over the world in places like Southeast Asia and Latin America, getting mainstream Americans to embrace crickets as a protein source is still a major hurdle. In fact, when the Bitty Foods journey first began, Megan was a bit wary of becoming the "crazy cricket lady."

But there was always something in the back of her mind propelling her forward. She knew that crickets weren't just a potential business idea -- these humble little arthropods might also help solve some of the biggest environmental issues that face our planet.

I was so impressed with Bitty's products, that we featured their Chiridos product in our September boxes, and I recently interviewed Megan for my . In our conversation, Megan revealed exactly what it takes to take a seemingly crazy idea like cricket snacks and turn it into an awesome reality.

Here's how she and Bitty did it.

1. Let purpose be your guide.

As Megan tells it, the driving force behind her transformation from digital strategist to food innovator wasn't just her passion for food and nutrition -- it was her belief in the power of sustainable agriculture.

“ There are lots of nutritious things that we can eat, but part of the problem is that some of them are so resource intensive,” she explains. “ I love a delicious burger as much as the next person, but every burger you eat is equal to something like six showers.”

One thing few of us consider as we take a bite of that juicy burger is that our cultural obsession with protein puts considerable stress on the planet.

Conventional protein sources -- like beef, pork and poultry -- take up tons of precious water and land resources and are among the highest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.

Crickets, on the other hand, take hardly any resources at all. They require just one gallon of water for every 2, 500 gallons that cattle use up. And since insects actually prefer to live on top of each other, they require almost no space.

With the global population on track to reach more than by the year 2050, the stress on the world's food supply will only increase. Crickets present a real solution to these problems.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the purpose that motivated Megan to pursue the idea is the same reason that Bitty's products have resonated with consumers.

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“ To my great surprise, people really embraced the idea” Megan says. “ As soon as you lay out the environmental facts, people are like, ‘ Ok now I have to taste it. And if it actually tastes good, I’m sold.’”

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2. Look beyond the norm.

In the early days of Bitty, Megan knew that she had to think outside the confines of traditional Western cuisine to tackle challenges this substantial.

She found the solution while traveling in Southeast Asia, where crickets and grasshoppers are a common street food. Likewise, when it came time to develop flavors, Bitty drew inspiration from other cultures.

“ We decided to go with the flavor profiles that came from some of the regions that traditionally eat insects,” she says. “ The have a tradition of eating crickets and grasshoppers in Mexico as a bar snack -- they’re called Chapulines -- so we wanted to create a snack inspired by Chapulines. That’s how we came up with our Mexican flavor profiles.”

It was this ability to see the potential application of something completely outside the scope of the marketplace that led her to the right solution.

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3. Manage growth by focusing on the essential.

In our conversation, Megan admitted that her top concern with Bitty is growing too quickly.

At this point in their evolution, Bitty has opted to keep their headcount small. With just a core team of three, the company can be extremely nimble, but it also means that they have to be strategic about the opportunities they pursue.

“ In the retail space, you never want to open doors that you can’t keep open,” Megan explains.

Often, this means saying no to some tempting partnerships.

“ Because we’re a small team,” she says, “ we have to also make sure that anything we’re devoting our time to is really worthwhile. Some things we look at and go, you know what, not now - even when it sounds like a really good opportunity.”

By focusing on the highest leverage opportunities and having the discipline to say no to all but the essential, Megan and Bitty have been able to gain traction and build momentum in a manageable way.

4. Grit is your best asset.

Entrepreneurship is always an uphill battle, but creating momentum for a category that practically doesn’t exist in the U. S. takes an extra dose of grit and determination.

In the early days, Bitty was completely bootstrapped. Megan and her co-founder Leslie Ziegler cooked up the first prototypes in Megan’s kitchen using crickets and mealworms they purchased from pet stores. In fact,

Megan wanted to make the company a reality so badly that she actually financed the company herself -- by keeping her full time job.

“ My very first funding... I was actually still working at my other job,” she says. “ For about six months, I bootstrapped it myself, which is insane.”

This grit and determination has proved invaluable as the company takes on bigger and bigger challenges.

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5. Don't forget to take care of yourself.

With all the focus on growing Bitty, it's a wonder Megan has been able to maintain her sanity. She credits exercise as the main reason she's been able to stay grounded.

She adds, “ I'm one of those people who has to exercise or I feel crazy.”

Megan was a dedicated crossfitter for years, but a move to a boxless San Francisco neighborhood made crossfit practically impossible. These days she still makes exercise a priority by working it into her daily routine, taking calls and in nearby Golden Gate Park.

“ Taking walking meetings is a big thing for me,” she say. “ Any time I can get somebody on the phone and go for a walk in the park to have that conversation, or meet in person and take a stroll, I think that literally brings a breath of fresh air into the conversation.”

Through it all, Megan's been able to stay focused on Bitty's long term goals because she makes it a priority to take care of her mental and physical health.

Megan and Bitty's story has been remarkable so far, but it's only the beginning. Megan's vision is to make sustainable insect protein a substantial part of the food supply, and in so doing, help solve some of the biggest ecological challenges we face.

For the entire interview, subscribe to on iTunes.