

Chris Nichols: [00:02](#) Welcome to the Open For Business podcast. My name is Chris Nichols, and I lead our business banking team in the greater Washington market. M&T is committed to serving our communities by providing helpful advice and information, like these discussions, to share the stories and insights from our business owners.

Chris Nichols: [00:17](#) Today we're talking with Angel Livas about the unique challenges facing female entrepreneurs. Angel is an M and T client and we've been working with her for a little over three years. As president of DC Media Connection, she and her group help corporations, government, agencies and not-for-profits tell their brand stories to the world. Welcome, Angel. Thanks so much for being here.

Angel Livas: [00:39](#) Hey Chris, thank you for having me.

Chris Nichols: [00:41](#) Let's jump right in. We know that starting a business can be a big challenge. What motivated you to take the plunge?

Angel Livas: [00:49](#) For me, I had been working in corporate America for about 15 years in the media space and while I was on maternity leave, I found out I was not going to have a job to go back to. I looked for another job and shortly found out nobody could afford me. Nobody could meet the salary requirements that I had been previously making. I said, "Well, if I'm going to take a pay cut, I'm betting on me. I'm not going to just sit around and go backwards in life. If I'm going to do this, it's going to be to build my own personal brand." I wanted people to recognize my name and the person that I am and the work that I'm able to build and do for others.

Chris Nichols: [01:27](#) You've worked for immediate companies, big and small. How did you take that experience working at those companies to when it came time to build the Angel Livas brand?

Angel Livas: [01:36](#) I literally realized that I had worked with such huge names from Larry King to Jane Pauley to Russell Simmons to Jane Fonda. I had worked with all of these phenomenal individuals and I realized I had to come to grips with, it's not this huge brand behind me that's making this magic happen. It's me. I'm the one that's doing the work. Yes, the brand got the people here, but I'm the one that's keeping them here and if I believe enough in myself that I can execute and I can get all of these amazing things done for other companies, why can't I do it for myself? That's when I realized, OK, it's time. It's time to build my brand and implement all of these different teachings that I've learned over the years.

- Chris Nichols: [02:17](#) I've heard you talk about the peaks and valleys of entrepreneurs. What were some of those valley moments that you had as you were building and starting your business?
- Angel Livas: [02:26](#) Well, valley moments I feel like are a dime a dozen. I think we all have a tremendous number of valley moments, but one in particular that really stands out is when I first started my business. Actually, I have two, but one in particular. I walked into a meeting and the people just kind of looked at me like, "Oh, well where's your boss?" And it's like, "No, I am the boss." When you say that, people are like, Hm, a little taken aback, but then you really have to make sure that you know your stuff, you're on your A game and that you can execute and you can deliver. It's one thing to walk in and say, "I'm a boss and I'm going to present these amazing things," but you really have to be able to back it up and I know I can, so I was good.
- Chris Nichols: [03:10](#) Love it. And how about those peak moments?
- Angel Livas: [03:13](#) The peak moments, those are the times where you're just like, "Oh my gosh, you thought that you could do something," but then when you actually get recognized for the work that you're doing to me that is one of the most amazing accomplishments that you can have is when you have somebody else to recognize the work that you've done. This year alone, I received a Communicator Award for one of our productions that we've done as well as our radio show. That was a huge accomplishment to receive the Communicator Award, and tomorrow I'm actually traveling to New York to receive another award for Women To Watch in 2020.
- Chris Nichols: [03:59](#) I imagine going from starting your business, growing it and realizing some success and you mentioned some of those accolades. You still have to stay sharp and on top of your game. Could you share with the listeners what are some of those things you do to continue to learn and grow?
- Angel Livas: [04:12](#) Yeah, no, absolutely. I think that it is so important to keep your mind active and we can easily get so wrapped up in the things that we already know how to do that we forget as times are changing, so is the world. The summer is a great example. I went into my local M and T bank and I was just randomly talking to the branch manager and he was like, "Oh my goodness, you'd be a perfect candidate for this upcoming Mount Vernon leadership training program. It's going to be the inaugural class and I think you'd be great." And I was like, "Really?" I was like, "Well, send me the information." He was like, "Yeah, I got you

one better." He printed out the page where I needed to go apply all of the information and I went in, I applied and I actually got accepted into the program. But it's things like that where you're working not in these silos, but you're building a community within your community with other leaders, with other people in business. You can learn, grow and share information with one another. I think that that's imperative— to not only your personal growth but also your business growth.

Chris Nichols: [05:15](#) And I've had a chance to listen to your podcast. You have your own podcast, The Woman Behind The Business. I imagine interviewing some of those leaders and people helps, as well as you get perspective and hear their stories.

Angel Livas: [05:25](#) Oh, absolutely. What I don't think I've ever shared with them is that just as much as me being able to pull out their story, it's beneficial to our audience. It is such a blessing for me because I'm continuously able to learn and remember that I'm not alone on this journey. A lot of times people think, "Oh, well when you're in business, I get free time. I can do whatever it is that I want to do. I don't have anybody to answer to." But the reality is you just have more people to answer to. You're getting clients. Just making sure that you're open, and I feel like the radio show allows me to be open to new perspectives and new ideas.

Chris Nichols: [06:08](#) The financial aspect of starting a new business is so critical. How did you prepare financially to start your business? What were some of those critical decision points that you faced?

Angel Livas: [06:17](#) I grew up surrounded by two entrepreneurial parents, so I was able to see what it takes, just a structure of things that you need to do. My dad always said, "You always have to be one step ahead. You always have to prepare in the event that your company tells you, 'we no longer need you for your service.'" Having that always in the back of my mind, I was always prepared financially. I always saved a lot. I always made sure I had, they say three to six months of disposable income to be able to live off of. I had those things, but then I also had a hefty 401k that I put money into. Where I was working less, I have a pension. Saving, I'm keen on that.

Angel Livas: [07:03](#) When the time came for me to start my business, I had capital, I had money personally that I was able to invest in what it was that I believe was my vision because I think that it's extremely important to realize if you don't believe in your vision, if you're not willing to invest in your vision, why would you expect

somebody else to? That was one of the key elements because then even if you go to family and friends, they may say, "Well, how much have you put in? You asking me for my money? How much have you invested?" At least I was able to say, OK, well I had \$20,000. Can you match that or can you help me put toward something? Even going to the bank, they want to see: "Do you have some skin in the game or are you just coming to me looking for a handout?"

- Chris Nichols: [07:47](#) I love that. It's so important to be thinking far ahead and preparing in advance. You mentioned that earlier—of betting on yourself—and it sounds like this financial aspect of it falls right in line with how you described that, so appreciate you sharing that. Who are some of the mentors that you've had throughout your journey and what advice would you have to the listeners who are maybe looking for a mentor?
- Angel Livas: [08:10](#) I love mentors. I always say, it takes a village to raise a child and I believe that it takes a village to raise a successful person. You need to have a village around you to pour into you, to really give you sound advice and to really guide you in things that they've been through. I literally have an array of amazing mentors. Honestly, I have some people who don't even know that they're my mentors, but they're my mentors because I don't think that a mentor is somebody that you have to sit down and have coffee with and be like, "Oh, let me pick your brain." Please don't tell somebody that if you really want them to help you. Just say, "Hey, do you have three minutes or five minutes? I just have this one idea. Can I just throw this by you just to see how would you respond or do you think that this is a good thing to do?"
- Angel Livas: [08:56](#) My mentors: I have men, I have women, I have different ethnicities. I have people from other countries because there's value in things that they've done and things that they've been through. And if I want to do international business, I can't just have the perspective of someone from America. I need somebody who's in another country to be able to aid me and guide me in that direction.
- Chris Nichols: [09:17](#) I know you've worked with Ballou and she's been a big help for you. Can you talk a little bit about that relationship? Ballou's one of our relationship managers here in the greater Washington market.
- Angel Livas: [09:26](#) Yeah. When I first met Ballou, my nonprofit, we had a retreat in Nassau and I went in and I said, "I am short about \$5,000. I need

to see if I can qualify for a loan." She was like, "Oh, I'm sure it won't be a problem, "and she had such a bubbly personality. I'm like, "OK, let's try this." Within literally, I think it may have been five minutes, she comes back. She's like, "OK, you're approved. The money will be in your account." I'm like, whoa, OK. But having somebody that you can go to that has taken the time to really investigate who you are, and I think that that's one of the things that people need to be mindful of.

Angel Livas: [10:07](#) Your banker, you have to have a personal relationship with that person. You have to really share who you are, what you're doing, what your vision is. They can't buy into what it is that you really aspire to do if you're not honest. You have to tell them, "This is my situation. This is what I'm trying to do." Then they can really help you and say, "Okay, well this might be a good avenue or I think you need to wait a couple more years, flesh out your ideas," but you really have to be able to be transparent. If you're able to be transparent, then your banker can really help you, guide you.

Angel Livas: [10:44](#) Me personally, I mean I know this is a business show. I hate finance. It's just not my thing. It's just not. I lean on Ballou so much more than she probably even realizes and one of those people who probably didn't know that they were a mentor, she's one of them because I'm not skilled in degrees, certified in finance. I can do a whole lot of great things in other areas and I know what those areas are, but I lean on my banker to be my sound financial advisor.

Chris Nichols: [11:14](#) Having so many responsibilities, running your business, being able to rely and delegate responsibilities to the experts, that's definitely something that we take a lot of pride in is trying to be that financial expert and take that off your plate and provide you advice and support with it so that you can focus on what you do, which is running and growing your business.

Chris Nichols: [11:35](#) Angel, this has been a ton of fun. Thank you so much for being here and sharing your story and your journey as a female entrepreneur with us. We wish you all the best and we look forward to continuing to be your partner along the way. Come back soon for more stories and insights from your fellow entrepreneurs. I'm Chris Nichols for M&T's Open For Business podcast. Thank you for joining us.