CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO AND MOVE

...don't worry about what could happen

A CONVERSATION WITH BREVARD NELSON · BY GISELLE HUDSON

Brevard Nelson is a man on purpose and walks his talk. You'll see what I mean as you read his story. He ain't sitting on the sidelines, that's for sure!

In 2008 the world was experiencing the worst economic disaster since the Great Depression. Logically, it was a horrible time to start anything. It was a period of disruption, much like our collective experience with COVID-19. But for Brevard Nelson and his business partner Chike Farrell, it was the best time to start a business.

- There was a market for innovation, which usually follows any period of disruption.
- Competition was less, as many businesses were in chaos.
- They were agile, unencumbered by the overheads of bricks and mortar.
- And they were flexible, faced with a wonderful opportunity to create something from the inside out, without the distraction of what anyone else was doing.

At that time, Brevard was doing his Master's in the United Kingdom. The vision was for Caribbean Ideas to become the "Yahoo" of the Caribbean: for Caribbean people, by Caribbean people.

JUST DO IT!

Brevard's message, especially to young entrepreneurs, is simple: "Just do it."

"Most times we get caught up in analysis paralysis and we don't take the action that would lead to success. We start worrying about what could happen."

> *"Don't worry about what could happen. Just do it!"*

Brevard applauds those who pick up the mantle, remove the safety net of a job, and go out as entrepreneurs to challenge the status quo. "In doing that, we as a Caribbean people move forward."

"Just do it" embodies a philosophy that transcends its simplicity, and Brevard's thinking is not dissimilar to the shoe company that made the phrase popular. To Nike it isn't a slogan but a philosophy, one that invites people to join them in what they believe and stand for.

Brevard hopes that we can join him in shattering the Caribbean stereotype held by many globally, where we are seen primarily as rum-and-coke drinking, Mai Tai sipping, beach-going people.

"We have the potential to be even greater than we are. Our human capital is a tremendous resource that will propel us to compete globally."

HOW DO WE COMPETE GLOBALLY?

To do that, we must keep our pulse on industry trends, not unlike what Nelson did in 2011. Caribbean Ideas was now being recognized for its future outlook and thought leadership in the digital space. He wondered if they could connect leaders of Caribbean organizations with cutting-edge thinking on how digital technology, web and mobile specifically, could be used to drive positive business and marketing results.

The answer was the launch of the first-ever digital conference in the region: the Caribbean Digital Expo. Brevard reflects that they simply decided to be bold.

The team adopted the approach that if you never ask, the answer will always be "no!" So ask they did. They invited speakers from Facebook, YouTube, MTV, and even the PR consultants for Rihanna to deliver at their conference in exchange for a vacation in Trinidad and Tobago.

It worked!

In Trinidad and Tobago we don't have a vibrant venture capital market. If you want to start a business, our angel investors usually comprise family and friends. This may be a blessing in disguise, and just what we need to stoke the entrepreneurial fires: relying less on funding and leaning more on our innovation and creativity.

And boy, do we have tons of that!

CLOSING THE GAP THROUGH EDUCATION

We also need to occasionally take a step back to review what's in front of us: to consider the possibilities and identify the gaps.

There was such a gap in the digital marketing space, which Brevard sought to close using education. Marketing and communication practitioners needed help understanding digital habits and practices, loyalty programs, the power of gamification, e-commerce and real-time marketing.

Parental involvement is an important factor in successful education. Students need a positive learning experience to succeed in school, one that provides support, motivation and quality instruction. One could say that Brevard got a double whammy, as both his parents were educators.

Brevard's mom is a retired educator and former principal of Tunapuna Girls' RC. She made many sacrifices along the way to ensure that both Brevard and his brother could move forward in the world.

Brevard's dad, Elton Nelson, was a polymath. He authored several books, the first of which was *Metric is Simple* (1979), which aimed to help people of all ages grasp the metric system. He also pioneered the weekly pull-out of Common Entrance practice tests that appeared in the *Express* and later in *Newsday*.

Mr. Nelson passed on March 26th, 2019. His colleague Haydn Murray wrote: "Elton Herbert Nelson was a colossus in the history of primary school education in Trinidad. Together with George Singh and Patrick Donatien, he put Curepe Anglican on the map as one of the leading primary schools in the country."

TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION

It seems almost natural to follow the path of his parents.

> *"Teaching is critical for the next generation of leaders."*

He has been on the board of his alma mater, St Mary's College, for 12 years, and has served as president of the college's past students' union.

Brevard is a firm believer in giving back and sharing everything he has learned. He initiated an alumni association at his primary school, working with and helping underprivileged, at-risk students who are brilliant but don't have the opportunity or guidance to unlock their true potential.

INVESTING IN US

The Trinidad and Tobago Music Company Limited (MusicTT) was established in 2014 with the mandate to stimulate and facilitate the business development and export activity of the music industry in Trinidad and Tobago, to generate national wealth.

Despite this effort, there remains the view that Trinidad and Tobago does not have a defined music industry, only pockets of artistes, producers, and people marketing and promoting music.

Brevard sees the potential for the industry to be enhanced and to become exceedingly profitable.

> *"There are generations of students who are not considering music as a career, so five years ago I co-founded the Rosemond Academy for the Performing Arts."*

He sees the future as promising. However, the industry needs to be more organized, with more effective marketing and management.

"We need to invest in us."

WHAT A DRUMMER KNOWS

Scientists agree that great drummers can use high-level mathematics in their drum patterns, instinctively using figures known as fractals.

I'm not sure if Brevard chose to teach himself the drums because he is good with figures (data-driven, analytical and logical), but I do feel that everything he has shared about the evolution of Brevard the individual and Brevard the business owner will no doubt come together to make him an excellent drummer.

Qualities like *persistence*, the key to all things. Only persistence will get you to where you want to be. It is the one thing that will keep you going when times get tough, and they inevitably will. And with persistence must also come *patience*. No matter how experienced you are, there is always something to learn.

Then there's *passion*. Passion has driven Brevard to put himself out there and take risks.

And finally, *adaptability*. Brevard has seen himself become more adaptable by pushing himself and stepping out of his comfort zone.

GROWING IN A PLATFORM WORLD

Change is the only constant, and he knows this well. Caribbean Ideas is now Caribbean Ideas Synapse. The name was chosen because synapses play a powerful role in enabling communication between the different parts of the brain.

As an integrated marketing agency, the ability to craft and orchestrate marketing solutions that seamlessly cross media channels, driven by being great at both left- and right-brain marketing, is essential.

One of today's challenges is cutting through a crowded digital space. Brevard believes the right blend of knowledge, design and creativity can make Caribbean Ideas Synapse attractive to potential clients going forward.

> *"Our job is to help our clients find growth in a platform world."*

The future looks bright for this entrepreneur. Uncertainty is par for the course, and Brevard is up for the challenge.

His mom was always a strict enforcer of rules, at home and at school, and she never stopped encouraging him to dream big and do his best. This continues to be a huge motivational force in his life, taking him from strength to strength.

THREE TAKEAWAYS FROM BREVARD'S SPOTLIGHT

1 *Disruption is an opening.*
Brevard started his business in the 2008 crash, when competition was low and agility was an advantage. Hard times can be the best time to begin.

2 *If you never ask, the answer is always no.*
Asking boldly brought Facebook, YouTube and MTV to the region's first digital conference. Boldness is a strategy, not a gamble.

3 *Persistence, patience, passion, adaptability.*
The same qualities that make a great drummer build a lasting business, and a Caribbean that competes on its human capital.



Brevard Nelson

Co-founder of Caribbean Ideas Synapse, an integrated marketing agency, and of the Caribbean Digital Expo, the region's first digital conference. Co-founder of the Rosemond Academy for the Performing Arts, and a long-serving board member of St Mary's College.

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