



# Rachel Muir

BA '94, FOUNDER OF GIRLSTART, A NON-PROFIT THAT EMPOWERS GIRLS IN MATH, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY. RECIPIENT OF OPRAH'S USE YOUR LIFE AWARD. A FAST COMPANY "FAST 50" CHAMPION OF INNOVATION. RECIPIENT OF THE AUSTIN UNDER 40 AWARD IN YOUTH AND EDUCATION. SELECTED BY THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE AS BEST ROLE MODEL FOR GIRLS. SELECTED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF FUNDRAISING PROFESSIONALS AS OUTSTANDING FUNDRAISING EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR IN 2000

AS TOLD TO ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

SUCCESS TO ME IS REALLY QUITE SIMPLE; it's about being happy.

I have never defined success as making a certain amount of money, or living in a particular home, or having certain material possessions. I've had the pleasure in my life to know many amazing people who had none of those things but were far happier than people whom others might easily label more "successful." There are millions of "successful" people out there who are miserable, many of whom don't even realize that life, and happiness, are passing them by.

I found success in my life doing what I believe in, which is empowering girls in math, science, and technology. Growing up I was completely discouraged in math and science, and it wasn't until I graduated college that I realized what the stereotype that girls are "bad at math" had cost me. So at 26,

I started Girlstart to change that. I had \$500 and a credit card. There were people who told me that I would never be successful, and thankfully, for the sake of the 10,000 girls and families we've served in the past eight years, I had the good sense to ignore them. To be successful you have to trust and believe in yourself above everything else. You also have to be a person willing to take risks — continual risks, because every day challenges us to learn something new.

The thing that makes me the happiest about Girlstart is that we help girls, and many times their parents as well, dream big and learn new skills. They walk out of Girlstart more confident and self-assured about themselves and their future.

The biggest lesson I have learned since starting my company is that success means seeing each minute of your life as an opportunity. This is my moment. What is my opportunity in this minute? Is it to laugh? To learn? To be grateful? To give? To receive? To teach? To take care of myself? To take care of someone else?

We choose our opportunities each minute of our lives. We decide if it's going to be a bad day, a terrible meeting, or who ruined Christmas. Or we can choose to make it the best day of our year. You will be successful, 98 percent guaranteed (to quote Dr. Seuss), if you believe that your darkest moment is an opportunity to learn and grow in new ways that you never thought you could.

I have a beautiful mural in my office painted by local artist Margaret Burns of Bonjour Fine Art. The painting features a girl, a cat, a fish, and the Eiffel tower. There is an inscription in the mural that reads, "Love and do what you like."

I do what I like, and I love what I do. Life is too short to be unhappy. We can all do what we like; it truly is just that simple. All of the "but I have to ..." excuses and obstacles we put in front of ourselves are really just our fears talking and holding us back from achieving our dreams. Everyone is afraid; it's what you do with those fears that determines whether or not you will be successful. You can take baby steps to get to your goal, but you have to take a step every day. Before you know it, you'll be there.

Some people think they have to have a piece of paper, like a degree behind their name, or a big fat check, to do what they want. I believe we all already have that piece of paper. You got it the day you were born. It's called your birth certificate.

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The "Success to Me" series is prepared by Aruni Gunasegaram, BBA '92, MBA '98, an Austin entrepreneur, and Pam Losefsky, an Austin writer and editor.