



PEACE BY CHOCOLATE

MY PATH TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CANADA, AND BUILDING A PURPOSEFUL BUSINESS

AUTHOR: *Tareq Hadhad, Founder and CEO, Peace by Chocolate Presented at the workshop on the role of the private sector in economic integration of refugees (Paris, June 11-12, 2019)*

Entrepreneurship is a way of economic inclusion and it's all about being unique and remarkable, it's also about those who think out of the box and take risks that others won't have the courage to take, not only for the sake of experience but because entrepreneurs are the real social and business game-changers of our time. It doesn't take a lot to switch any idea into reality - at a time where you can start your own project with a smart device and internet (and sometimes you don't need the latter until getting deeper in the process). The accessibility of resources in our time is a changing factor to so many as we are noticing a massive switch in the global approach towards new startups and businesses. We now understand more than ever before the value of new ideas and the chance for transforming our societies to the better by building on our belief that risk takers are opportunities makers, all around the globe. Newcomers should have the opportunity to explore entrepreneurship as a pathway to success and settlement and service agencies should be able to refer newcomers to the appropriate resource. We understand that the world is more interconnected than ever before, yet we continue to witness exclusionary policies and rhetoric. We continue watching people fleeing their homes for so many reasons - whether it's by choice like regular

immigrants or because of wars, instability and armed violence that made their lives at an extreme risk like refugees who lose everything in the blink of an eye and are forced to find another place to call home and rebuild their lives again. The journey of rebuilding can be long and ruthless but the passion to be contributors to the system is what makes this group of newcomers so creative by finding ways to fill the gaps in society with full determination and perseverance because migrants and refugees are not numbers, they are human beings. Every person should have a place to call home, it is a basic right. It is our duty to treat migrants and refugees with empathy, dignity and respect. We know that migration is an opportunity for individuals, for families, and for our countries. It can bring significant economic, social and cultural benefits to host countries as well as income to countries of origin. It also benefits human relations and cooperation across borders. After losing everything in the war in Syria in 2012-2013, we had little room for hope but plenty of room for frustration. A father and a mother that have built an empire of chocolate in the country, myself as an aspiring physician, my siblings who were on their way to put their fingerprint into our community, we had to take the hard decision, leave everything behind and flee the country with only the

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clothes on our back. However, only few days after coming to Canada and landing in small town on the Canadian East Coast called “Antigonish”, we found out that entrepreneurship is our door to integrating in our new community and building connections in the country that we started calling “home”. Contrary to our own expectations, it only took us two months to rebuild our business. The despair and uncertainty that had been letting us down, were quickly replaced by motivation and inspiration that had always ignited our entrepreneurial spirit. It was this spirit that influenced us to create something remarkable and unique that could show everyone the potential immigrants can bring to their new communities. In early 2016, we created Peace by Chocolate with the aim to share a taste of peace with each piece of homemade chocolate. It may sound strange, but I was motivated greatly by my background in medicine: both chocolate and medicine have the goal of making the world a happier and less painful place, and both require skills that bring people together instead of tearing them apart. We created the ‘Peace’ bar which comes in over 20 different wrappings, each displaying the word ‘peace’ in a different language. We also created slogans like ‘One Peace Won’t Hurt’ and ‘Peace Is Beautiful in Every Language’, to remind customers of our backstory and how much we have been through in the last several years to make these little pieces of joy reach their hands. By September 2016, our story had begun to reach parts of the country we could have never imagined. Even Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was moved by our story and during the United Nations Leaders’ Summit on Refugees and Migrants that month, he delivered a speech

in which he told the world how we had rebuilt our life and business in Canada. Our family’s story went viral, and against all odds, we became the face of the new Canadian Syrians. I believe that chocolate has been the key ingredient of my integration in Canada, and thanks to chocolate, we have been able to give back to our new community, from offering jobs to locals to sharing new methods. We even donated some of our profits to the Canadian Red Cross when we witnessed the terrible wildfires in Fort McMurray which forced many families out of their homes in 2016. We know that devastating feeling and felt that we needed to help our new fellow citizens. We realized that the development of services of particular importance for the society as they may tackle important issues such as ageing society, resource scarcity, fight against poverty, the process of entrepreneurial idea and business concept development, and the refinement of the business concept, help creating trust in the local people and acculturating a sense of belonging. During the process, immigrants are also being re-integrated to the home country through maintaining and establishing new links to the home country. Newcomers must be flexible, acknowledge the risks and never take any resources available for granted. I believe that it is an immigrant’s responsibility to speak out and share one’s ideas when they arrive at their new home: no one will come knocking at your door to ask what plans you have. One has to be open and give integration a chance. At the same time, I would love to see more diverse resources for new immigrants to prosper. There are some resources out there for sure, but they are sometimes almost too abundant in some

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fields while too scarce in others. Governments should acknowledge that it's important for the country to grow at the same pace in both metropolitan and rural areas. A fair distribution of newcomers in their new communities is crucial for the sustainability of small towns. We started Peace by Chocolate in 2016. It developed from a self-employed family to hiring the first employee August 2016, adding extra 10 employees by December of the same year and look for opportunities to scale up quickly to match the phenomenal awareness nationally and internationally of the story and the values that we put in the business and the charitable side of the business to help build a more peaceful world. We are now hiring a number of people – in distribution, production, accounting, and other specialties. It's always important to mention that the new hires in any start-ups are a great part of the integration process. There is a focus to get the host community involved and learn from them and understand the systems to get loans, build distribution networks and understand the demand and culture. This also helps the business to reverse the prejudices about the impact of the newly created jobs and the policies that the business will have in place to be as inclusive as possible. Peace by Chocolate inspired real change in understanding the impact of immigrants into their society. The acceptance to bringing people to our province especially increased more than 45% since 2015. Our family established the Peace on Earth society to support projects like Special Olympics, Indigenous communities and Canadian NGOs who are making an impact to change the lives of Canadians and the world to the better. Originality, innovation and future plans As

a brand, Peace by Chocolate was uniquely positioned to provide a positive peace-oriented narrative within an otherwise conflict driven global conversation. Its original mixture was unlike any story being told in Canada or the world. What has set Peace by Chocolate apart is its ability to shift empathetic and emotion driven support of refugees into a pride inducing representation of a country coming together to support immigration. It's a good news story and for all the right reasons - community, compassion and hard work. Peace by Chocolate fully intends to accomplish its goal of being a top 5 chocolate company in Canada. Doing it the Hadhad way will demand innovation in both how and where the brand furthers its peaceful conversation. The Peace Bar has introduced a new conversation around peace into thousands of homes, just two weeks after its roll out across five provinces. The second chocolate bar brand, releasing in July, has already outpaced pre-orders. With names like Bygones be Bygones and Kiss and Make Up, the Forgiveness Collection is a call to action for people to address pointless squabbles and differences of opinion. Like any production facility, minimizing costs factor significantly into operating at a profit. Automation coupled with hands on flex points in production will be a key investment moving forward. The brands products are already priced near the top of the confectionary industry so investment dollars cannot be recouped at retail or wholesale. The brand will need to improve production efficiency so savings can be invested in brand awareness initiatives. This will be a major turning point for the business but an inevitable stopping point on the road to 1 in 5 market share.

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Generally speaking, to succeed as an entrepreneur, the start-up is everything. Once you help people get on track, they will continue on the road by themselves. Immigrant entrepreneurs can be important for several reasons: they create their own jobs; can create jobs for others; can develop different social networks than immigrant workers; and, last but not least, shape their own destinies rather than collecting welfare benefits and waiting for cues to become active. Also, they can provide a different range of goods and services; they can enhance the vitality of particular streets or neighbourhoods in cities or of specific economic sectors; they can give an added value to the appearance of the city. And of course they can play their part in the 'natural' process of succession and renewal of the total corpus of entrepreneurs. They work hard because it's

make-or-break for them. At Peace by Chocolate, we recently announced that by 2022, we will hire 50 refugees, help 10 refugee start-ups by mentorship and support 4 refugee businesses to access new markets through our distribution channels. In the end, we all should look again at entrepreneurship in the new communities as a rebellious way to change economies. Being an immigrant and starting your own business is not always easy but once the ideas start rolling, things can become clearer. No better way to face the cultural shock after the first couple of weeks in the new country than starting a small business to reflect your skills that you came with, which will lead to a great movement to embrace the start-up and incubate it.

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Biography of Author

Tareq Hadhad

CEO, Peace by Chocolate

Tareq Hadhad, the founder and CEO of Peace by Chocolate and one of the Top 25 Immigrants to The Maritimes moved to Canada in Dec 2015 as a Syrian newcomer. He studied medicine at Damascus university and proceeded to join the medical relief efforts for the Syrian refugees with UNHCR and WHO through a local organisation when he arrived to Lebanon in 2013 as a refugee himself. Passionate about the peace and youth entrepreneurship, and just after arriving in Canada, he and his family started their company “Peace by chocolate” in Antigonish, NS, to sponsor peace building projects and support the local economy by offering jobs. The company later turned into a phenomenon that inspired so many people around the world and was mentioned by a famous speech for the Prime Minister Hon. Justin Trudeau at the UN summit in Sep 2016 in New York as a remarkable example for the contributions of the newcomers in their communities. After a series of media interviews with 500 media agencies including BBC, CNN, PRI, CBC and much more, Tareq and his family won the Newcomers Entrepreneur Award and was chosen by Google the National Hero Case in Canada in 2018. He is also challenging being physician in Canada. He is now serving on Board of Director for Invest NS to support Public Grateful for the encouragement and support from his new community, and is now also more involved in public speeches and media campaigns and interviews to support youth entrepreneurial skills as well as linking the Syrian youth and helping the Syrian refugees all around the world.

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