

How a mompreneur used online learning to startup a biz

Most people don't think of YouTube or Pinterest as online learning sites, but when used properly, they're a rich source of knowledge.

Tami Shidawara-Vazquez started her business after she had her second child. After maternity leave from her FedEx job, she was looking for ways to earn some extra income. She was trying to think of things she could do at home. This is when this Silicon Valley mom decided to become a mompreneur and educate herself through online learning.

"I started making cakes for events. I love creating sculpted cakes. It's an art form for me. The kids go crazy for it when they see the cake come out. They love it. I love the reward of seeing kids' and adults' faces. They're so wowed by it. It's fun to see their reactions," Tami said.



Tami made this train cake for a boy who was turning five years old.

"I also like the fun of trying to figure it out. Most of the time I'm creating something I've never done before. I have to

Google the theme or go on Pinterest to see how other people have done it. Pinterest is my usual go-to place for ideas and online learning. Sometimes I find helpful DIY videos and tips,” Tami said.

“But doing cakes was hard with the kids. It was too hard to do baking and decorating with kids who need constant attention. They were always trying to sneak a lick of frosting or stick their fingers in the cake. It was too hard to juggle a cake business with kids that age,” Tami said.



Tami Shidawara-Vazquez (left), pictured here with her friend, Violeta Sy (right) at the DeAnza Flea Market in 2013.

Tami started looking for other things she could do. That’s when her friend, Violeta Sy, introduced her to shabby chic.

“Violeta was thinking we could do the flea market together. I started painting furniture and some wall decor. We went to DeAnza Flea Market together to see if our stuff would sell. She did really good. I did ok. It was a fun experience. I met some people who really encouraged me. I got some really good

feedback from customers. It made me want to keep going and learn new stuff and try new techniques. It worked out and I started doing more and more pieces,” Tami said.



Tami's oldest son practicing safety-first with his bike helmet on.

The first project she did was an old wood toolbox that her boys did with her. Tami picked up this toolbox at a garage sale. They sanded it and stained it. Then they planted succulents in it. Ricardo was five and Mateo was three when Tami kicked off her wood restoration business with this first project.



This handmade toolbox is one of the first wood painting projects Tami did with the boys.

Tami chose Restoration Illumination as the name of her business because she wanted to restore things and give them a new life. "Restoration" is a means of giving an old item a new life. "Illumination" is a way of seeing things in a new light. She also liked that the name rhymed. Check out some of her pieces on Instagram at Restoration Illumination.



Tami liked the idea of starting a business where her boys could get involved.

Online learning opened up a whole new world for this former FedEx manager. She taught herself how to do shabby chic by watching YouTube videos and clicking through Pinterest links. By following along, she learned the techniques. From there she discovered farmhouse style, French Cottage, industrial, Funky Junk, and Trash to Treasure.

Online learning offers the flexibility that this mompreneur needed to gain the skills to build her business. As she was learning new techniques, she taught her boys the basics along the way.



The boys are always eager to help out. Tami loves watching them paint even when she has to redo their work.

“I have a home workshop. I started working in my back yard with just a couple projects. As I started getting more projects in, I started using the carport. I took over the carport and then as I added on even more projects and the work started coming in more, I took over one part of the garage. Then as it grew even more we built a little overhang. It’s been three years now. I’ve taken over the whole back yard,” Tami said.



“My boys love any chance they get to use power tools. They know that safety is first. They can’t just play with them. They know that they’re actual tools and they can’t use them unless an adult is with them,” Tami said.

In addition to learning from YouTube videos and how-to articles, Tami also learns from shows on HGTV, DIYNetwork, and Great American Country.



“My older son enjoyed prepping and sanding this vintage chair for restoration. This was one of our earlier projects,” Tami said.

Tami is a big fan of Joanna Gaines, the “Magnolia Mom,” and host of HGTV’s Fixer Upper show. This is one of Tami’s favorite shows for online learning.

“I’m inspired by Joanna’s down-to-earth personality and style. She renovates homes that others wouldn’t want and helps them to see the potential in it. They’re low-key and fun to watch. I love how when she’s staging, the kids come over and they have dinner together. I love how she involves her kids and makes time for family,” Tami said.

Tami is also a fan of Flea Market Flip, a competition where two teams have \$500 to spend at a flea market. They have three projects that they have to do and one day to complete all three projects. Whoever has the most profit in the end wins

\$5,000.

“I love seeing what the teams come up with. They have a list of projects to do. I like seeing what they pick and how they turn it into something very unique or something with a new purpose. I like seeing the whole thought process of what they do,” Tami said.



Tami's boys like going with her to the flea market because they get to find something fun for themselves, like Pokémon cards or Legos.

Salvage Dawgs is another one of Tami's favorite shows.

“They go into old historic buildings that are being torn down. They get to go into a building and save pieces from inside before it's demolished. They're saving history and repurposing it. They find a lot of great stuff, a lot of architectural salvage. They usually show one project they're working on and how they repurposed it for their shop,” Tami said.

“I watch shows after the kids go to sleep or when they're at school. Or I watch after dinner is done and the homework is

done. The boys get bored with the shows. They prefer to watch cartoons or play video games,” Instead of watching TV, I like to do things with them outside, things they can get involved with. Gardening is one activity that they do at school and we do at home. They were interested in planting a garden. They picked out some plants from Los Altos Nursery,” I like the gardening. It’s an activity plus it gives them a sense of pride that they’ve picked it out, they care for it and they get to watch it grow. It also gives them the responsibility to keep checking on the plants,” Tami said.

“The reason I started this business was because I wanted to take care of the kids and be with them at home. When I’m at home and working outside, the kids can be playing outside or they can be helping me out and I can still watch them while I’m working,” Tami said.



The boys love using their repurposed milk jug

to water the garden they planted in their back yard.

“I started selling on Craigslist. As people came to buy things like a dresser, I would ask them if they needed anything else for other parts of their house. I got people interested in doing more work just by asking. Then I’d get referrals from them and it grew from there,” Tami said.

Most of Tami’s repeat customers are people who purchased one item from her and turned to her for help in finding more pieces. Tami especially enjoys working with these clients and shopping for them, finding the perfect piece. She likes working with customers who want to do an entire room in a new theme.

“Now Ricardo is helping more. He’s seven. When Mateo helps out, it’s more for fun and I usually have to redo it. He just turned six. Ricardo is getting to the point where I can use his work. He does signs and distressing. He’s good with banging up wood and distressing with hammers and chains. He’s good at it and he likes to do it,” Tami said.

“Sometimes they’re eager to help out and surprise me. I’m just afraid one day I’m going to come in the house and find out that they distressed all the furniture with hammer and chains,” Tami said.



Tami is especially excited when customers think it's an authentic piece, but it's something she just painted.

"You can learn a lot on YouTube! I love what I do. I can easily work twelve to fifteen hours a day," she said.

Today, Tami considers herself a junker who loves shabby chic and French Cottage design. She also likes farmhouse style, especially for kitchens. She enjoys creating decorations that pull everything together.

If you're interested in seeing some of Tami's repurposing projects, check out:

9 Ideas to Repurpose Junk Into Treasure

"If you're a working mom looking for a way to spend more time with your kids, I would definitely say to do something that you're passionate about. That makes it really easy to love your work. If you need more skills, online learning is a great resource and a lot of it is free. It's easily accessible, right at your fingertips. Even my boys use online learning for school to learn reading, spelling and math. If it's something your kids can do with you, you can get them involved and use it as a bonding experience. It's a chance to help them

learn new skills. The more you can get them involved, the more time you get with them, and maybe you can even start a family business. The main thing is to just do what you love and try to keep the kids involved. But don't get so wrapped up in your work that you're not present with them. You need to be there not just physically, but for their needs as well. If they ask for help with homework or they want to show you something they did at school that they're excited about, don't put it off.

Make time to be there for them when they need it," Tami said.

