

Kia ora everyone, thank you so much for having me.

My name is Emma, and I am here from FuturEcology.

I would love to start off by saying well done for making the choice to take business studies. Well done for making the choice to be here today. Everyday you make both high and low involvement choices. Low involvement being what you have for breakfast, brushing your teeth, putting your socks on etc. A high involvement decision is coming here today. You have actively chosen that you are going to make positive change and that is so brilliant to see. The future of our planet is relying on people like you, not afraid to challenge the status quo. There has never been a more important time for sustainable innovation.

I loved my time in the young enterprise scheme as it was the creative outlet, I needed to literally keep me at school. I was always a reasonably unmotivated student, my parents and I use to joke that I was really only going to school to eat my lunch and see my friends. This was until I figured out my why.

When I was 15, in year 11, my dad had just started a conservation and ecology company and I was working with him in the holidays to earn a bit of extra money.

We were working on a site next to a waterway with the goal of restoring the health of the stream and increasing biodiversity in the area. We had tidied it up, sprayed it, planted it and the final step was installing good old fashioned blue core flute plastic plant guards. This was the step that didn't make sense to me. We had just spent all this time trying to restore the site, only to be introducing imported plastic into the environment. Which would then need to be retrieved again a year later.

In my usual fashion, I was chatting away asking a myriad of questions, one of them being

“Why are we using plastic guards, there has to be an environmentally friendly alternative”

Only for dad to inform me that what we were using was the best of a bad bunch. He explained the importance of using plant guards and then set me the challenge to see if I could come up with something better.

So that brought me to 2016, sitting here with my group armed with my idea that I was confident would change the industry globally. This was still very much our ignorance is bliss stage and were fairly sure we could have a few prototypes knocked up in a few weeks and be millionaires by the time mocks rolled around. Oh, how wrong were we. It didn't take us long to realise why biodegradable plant guards hadn't been done. We spent our first year which quickly turned into our second year with new group members on board looking at all sorts of materials we could use.

I had several different kinds of biodegradable cups rotting in my parents veggie garden and then finally, at the very end of year 13, my mum was walking through bunnings and came across a specialised waxed cardboard. The board was manufactured in America and imported as floor protection during construction. Using the board, I sat on the lounge floor and cut out 34 samples with a craft knife. My group then headed up the Maitai and installed them on a new planting. We then wrapped up the year and everyone went their separate ways to make their own way in the world.

My parents and I watched the trial and were blown away by the success of the plants that had had these cardboard guards. The following year, my dad contacted a manufacturer who had just brought out a specialty cardboard, the only one of its kind in New Zealand that would be able to withstand the test of time.

We decided to take the leap and invest in getting 5000 of what are now called EmGuards made.

This was a huge leap of faith, it was a lot of money at the time to be investing in a product we didn't know would work. But we did it. We took that leap and sold them at cost to one of our projects to trial them. Before the year was out and we were sure the guards would work we had a call from another Nelson business wanting to purchase 20,000 of them. This was that catalyst moment where we could have chosen the safe route, said no and waited till we were sure they would work. But in business, waiting till something is perfect is not always the safe route. There is never a perfect time to launch your business, but the most important thing is that you believe in what you are doing.

Simon Sinek has a very famous TED talk where he explains the principles of the golden circle in business, most businesses know what they do, most of them even know how they do it. But those that are most successful, know why they do it.

He reinforces that "people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it".

In building your YES businesses, I encourage you to sit down and really think about what it is that is driving your passion to be successful in this field. For me, it is the importance of our local awa, the Wakapuaka River. Growing up, my friends and I would spend most of our time in that river, building rafts, swimming and tubing between our houses. Now in less than 20 years, there are areas in that river that your dog can't even swim in. My vision is that we can help to rebuild and strengthen the health of not only our local awa but also streams, rivers and wetlands all around the country.

My gorgeous niece is only a year old, and it is my dream to be able to share the joy with her of rafting down the Wakapuaka River on tubes and her being able to do the same with her children one day. People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it. Being authentic, believing in what you do and offering sustainable solutions to improve efficiency and effectiveness will see you succeed.

I would like to introduce you to a Japanese concept called kaizen. It is the belief that everything can be improved, and nothing is the status quo. I was talking to a customer recently and she said that in one of their particularly challenging areas they used to see about a 20% survival rate of plants and now in implementing EmGuards, they don't need to account for loss at all.

Some of the biggest lessons I learnt from my time in the Young Enterprise were that it is very unlikely you'll be an oversight success but that doesn't mean you won't be successful. I also learnt the importance of playing to your strengths, you can't be a superstar at everything so it is important to bring in experts and support where you need it. The EmGuards would not be where they are today if I did not partner with my parents. This is because we all bring our strengths to the table and together we have sold almost 2 million around New Zealand, Australia and some have even gone to Tahiti and Rarotonga.

One of the quotes that I found very useful was "it is better to own 50% of something than 100% of nothing. Sometimes, a partnership may be what you need to lift your business to new heights.

While I was at uni, I read a book by Marie Forleo who is an American entrepreneur. The book is called everything is figureoutable. The book is incredibly powerful in that it reframes approaching challenges and how if you approach an idea with a positive attitude that it is in fact figureoutable, you are far more likely to be successful in solving the problem. I would like to leave you with a quote from Marie's book

“If you believed to your core that everything is figureoutable, what would you do now? What would you create or heal or transform or transcend? Who would you become?”

Thank you so much for having me and good luck.