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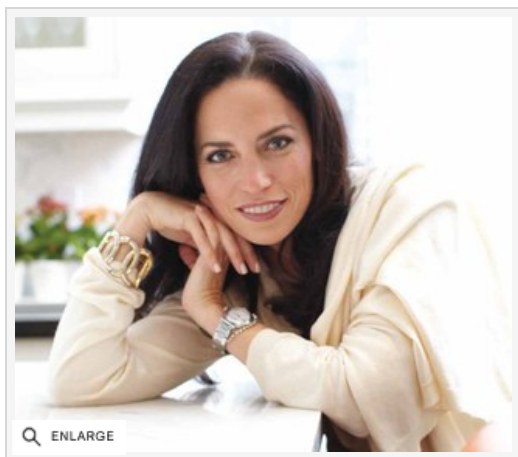
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How FemMed's founder Shawna Page started a natural supplement's line

After 20 years, three kids and zero work-life balance, Shawna Page quit her job in finance. Two weeks later, she was bored silly and became CEO of her own company

Maureen Halushak Wed Feb 29 2012

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Occupation: Founder and CEO, FemMed doctor-recommended herbal supplements for women
Age: 47
Hometown: Toronto
Education: BSc, University of Toronto

Q: Why did you leave finance?
A: When I turned 40, I realized I'd never really gone on a proper holiday or taken a full maternity leave. (And I have three children!) I was in the office by 7 a.m. and I'd get home around 6:30 p.m. You miss a lot when your children are young.

Q: Did you enjoy being at home?
A: It was actually a huge culture shock. I was used to getting 200 emails a day; now the only email I'd receive would be a bad joke from my mom! I thought I was going to feel the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders. Instead, I felt kind of useless.

Photo credit: Roberto Caruso

Q: Why did you start FemMed?

A: I'd always been interested in natural health, and a friend of mine who was going through menopause asked me to find her a supplement to ease her symptoms. I knew the formulation she needed but couldn't find it. I figured there was a gap in the market and that propelled me forward.

Q: How did you get it off the ground?

A: I hired a broker to get me a meeting at Shoppers Drug Mart to pitch a line of women's supplements and see if it was viable. The buyer was a woman in her mid-40s, which I thought would bode well for us. But she didn't crack a smile during our presentation. I thought, "We're toast." When we finished, she said she'd been waiting for someone to fill this massive void. It was unbelievable; I high-fived the broker in the parking lot!

Q: But you still had only an idea, not a product?

A: We worked day and night formulating the line, putting together a medical advisory board, creating our brand and building a website. We left our second meeting with a commitment to launch all five products in 800 stores. Now we're with a total of about 3,000 retailers, including a chain of drugstores in New York City.

Q: What is the best part of running FemMed?

A: The validation of my concept. It was so simple and so obvious, yet no one had done it. And our customers are so thankful. They tell me that my products have helped them tremendously, and ask where I've been all their lives.


Q: Did you find balance?

A: I work even more hours now, but thanks to my home office I see my kids before they leave in the morning and I'm here when they come home. I'm much more present in my family's life than I was in the past, and I have way less guilt over being a full-time working mom.

Q: What have you learned?

A: You only go through life once, which is why it's so important to go after what you want.

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