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Career Confidential: Emily Raleigh

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Full name?: Emily Raleigh

Position / Job title?: Founder & Smart Starter of The Smart Girls Group

1. When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

President and a member of the New York City Ballet (simultaneously).

2. Fast-forward several years/decades. How did you land (or create) your current position?

I founded The Smart Girls Group, which provides products, resources, and opportunities that empower ambitious women and girls. The Smart Girls Group idea really started when I was a little girl. I would walk downstairs every morning after putting on my outfit for school, and ask, “Mommy, do I look smart?” I was raised on the concept of the Smart Girl. With that in mind, I wrote a book for my freshman sister, Sophie, during my senior year of high school that was a how to guide for surviving and succeeding in high school. I gave it to her for Christmas and my family really wanted me to get it published. I wanted to do something that would be more than just a book, something that was continuous. So on New Year’s Day, I made my New Years Resolution to start The Smart Girls Group.

We initially had 9 girls involved, and released a small magazine that we planned to only be 10 pages long. Soon enough, the sisterhood began to grow and so did our products. What keeps us moving is the girls and we truly have a group of girls who will change the world.

3. Did you have to take on internships to get there? How important in general, do you think, are internships?

Since I started Smart Girls Group when I was in high school, I didn’t really take on any internships, but I asked a lot of questions and got as much help from experienced people as possible. I think internships can be extremely important if the program is effective and if the intern has a passion for what they are doing.

It really is the perfect way to start out if you have no experience in a field of interest.

4. Tell us what a typical work day looks like for you. What is your job REALLY like, both the glamorous and not-so-glamorous parts?

I try to wake up between 5 and 6 every day, and then I usually will use that time to run or go to the gym. I really like having time in the morning before my classes start to just get done small things, plus it is a great time to do laundry because most college students aren’t awake to take all of the dryers! I have classes most days during the week, but I consider it part of my day for The Smart Girls Group as well because I am a business student, so all of my classes are in some way relevant to SGG. Luckily, with the way my class schedule works, I can work throughout the day because my classes are either very early or very late at night, so in between I will go to the SGG office at the Fordham Foundry, a small business incubator just steps away from campus. I spend the rest of the day and sometimes into the night there, working on SGG.

It’s a really awesome space because there’s so many entrepreneurial minded people there who are always willing to help you make business decisions. Whenever I get done all of my work for The Smart Girls Group, I will meet up with friends and grab dinner at one of the restaurants on campus or at the cafeteria. The rest of my night consists of homework, club meetings, and working at my job as a Resident Assistant. I try to get to bed early, but that’s a work in progress!

5. What is the biggest career mistake you’ve ever made?

Hmm...that’s a tricky one! I would have to say that at first, I tried to hide my age because considering I was a high school student, I thought people would not take me seriously. While that was sometimes true, I have now learned that I need to own my age because it is a part of what makes Smart Girls Group and I unique.

6. Let's talk about work/life balance. What does that mean to you? Is it important?

It is so important to me! I have begun to take my work/life balance much more seriously now that Smart Girls Group is a full time job. I turn off my phone notifications on the weekends and spend time with my family on the beach. I sleep 7-8 hours a night regardless of how much work I have. I train to run races so that I have to keep myself in shape. I have learned from my parents that balance is just as important as success and now I find that I attribute success to how well I am balancing out my life.

7. On that note, do you think women can have it all? Both the baller career, and the happy family?

I don't think anyone can have it "all," but I do think we can have what we want.

8. If you could look into a crystal ball and see 20 years into your future, what would you want to see?

I hope that I see women across the world who have been a part of Smart Girls Group leading companies, countries, and communities. I hope that we have used Smart Girls as a platform to create social change, particularly for women.

9. Do you have any career role models? Who are they?

So many! I have always admired my Nana and Pop, who are both entrepreneurs. Their dedication and drive, partnered with their ability to see life beyond work, has always inspired me. I hope some day I have my dad's marketing skills. I'm constantly calling him, asking for advice on how we can get a new supporter or a new client, and I truly haven't met someone who can sell something the way he can. My mom is a teacher and her patience astounds me, and I try to channel her when I get frustrated.

Outside of my family, I am incredibly inspired by Richard Branson. Is there an entrepreneur who doesn't consider him a role model? I loved reading his books, especially when I first started expanding Smart Girls Group during my freshman year of college, because his books and blog gave me a sense of confidence in my vision of Smart Girls, even if only few could see it at the time.

I am also deeply inspired by Lauren Bush Lauren. Her efforts with FEED are nothing shy of incredible. She was the first entrepreneur I looked to when I started Smart Girls Group and when we started planning Smart Girls Summit, she was the first person I invited to come as a speaker. There is nothing more motivating for me than seeing another woman entrepreneur not just creating a wildly successful business, but also creating major social change in the process.

10. What is the best piece of advice that you have ever received – career-related or otherwise?

Oh that's tricky!

11. Parents love to say, "just wait 'til you have to face the real world..." When you were in college or high school, what did you think the "real world" looked like? What is the difference between what you thought and reality?

I'm still in college, so I may have the wrong perception of the real world! The only picture I ever truly envisioned of the real world was if I were to live out my high school dream to become an orthodontist (talk about a 180). So my only "real world" idea was that of dental school and an orthodontist office. The reality of the real world for me now is completely different as an entrepreneur. Now half my life is living as a college student and the other as an entrepreneur in the real world. I like to think I have an idea of

what the real world is from that, but I still don't know what it is like to live in the real world, since I still live on campus. That I imagine is much different.

12. Should you work for the money, or do what you love?

Definitely do what you love. When you are passionate about what you are doing, you will find a way to keep doing it. Smart Girls Group wasn't a business idea at first. I just loved doing it. It became a business when I realized that I wanted to do everything in my power to ensure I could keep doing what I loved.

13. How important is money to you when considering a job?

I have never been someone who saw money as the goal, but more as a means to an end. I didn't start Smart Girls Group even thinking it could make a dollar and I think that is what makes it so special.

14. What is the single most important factor of a job?

The people. I truly believe what makes Smart Girls Group so special is our community. Above all Smart Girls is a sisterhood and our community does not take that lightly. I feel so lucky to work in an environment where my teammates are cheering me on whether I'm training for a marathon or building a new business within SGG. We are all invested in Smart Girls Group, but most importantly we are invested in each other. When you are in that sort of work environment, anything is possible.

15. If you married a millionaire husband and didn't have to work, would you? (Be honest.)

Oh gosh yes. I voluntarily took on the work with Smart Girls. I already had two jobs and I was in high school, so it wasn't like I needed it for financial reasons. I simply enjoy working and being a part of something with a bigger purpose. Smart Girls Group never seems like a job to me because it is so much a part of me. There is a lifestyle for everyone, but I know I could never not work.

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