

# Future of the Business World: A Girl Scout Advocates for Redefining Success

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*Naomi Porter, our March 2021 Future of the Business World podcast guest, embraced entrepreneurship when she was only 11 years old with her first venture, Spice It Up. Now 16 and a high school junior in California, Naomi is using her business experience and Girl Scouts of the USA platform to empower students, research youth challenges, and advocate for change. In this multi-faceted episode, she touches on everything from the travel blogger who helped save her spice business, to her dreams of becoming the U.S. Secretary of Education. Says Naomi: “Instead of asking: What do you want to be when you grow up? Let’s ask kids: How do you want to use your passions and talents to make the world a better place?”*



**Wharton Global Youth Program:** Hey, everybody! Welcome to *Future of the Business World*. Each month, we bring you new conversations with Gen Z about innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership, and all kinds of youth-led business trends.

I’m Diana Drake with the Wharton Global Youth Program at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. At Wharton Global Youth, we design programs, competitions and content introducing high school students to different areas of business education.

We’ve had some fascinating podcast conversations so far this year, exploring everything from procrastination and 3-D-printed limbs, to civic engagement, coding, and group innovation. I encourage everyone to check out our previous podcast episodes.

Today’s guest – Naomi Porter — is a high school junior from Los Angeles, California in the U.S. Naomi has been a proud entrepreneur since the age of 11 and, now 16, is passionate about expanding entrepreneurial education for younger students.

Naomi, thank you for joining us on *Future of the Business World*!

We have so much to talk about, including the Girl Scouts, which holds a special place in my heart as a former Girl Scout Leader.

First, let's talk about your first business, Spice It Up, which has been going strong for the past five years. One of the reasons I love this is because you started the company to actually make money! While mission-based entrepreneurship is so incredible, lots of people also start businesses to generate income and profits.

So, tell us about Spice It Up: what is the business model and how and why did it start?

**Naomi Porter:** I started Spice It Up when I was 11 years old after realizing there was really no affordable alternative for students who were looking to go camping, exploring and just in the great outdoors and take spices affordably and compactly. That's what entrepreneurs do. Whether or not you're looking to make money or just make change, it's about looking at your community and figuring out how you can make your world more efficient. How can you make your world more environmentally friendly? And you start asking yourself these questions about how you can create these micro-efficiencies.

I realized when I was hiking and camping in Girl Scouts that there was no way to carry travel spices. If you're like me and you're an avid hiker and backpacker, you know that camp food can sometimes be a little bit bland – and so you need to “spice it up,” which is where I got the name from. And so I decided to create a product that was TSA (Transportation Security Administration)-approved, waterproof, super lightweight and perfect for all sorts of traveling and all kinds of adventuring. As the target consumer myself, I realized that there was a need for this to not only be environmentally friendly, but also affordable for that target consumers. This is a for-profit business. And that's when I began to develop an entrepreneurial mindset, which is continuing to look in your community and figure out different ways to innovate and different ways to adapt. For me, that was creating Spice It Up when I was 11 years old.

**Wharton Global Youth:** Has Spice It Up made money? What do you do with the proceeds from your business?

**Porter:** Originally with Spice It Up, I entered a competition similar to what you have at Wharton. I entered a startup funding competition, so I actually ended up winning second place and I got seed money to begin my business venture. All the money I've made has been for profit, which has been huge for me. If I make a marketing error or if I forget to do certain sales, it's OK. I still have that seed money. And I'm using the money [my business generates] to save for college because I expect to pay my way to go to college, get potential internships and study abroad. All that money is going toward college funds. And if I need to spend it on marketing or promotions or to get more stock, I can also do that. Like a 20-80 business model, if you will.

**Wharton Global Youth:** If you had one or two valuable lessons to take away from your first foray into entrepreneurship, what would they be?

**Porter:** I have learned two main things. The first one that pops out at me is when things don't go right, go left. It has so much value. As entrepreneurs, you know the importance of adapting and innovating and marketing yourselves in different ways when things aren't working. You don't keep going in the same direction if things aren't working. For me, I realized it about one year into my business venture with Spice It Up. It was summer, it was travel season and I had great success. Everyone is looking for that fun, new, innovative product from a young aspiring, up-and-coming entrepreneur. Then hits this November-December season and my sales really fell flat. That was very hard for me because I knew I had this good product that people really liked. They told me as much. It was evident that this product and this idea were something of value, but then I hit this non-travel season. It's the offseason.

So, you have to figure out different ways to market yourself. For me, I sent out emails to 60 or 70 travel bloggers asking them if they could review my product. And so I got a lot of no responses, a lot of no's but I got one yes. That one yes really shifted my mindset. Yes, you're going to get No's in the business world. That's just life. Not even if you're an entrepreneur – if you're a business owner, an aspiring entrepreneur or even if you're just living life, you're going to be told no. For every No, there's a greater Yes down the road. The [blogger] who emailed me back said they would love to

support me and love to support my mission and it turned out to be a very big travel company that actually had all of my target customers. People who were looking for an affordable and alternative option. From there, they linked my shop and my sales continued to grow and have continued to grow ever since. That really taught me that it's okay to get rejection, but also you have to keep going because there is a yes down the road.

“We need to have conversations and build social movements to address racial inequalities, economic injustices, climate change, gender equity and all these important things that are opportunities for entrepreneurial minds to go to work. Our generation stands out as an activist generation who wants to make a lasting change.” — Naomi Porter, Entrepreneur and Educator

**Wharton Global Youth:** I asked you to reflect on those early entrepreneurship lessons because I'm sure they sparked your passion for helping youth adapt and innovate to succeed. Tell us about Bright Futures Tutoring and Academic Coaching and how that is connected to your Girl Scouts Gold Award?

**Porter:** As entrepreneurs do, you're always looking for the next big innovation; the next way to make some sort of a lasting change. When I was 13, I realized there was no affordable tutoring in my area. But when you're creating something as generic as a tutoring service, you need to figure out what's going to make yours stand out. What's going to make yours different? For me, it was run by a 13 year old, but I was also offering better and more flexible scheduling than my competitors and I was also offering more affordable pricing. As an entrepreneur, you need to figure out what's going to make yours stand out from others, especially when it's such a widespread service like tutoring. From there, I've partnered with local elementary schools and donated to different auctions. As I learned with Spice It Up, you need to learn how to market yourself differently. Now I manage and hire a team of employees because my business continued to grow. People want young tutors, people want affordable options and flexibility. We want our clients to know that they are so much more than a paycheck in and out the door and that each of them has, in turn, a bright future.

All of that I've learned through entrepreneurship and my two businesses inspired me to start my Girl Scout Gold Award. My Girl Scout Gold Award is called “EntrepreYOUership: You Can Do It Too.” It provides free entrepreneurial education courses for youth during this pandemic, but also outside of this pandemic. We have partnered with about 20 organizations to foster this idea of: What does it mean to be an entrepreneur? What does it mean to have lasting change? This began as my Girl Scout Gold Award and I partnered with a few organizations over the summer, we had start-up classes, we actually had a startup [that was] funding a competition that was completely free of charge for our students to take these ideas and turn them into economic and social value impacts. That to me is huge. I hope to continue to get start-up funding through EntrepreYOUership and to host more of these competitions.

Now we're pivoting and offering more entrepreneurial education courses, because our program is youth-led. We want to debunk this myth that entrepreneurship is only reserved for adults who have fancy degrees and venture capital. We want it to be youth-led, because while our generation only makes up 25% of the population, we are 100% of the future. I hope to continue that mission and continue getting more youth involved and all be on this path of personal dignity and professional stability.

**Wharton Global Youth:** You're talking generationally and talking about Gen Z and your youth-led movement, so to speak. You do have both this for-profit aspect of your life, but you also have this social mission-based aspect of your life. Is that a core value for Generation Z? This concept of wanting to give back to society and change the world? We've talked to so many great students on the *Future of the Business World* podcast about this very thing. They are all doing wonderful endeavors. Have you observed that your peers are oriented toward [doing good for society?]

**Porter:** Gen Z has this split mindset. I need to put a roof over my head and my family's, so you can create businesses and social movements that have economic value and are for-profit. And then there's also this idea of: 'I've learned so

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much and I want to help others.’ This idea of collaboration over competition; a “we” over “me” mindset. That’s something that Gen Z really excels in. It’s this collective togetherness. If we’re all passionate about something, let’s all have conversations together, let’s bring people into the conversation, instead of calling them out. Let’s create something together so no one is left behind. We need to have these conversations and build social movements to address racial inequalities, economic injustices, climate change, gender equity and all these important things that are opportunities for entrepreneurial minds to go to work. Our generation stands out as an activist generation who wants to make a lasting change.

**Wharton Global Youth:** You are more than a tutor...you are an advocate for entrepreneurial education and the benefits it has for youth. How do you describe the power of entrepreneurship?

**Porter:** Entrepreneurship really is the future. There is no longer this corporate ladder that people can easily climb. There is no set path for Gen Z. It used to be that there was only one version of success. You would graduate from high school, go to your four-year college and get one of these typical jobs. But with our generation and with this idea of entrepreneurship and developing an entrepreneurial mindset, it’s making your own things. It’s taking these skills that you’ve learned as an entrepreneur and putting them into your workplace fields. Entrepreneurship is not always about creating a business or making a social movement. It’s also about having these ideas of innovating and adapting in order to succeed. That’s what entrepreneurship is, and you need that regardless of what job or field you go into. Entrepreneurship is the future.

**Wharton Global Youth:** Where has your advocacy had the greatest impact?

**Porter:** Definitely with adults, which is surprising. With our education system, we are not necessarily prepared for the skills of today and tomorrow. High schoolers are drowning in rigorous course loads, AP work, extracurriculars. I implore to ask youth and adults, do these prepare us for the skills of today and tomorrow and our future jobs? The long answer is No. Analyzing Shakespearean sonnets and graphing quadratic equations, while they certainly have their part in our education system, we need to start asking different questions. Instead of asking: What do you want to be when you grow up? Let’s ask kids: How do you want to use your passions and your talents to make the world a better place? What changes do you want to make? Change this narrative at a young age so young kids can know that there is not really just one version of success. There are different pathways. Why not explore entrepreneurship? Why not implement entrepreneurial education? Why not teach these critical thinking and problem-solving skills?

So often in our classes, there’s only one right answer. In math, there’s only one right answer. In history, there’s only one correct date. It teaches us to be narrow-minded in the sense of there’s only one correct answer. When you get into the business world and into the real world, there’s not always one right answer for everything. And so in terms of my advocacy through writing blogs and having conversations with policy-makers, we’ve come to this collective understanding that the model we’ve been doing for hundreds of years may have worked for Baby Boomers and Millennials and Gen X, but it’s not going to work for this generation. And we need to pivot that mindset.

**Wharton Global Youth:** You are a Global Research & Design Intern for Girl Scouts U.S.A. How did you land that gig, and what do you do in that role?

**Porter:** I have been a Girl Scout for about 10 years, so since I was in Kindergarten, and in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, which would have been 2018, there was an application out that said: Calling girls who are interested in being a national intern for Girls Scouts of the U.S.A. I was like, sign me up. Where do I get in line? That’s the interesting thing about internships is that sometimes you search for them and other times it just lands in your in-box and you go: this sounds fun and like something you really want to do and explore. Originally with my internship, it was 25 girls from around the world who were planning the 2020 National Convention, which happens every three years. Of course, due to the pandemic it was canceled. That was a great opportunity for us to adapt, like entrepreneurs. We just pivoted our mindset. Originally, I was

a merchandising and retail intern. So, I was planning all the business side aspects of Convention, like merchandising, pricing and marketing and all those things.

I've become a global research and design intern for the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., through which I've partnered with Girl Scouts Research Institute, which is the largest girl-led body-of-research institute in the U.S. and the world. We've tackled obstacles like mental health. Right now we're working on racial justice and how to be actively anti-racist in your daily life. We've led focus groups exploring the effect that this pandemic has had on youth and on girls. We've talked about politics and written research reports and I've co-authored a couple of reports alongside my peers.

We've designed a national TV show for Girl Scouts and we've been interviewing girls around the world and women who are doing amazing things that are not stereotypical for women to do. Women who are activists, doctors and CEOs. These aren't typical for women, but they need to be elevated on a national platform so that girls can say, I do want to become a doctor, I want to go into these STEM, science, sports fields. That way they can see themselves in the media, and what better place than on the largest girl-led platform in the world. That's an overview of what I've done for Girl Scouts, but I am definitely eternally grateful to Girl Scouts for being the first place to amplify my voice and let me know that there is so much more to this world than this me, individualistic idea. Girl Scouts is a huge organization that focuses on diversity, equity and, more importantly, inclusion.

**Wharton Global Youth:** What are some of your greatest takeaways from your research, in particular on mental health?

**Porter:** We did the mental health research report in August, September and October of 2020. This was a pivotal time for many girls. It was transitioning from summer when everyone took a break, everyone's mental health was doing fine, you're getting fresh air and away from the stress of school. Everyone had this perception that we were going back to normal in the fall. But, of course, as we've seen, coronavirus cases have spiked and it's everything but normal. We hit this transition of I'm having a good life and enjoying myself and my freedom, to stuck on a Zoom screen for 8-10 hours a day.

We saw the drastic effect that had on girls' mental health. We asked questions like, not just how are you feeling today, but what can we do about it? How can we be problem-solvers and proactive? We asked girls, who would you turn to if you were struggling with anxiety and depression? A lot of girls wouldn't turn to therapists, which is fascinating to me. If you're struggling with anxiety or struggling with these mental health issues, you should turn to a licensed professional. But it is so stigmatized in our society. That is something we really need to change as a culture. It's so hard to change society's beliefs that when you're walking in the door of a therapist, [it means] you have problems, you have issues. Everyone has problems and everyone has issues, and we all need to talk about it. We need to be compassionate.

In the second side of my work, which focuses on DEI, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the thing I found most fascinating is the difference between diversity and inclusion. I always thought of it as: I seek to be the most diverse. I want to meet people from different races and I want to talk about different religions and that's diversity. There's a huge difference and a gap between being diverse and being inclusive. Diversity means we are going to have people of multiple races and cultures, but inclusivity means that everyone feels like they truly belong.

I think Girl Scouts is doing a great job at this. The interesting thing is that diversity isn't just racial. It also mean diversity in having equal amounts of genders, people with disabilities. This weekend we're going to host a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion panel where we're going to be talking about race, disabilities, gender and gender roles, all while fostering this idea of inclusion. It doesn't matter if you have a disability, because you are welcomed. That's something I want to implement in my daily life: being diverse and being an inclusive leader. That's where the future is at: diversity, but more importantly, inclusion.

**Wharton Global Youth:** You have done so much in your 16 years, many of it entrepreneurial in nature. Where do you

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go from here? Do you think you will be a lifetime entrepreneur? Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

**Porter:** I will be a lifetime entrepreneur, but I won't necessarily have a business. Entrepreneurship is a mindset, and it's about taking these skills and making lasting change. In the next 10 years, I want to double major in education and business, because my dream is to work on an administrative level with education and education reform. I'll have my double major and get my administrative credentials, and hopefully down the road I'll be a principal or a superintendent. My dream would be to become the Secretary of Education for the United States. That's dreaming big. Hopefully, I can do work in Los Angeles and in my area to combine my passions of entrepreneurship and education. And work with students one-on-one, because that's what brings me so much joy. I can see myself doing that for years to come.

**Wharton Global Youth:** One question I like to ask all of the innovators we interview on Future of the Business World is...If you could change one thing in the world, what would it be?

**Porter:** I think I would change the way we validate success. Attending university is the most coveted and celebrated pathway heavily promoted to youth. I'd like to see vocational and trade development becoming more accessible and become more promoted – promoted by students, parents and adults. Validating this idea that college isn't for everybody and promoting these shared core values. It doesn't matter how many opportunities are there, how many programs or courses, because if we as a society don't say that is successful, that is a measure of your self worth, then that really doesn't do us any good. That would be the one thing that I would definitely change in our world.

**Wharton Global Youth:** Let's wrap up with our lightning round. Answer these questions as quickly as possible.

What do you hate most about being an entrepreneur?

**Porter:** My age.

**Wharton Global Youth:** The accomplishment you are most proud of?

**Porter:** My Girl Scout Gold Award

**Wharton Global Youth:** A business person you would like to take to lunch?

**Porter:** Melinda Gates, because I absolutely love her and would love to have a conversation, just woman to woman. That would make my year.

**Wharton Global Youth:** An innovation that blows your mind?

**Porter:** Technology, in general. Zoom saves 2020.

**Wharton Global Youth:** Something about you that would surprise us?

**Porter:** I have been to school in the Netherlands. When I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I spent the summer studying in the Netherlands. It's so different than life here and was probably one of the best experiences of my life. I hope to go back and study abroad in Europe when I'm in college.

**Wharton Global Youth:** What is your favorite Girl Scout cookie?

**Porter:** Definitely thin mints!