



Zandra Moore

Growth begins at the end of your comfort zone

Dear younger Zandra,

We have always found the tech world fascinating: from seeing the joy it brought mum or working with incredible startups.

We aren't the entrepreneur that's been dreaming of setting up a business since birth. It's becoming a parent, and the need for flexibility, that makes you take the leap.

Running a business certainly isn't for everyone, but it turns out it's the perfect job for you. You have an ambition to grow something, you move three times the pace of everyone else (probably due to undiagnosed ADHD), and you lean into problems.

So, keep leaning in, but take some of this advice with you as you do.

Look for a good partner. It won't be an overnight thing, becoming an entrepreneur. It's a transition that will take years, from being employed in tech to self-employed in consulting to finally finding the right opportunity.

And more importantly, the right co-founder. Businesses struggle if their leadership teams aren't aligned, no matter how good your solution is. And it takes a lot of trust to empty your bank account with someone you've only known a few years...so you need to believe you can go on this journey together.

I wanted someone who would balance out my strengths. I wasn't technical, but I had great commercial skills. So, I found a tech person that needed a sales leader, and it's been really successful.

Learn to prioritise. Running a business is going to be like a massive puzzle you can't get away from.

Every day, you'll be faced with whatever challenges come your way. They may not be things you want to work on, but they're part of the mechanism of running a business. As a leader you have to learn to adapt because, once you're in, you're committed.

The big problem is; there are millions of challenges and everything's a priority. And priorities can change day to day based on the needs of the business or who you're talking to.

But just because someone tells you it's urgent, doesn't mean it's important. You'll need to learn how to step back, evaluate things holistically, and prioritise. Make sure you spend time on things that will have the biggest impact.

Two tools you'll find helpful are the book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, and Eisenhower's Urgent-Important Matrix.

No one goes into this knowing any of it. It's a huge learning curve running a business. The business plan, buying products, raising money, dealing with investors.

They are all things I had to learn.

When we first needed to raise capital, I'd never raised money before. I didn't even know what corporate finance, private equity or a VC was.

But I got invited to the first tech incubator in Leeds and I learnt about the investment world. I realised we're actually more ready than I thought to raise investment, and that maybe I'm more capable than I thought. It helped me really lean into the opportunity to scale the business.

But, I also realised that maybe you don't have to work it all out for yourself. People are willing to help you.

So just know, you can do it, you just need to learn from those moments.

Bring people together about a shared problem. One of the best decisions I made was to ignore advice that women didn't need a network.

Most entrepreneurs (men) just don't understand. So, I needed a safe space with people I could trust. Where I could talk to people living in my shoes: who have experienced unconscious bias, who are juggling work and home balance (which is never really balanced), who are sharing too much of the load but are still overlooked and underestimated and undervalued – and that's women.

And sometimes it can be lonely at the top. If you don't have people to share your problems with, to ease that loneliness, it can be really hard to unblock yourself from the things holding you back.

Peer support is as powerful as any type of mentoring. It's accelerated my opportunity, my career, my confidence, my self belief, my learning, my peers: everything.

That's why getting involved in initiatives like Lean in Leeds or starting the Young Directors Forum will be so important for you.

Don't be afraid to go down rabbit holes. It's hard to see issues clearly when you're in deep.

Finding your product market fit is the hardest thing to get right as a tech leader. Especially now the market has become so volatile.

It's easy to go down narrow paths and find yourself at a dead end, unable to see the issues when you're in that deep. But that's ok.

We've probably pivoted our go-to-market about four times now – and I supposedly know what I'm doing.

You have to essentially be brave enough to be niche. Be brave enough to go down the rabbit hole and hit a dead end. Just know when to go back and start again until you find the right one.

Every mistake is something to learn from. It's cliché, but it's true.

If you don't have a new list of failures each week – if you're not feeling pretty uncomfortable every day – then you're probably not pushing your business enough, or care enough.

So failure is good. You should want it, because that's what makes you a good entrepreneur. That's what's going to get you to the outcome you want.

That being said, you'll also be your biggest critic. You'll put your head in the sand, and you'll kick yourself because of your mistakes. But this is human.

Just be brave enough to feel scared every day. Accept that you're not a hero (and no one is asking you to be). You're going to make mistakes.

You can't do it all. At least not for long. I ended up in hospital for the first time in my life because I hit a wall. I took on too much – despite having a great team and great people around me.

I failed at prioritising for myself.

But from now on, I want to make sure I achieve better for myself. To make sure I'm in a fit state to do the things I have to do.

Sometimes you need to stop and accept you've done enough. Learn to say no. Just because I can doesn't mean I should. Ask yourself: who can I hand this off to?

There's no secret sauce to 'doing it all'.

Be a 'glass half full' person. Finally, we have a propensity to believe that we can pretty much have a go at anything – that anything is possible. (Mum was the same). It's a great driver for what you're about to embark on, this 'can do' attitude.

You know, “shy bairns get nowt”. If you don't go out and ask for things, nothing's going to happen. You've got to do it yourself.

But equally, don't wait for someone to tell you what to do or give you permission, because if you do, you'll never do anything.

So, put yourself out there. Remember, growth only begins at the end of your comfort zone, so don't be afraid to go there.

Your older self,

Zandra Moore.



About Zandra

Zandra Moore is Co-founder and CEO of Panintelligence, a Leeds-based business intelligence and analytics solution. She is leading Panintelligence on an ambitious path to scaling up globally, closing a Series A investment round in 2019. With over 25 years' experience working in software, Zandra is an active speaker, a valued mentor, and an ambitious leader and innovator, having received various awards recognising these traits.



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