



CHAPTER

4

FIGURE OUT
YOUR SHARK TANK
PITCH



When I was eleven years old I was on the nationally televised show *Shark Tank*, where I got to pitch Mo's Bows and my company's mission to five investors. Being on the show felt like a dream come true. There were snacks and drinks everywhere I looked, and I felt like I was a star. But suddenly it was my time to pitch the company. I had been on TV before (*The Steve Harvey Show* in Chicago), but I had never been on a show like this, where I hadn't met the people I was being interviewed by beforehand. Walking out on set was the first time I'd even seen the five investors—Daymond John, Mark Cuban, Kevin O'Leary, Barbara Corcoran, and Robert Herjavec—in person. I would have been sweating if they didn't keep the studio so freezing cold.

People of all ages dream of going on *Shark Tank*. But many appear to think that they can just rattle off some crazy business

idea and get Mark Cuban's money and never have to work again. I knew that wasn't the case, however, because I had been hustling my bow ties for two years before I landed on the show. I knew I had to go out there and really convince the Sharks that my business was worth their investment.

I had told the story of my company a hundred times to people—interviewers, producers, and potential customers—but as I approached the Sharks onstage, I found that I just couldn't spit out the words I'd said so many times before.

Every *Shark Tank* pitch is supposed to start the same way. Before going on the show, I received an email from the producers informing me that “all pitches must begin with this format: ‘My name is [blank]. My company is [blank]. I'm seeking [blank] in exchange for [blank] percent of my company.’”

I knew that I had started off right, because I spoke first, even before my mom did, saying, “My name is Moziah Bridges, and I'm the CEO of Mo's Bows handmade bow ties.” I then adjusted the yellow-and-white chevron bow tie around my neck and gave them a big smile, saying, “And I brought with me my lovely momager.”

That got the whole room to break into a smile. Mom and I then started to tag team the pitch, and it was smooth sailing: “Sharks, I always like to dress nice. Even when I was little, I would wear a suit and tie just to go and play on the playground. But the problem was I could never find nice-looking clothes for kids.”

But more important, getting them to smile helped me get my rhythm back. I was so focused on *doing my pitch* that I tripped over my own words, and that kept me from letting the Sharks know who I was. Ideas are more important than words. I wanted them to invest in *me*, not in my pitch.

One thing my mom and I worked on was making sure we knew what to say as our last line. So I told the Sharks a bit more about my company and how much we were looking to raise. I wanted them to know that we were really going places, so I ended by saying, “My only question is, Sharks: Who’s coming with me?”

Not everyone, of course, has the opportunity to get on a show like *Shark Tank*. But you don’t need to be on *Shark Tank* to make your pitch! Let’s do an exercise that even the best and biggest names in business struggle with: telling people what you do and what you want. This exercise focuses on who you are and what you can do for others. Sometimes as a business owner you have to quickly share your business motto or product with someone. You will have to find a very short and concise way to explain it. Most people in business call this the “**elevator pitch**.” You’ve got to hook your listener and sell them yourself and your product



in just the amount of time it takes you to complete an average elevator ride.

Remember: you are an entrepreneur. So go for the “*Shark Tank* pitch” in this situation. What is the best way you can hook a serious investor or customer in the shortest amount of time possible (even a time shorter than an elevator ride)?

Your *Shark Tank* pitch should go something like this: “My name is____. I am the founder of _____. I’m here today to _____.” That last blank lets the person you’re talking to know how to respond to what you are seeking, so think about exactly what it is you are seeking to gain or get from them.

Here are some quick examples using two different entrepreneurs. One has a lawn-mowing business, and the other has a lemonade stand.

Example 1 pitch: “My name is Karen, and I am the founder of Karen’s Lawn Care. I am ten years old, and I live down the street. I’m here today to show you how great your yard can look with my company’s help.”

Example 2 pitch: “My name is Dave, and I am the founder of LemonDave, a unique and delicious homemade lemonade. I am here today to give out a free sample of my lemonade.”

See how much we learn about Karen and Dave from their short pitches? We can tell they’re entrepreneurs, we can tell they aren’t like most kids, and we learn both of them are so passionate about what they do that they want to share it with you. Notice how a person could learn more about what they do at no cost?

Rejection keeps most people from even trying. But by giving a no-cost pitch to people, you are doing several very important things. First of all, you are talking about you and your **brand**. This takes practice! Second, you are generating word of mouth

in such a way that people care to share what you do with others. Trust me, the market for high-end kids bow ties is slim, but the number of people who want to hear about a mother-son team who started their own business is much larger.

If you have an idea for a business—any business—make sure you feel comfortable talking about it. To make your *Shark Tank* pitch even easier, think about a few things about your business: Does it have a name you can easily say aloud? Do people understand what you're looking for from them when you solicit their business? These things will lead you toward becoming only more successful and toward attracting great customers and great business.



When do you think your *Shark Tank* pitch will come in handy? Here are a few times when you can use your pitch in real life:

- It's great for when you see an old family friend or neighbor and they ask what you have been up to.
- It can be very handy when your parents introduce you to new people.
- It works great when you meet someone in a similar industry. They might even give you helpful pointers that will lead you to gain new customers.

Try it out for yourself as you start your business. And after you've given your pitch a few times, focus on how to better get on track—or to get back on track if you feel like you've lost your way in your business goals. It's okay to not have this down perfectly

right away. Honestly, it's part of the assignment to try and then retry your business pitch. Learn, explore, tear some things apart, and see if you can put them back together even better the next time.

When I got started making bow ties, my main goal was to look and feel good. I didn't have much of an elevator or *Shark Tank* pitch to begin with because the goal was pretty personal. But shortly after I made that first bow tie, I discovered that a lot of other kids and adults wanted my **product**, too. So I had to figure out how to take my passion for making bow ties to the next level—I had to learn to develop my pitch and then to sell my product to my potential customer.

Where I grew up, I didn't have a lot of local leaders or businesspeople to help me out by being my mentor or giving me resources. I had only a few books that I could turn to (and nothing about being a young businessperson, either). I did find inspiration in the book *Reallionaire*—the story of Farrah Gray, who started his business by selling pet rocks and then flipping the profit from that into beginning another business (he eventually became a millionaire by age eighteen).

I also sought out stories from designer Daymond John. I wasn't as interested in the stories of him pulling down a million in sales, but rather I was captivated by the narrative of him and his mother making hats in their garage when he was just starting out in business. I felt inspired; if Daymond could come from nothing and become one of the most successful figures in fashion and television by the age of twenty, what was stopping me from trying to do the same at nine years old?

What I found by reading these stories is that the people who are most successful early on are the people who are most

comfortable talking about their business and aren't afraid of putting themselves out there. And that's what you *have* to do in order to become a successful young entrepreneur.

Remember, if you're stuck as you start thinking about your pitch or if you wonder where you'll use your pitch, turn to the BOWS of Business for guidance:

BELIEVE in your ability to improve over time.

OPPORTUNITIES to give back are always a great way to get word out about your business. In the examples of the lawn-mowing business and the lemonade stand, Karen and Dave offered people helpful information about whether they could save money on their lawn care and about a new beverage.

WORK HARD! Your pitch will change over time, and it might also change depending on who you are talking to.

SEEK SUPPORT from friends and family whenever you are doubting your goals or your business. Test out your pitch on someone you trust and ask for their honest feedback, so you can make it even better for those times when you really need it to work for you!