

So where do I start? BLANKSLATE Partners is one year old.

Reframe: It's been one whole year that Danielle and I have been in business together.

Reframe: Our successful and growing business is stepping into it's second year!

There are days I have to pinch myself to check I'm not dreaming, or having a mental break.

BSP is One year old. That's 12 months. That's 52 weeks. That's 365 days. That's 8760 hours of sweat, laughter, passion, tears, excitement, euphoric emotions, disbelief... I could continue but I think you get the picture.

Danielle and I created BSP from a dream of helping startups and already established small to medium sized businesses, create workplaces that their employees were proud of and wanted to be part of – companies employees wanted see grow. We believed that even small businesses should have access great HR support to help them grow. Our mission is “To build a better working world in partnership with values based businesses.” – I mean “Whoa” – that's powerful stuff.

We wanted to do it through a repeatable, scalable, understandable business model that would disrupt the current perceptions of HR, Recruitment and Mobility, and give our clients the tools and skill sets to build themselves into being employers of choice! Think about it – if every company treated its employees like Google, or Netflix, the world would be a pretty cool place.

Our original dream was to do \$100K in sales and maybe, just maybe, hire one more person. “Wouldn't it be great if we could have 10 clients and even one in the US?” (Gosh! That was pushing it in our humble dreams.)

Fast forward to May 2016 and our first birthday. We find ourselves closing the year almost 5 times bigger than we thought we would be. We have clients in Vancouver, Seattle, Calgary, Halifax, London, Toronto, San Francisco and many many more locations than we never ever dreamed of!

So, outside of growing a business 5 times faster than we thought we would, what were the 3 main things we learnt in our first year as a startup working with startups?- These probably won't seem ground breaking - but trust me, to us they were.

#1 - PARTNERSHIP MEANS EVERYTHING:



The whole team, cuddled up on the couch at Suite Genius

Work with AMAZING people. In every capacity and every way. We are blessed - truly and utterly blessed with our team! Our first ever employee Hazel, CHANGED OUR LIVES!

We had an employee!

She is beyond smart, entrepreneurial and totally and utterly gets our vision and what we want to do in the world.

In fact – I can't imagine doing anything without Hazel. Her go 'get em' attitude and 'roll up the sleeves and jump straight in' style, BLOWS. MY. MIND.

Then comes our fantastic consultants. Alisa, Nooreen and Tricia. We couldn't have done this without them. We stumbled upon a business model that allowed our consultants to work the hours that they needed and still support our clients, while totally and utterly living their best lives! Alisa and Nooreen both run their own businesses, and have the most beautiful families. Our model allows them to work from home, be there to see their children grow up, yet keep their incredible business brains ticking, as well as support our clients in the best possible way. Tricia – I don't know where we would be without this powerhouse of a business partner. Not only has she volunteered at the Downtown Women's Shelter during her time working with us, she's learning a new craft, breaking barriers both personally and professionally and she is a qualified energy healer. (She even finds time to sing in a choir!) I think she has truly found her happy spot partnering with BSP. Our business model allows her to fulfill her lifelong passion and pursue her dreams of acting, while also blazing trails professionally, using the other side of her brain, as a professional strategic business partners and world's best recruiter.

Then there's D and I! Partnership with each other.... We've laughed, we've cried, we've toasted success with champagne and we've commiserated over failures. We've argued and we've made up. Two people who had worked together and grown from colleagues into genuine friends, came together and had a united dream. We built it together. I'm clear that I would not want to do this without Danielle. To sound cheesy, she's my ying to my yang, or as Danielle likes to say; my Elvis to her Costello (I'm not sure who's who.) For every hair brained idea I have, Danielle has a solution on how to make it happen.

Conversation is key to building partnership. We give each other permission to be ourselves. We cry in a lot of meetings, sometimes because we are really happy, sometimes because we are frustrated or overwhelmed and that is OK 'cos you know what, – we talk it out and we are stronger because of it. We've had some tough conversations, and I wouldn't change any single one of them because those conversations have got us to today. TODAY – 1 years old

and this week Danielle is talking on a panel at Startup Canada with the Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration, and she's speaking in policy meetings on finance and immigration too! Holy Heck – that's happening! BSP on a panel with politicians. (Talk about David and Goliath!)

We pay our people first, we pay our bills second and we pay ourselves (when we can) third. We have complete transparency with our clients and they only ever pay us for the work we do. Partnership. Not once in our whole first year has a client had to ask what a specific line item on an invoice was or question the quality. Without partnership – we do not exist.

So what's our secret sauce? Simply put its Partnership. It's in our name. How we partner with our clients, our employees, our contractors and our service providers is absolutely everything to us.

#2 - SALES REALLY WORK.



(Please know this image still gives me hives)

This one makes me smile. I think about the people that have been influential in my career and laugh because I bet they are having a wonderful “I told you so moment” reading this.

I had this strange aversion to being a salesperson again. Having come from a recruitment sales background I knew what sales looked like and I was 100% clear I did not want to build a company based on the “50 cold calls a day = 3 client meetings = 1 job order” model. It didn’t sit with my core value of partnership. We were so clear we are not a recruitment agency and I didn’t want us tarnished with that brush (Eek. Yes, I said “tarnished” because in the early days all I heard from start ups was how much they hated recruiters and “thank goodness we

weren't another recruitment agency.") In my mind if we did sales, and I mean cold sales, we were just another agency peddling their wares.

Our first 20 or so clients came 100% from referrals and from networking at events like [Vancouver StartUp Week](#). BSP was a sponsor for the event and it was an incredible launch pad for our fledgeling business. We felt validated that startup founders "didn't want to receive cold sales - they want to network and they want to know us." (Because remember, we are not an agency - we are different.)

Fast forward to month seven and I very quickly realized that we were slowing in our growing. We did not have enough incoming referrals to hit the new targets we wanted. So we got back on the networking horse. Danielle was meeting with everyone and anyone she could. We hired Tricia, an amazing business partner and recruiter, then asked her to do a small amount of biz dev for us. Sounds great right? Nope we brought on an amazing person and then we tied her hands up and totally limited her capacity to do what she is so incredibly natural at doing. We told her - "We don't do cold calls or sales (said with a condescending tone.) We are not a sales company - we are HR consultants. We want our clients to choose us - so what's been super successful is networking. Go out and network my friend" She did! She networked her butt off! Met incredible people and really helped build the awareness to BSP. But still we weren't going to hit our targets. The thing was, we were OK with this because we had already blown our year out the water! So maybe a few slower months were good. Regroup. Learn and get ready for year 2. *Wrong!*

It's month 11 of BSP and we are ticking along great, patting ourselves on the back for building such a great business with such a great model. Off I head to a conference in Houston called Circular Summit. It's one of those conferences that kick you up the backside, make you think about absolutely everything you're doing right and everything you're doing wrong in your business. It gets the brain ticking at 1000m/h. Whilst in that 1000m/h brain spin, I met some incredible women and what I learnt was that we were "resting on our laurels" and "playing small".

Did we really want to build a better working world in partnership with values based businesses? Yes!

Did we want new clients? Yes!

Did we need new clients to continue to grow? Yes!

Did we want to grow? Yes!

THEN PICK UP THE BLOODY PHONE! They aren't going to know you're out there unless you show them!

I was working on an assumption based solely on how I *thought* people would react to "sales" from an HR consultancy. That assumption was so very very wrong!

Month 11.5: 1 hour a day, for 1 week, 137 cold reach outs, 13 new client meetings booked and 4 new clients signed and you know what..... Not one person said "Go away you're wasting my time." In fact, I heard a resounding "We love your business model" and "Where were you 5 months ago?"

#3 - DON'T WORRY - WE WILL HIRE SOMEONE TO DO

THAT AND THEY WILL BE GREAT!



JUST DO IT.

The slogan's 27 years old and still relevant!

Wow did we ever fall into this trap. We had plans and we wanted to grow, but we didn't have the cash. We looked at ways of raising it, we hustled for grants, we masterminded budgets. Each time we said – “we'd love to do this – what will it take?” and the answer seemed to default be “Oh, we need to hire someone who's awesome at that.”

No – no you don't. You don't have any money to do that. So instead you talk about what you want to do in the future and how you will do it and you don't do anything!

Truth bomb for BSP – as Nike said: “Just do it.” (What they didn't add is – it doesn't have to be perfect!)

That marketing strategy that you've talked about for a year (- this blog, new website content, etc etc) – Just do it. If you don't, it won't get done.

That sales team you want to build that's going to do the cold calling.... Nope that's you too!

Payroll – *You*.

Accounting – *You* ([actually we get help with this.](#))

Grant writing and application – *You*.

Business strategy – *You*.

Tech Implementation – *You*.

Legal – Actually that really is someone else – don't try and fudge this one! But do your research so you don't pay through the nose and come prepared to meetings with questions.

So those are my big three lessons for the year! We've built an amazing business. I love my life. BSP is continuing to grow – our goal for 2 years: \$10M in sales, Offices in 6 Cities with 75 clients in each city..... Hello world... we are coming for you!