

Julie Jumonville
UpSpring Baby

Lorin: Julie, as founder of UpSpring, why don't we begin by having you talk a little bit about the Milkscreen product, and those that have followed?

Julie: Sure. Well, first of all, I am a co-founder, along with Lisa Williamson. And now, I'd love to tell you about Milkscreen. It is a two-minute test to detect the level of alcohol in breast milk. The whole purpose of the product is to extend the life of breastfeeding. As you know, with children, Lorin, we all err on the side of caution. The way I like to say it is we are a myth buster. People think that you can pump and dump and the alcohol in the milk goes away, but that's not true! It's just like blood. It takes time. It takes metabolism. One woman's size can be very different from mine, so the amount of alcohol she had and how long it's going to be in her system is very different, too. So, we created a no-guesswork, simple two-minute test for a mom to know exactly when alcohol is not in the breast milk and when she should use an alternate source to feed baby.

And, then we have Walking Wings, as well, which is a learning to walk aid and we are about to launch the first ever, portable SIDS monitor. We also have a whole suite of diagnostic products that are either in development or at the FDA for approval right now.

Lorin: So, how did UpSpring Baby happen? What was your vision?

Julie: First of all, I have a Civil Engineering degree with a Master's in Environmental Engineering, and this is actually my second entrepreneurial venture. I started a consulting firm in 2001 called Avery Environmental Services. (Avery is my daughter's middle name.) So, in 2001, I started a company with women who were laid off. I put them to work part-time, or a little bit more than part-time, and paid them a full-time salary, so they could do things with kids and work when they want to work, because we are a consulting firm. The company is still going great and alive today. It just doesn't have my involvement anymore.

Lorin: Well, that's a beautiful thing.

Julie: Yes! Some of the women I have worked with for nine years have taken over the company. They get strategic advice from me and they know that my main goal is to keep the work-to-life balance and when they are looking at bringing on other consultants or other moms that they respect the same values that I started the company with. So, that's where I kind of got started with my entrepreneurial success.

But during that whole period, my heart-of-hearts and what I've always wanted to do was to bring a product to life. I have had this green journal next to my bed and, for the past fifteen years or so, I've saved product ideas of different things that I thought were either needed in the baby industry or in the engineering field – or that the Sampson Semi-Conductor would need to make their processes better. I've just always been someone that's catalogued ideas.

Lorin: I love that! So, did you have a vision for that little green notebook?

Julie: You know, that's a very good question. I think I *did* have a vision within that notebook. It's kind of like when you are about to take the step to get married or have a baby, it's always, "Is it the right time? Do I have enough money? Can I support my family? Are all of these kind of social things in line before I can take that step?" My wonderful husband kind of pushed me over the edge when he said, "Julie, you've had all of these ideas for so many different years, this is obviously your passion. I'm going to push you off the edge of this diving board and we are going to do this!"

Lorin: That's a great husband!

Julie: Isn't he? I do have a great husband. You know, ideas are great, but execution is key! Without him pushing me over the edge into the pool, for lack of a better term, Milkscreen or UpSpring Baby would not be here today.

Lorin: How long ago did you start UpSpring Baby?

Julie: I actually started Milkscreen first, nights and weekends, when I was working and running my engineering company. So, I had Milkscreen and I met some women in Austin, Texas, who had another baby product. We soon realized that I had an amazing, innovative roadmap and they had the execution part of it in place – distribution, operations, and sales. In April 2007, we combined Milkscreen and Walking Wings to form UpSpring Baby.

Lorin: You sound amazingly able to let go and let someone else run with the other stuff. Does that make sense? Like even with the first business, you were able to let other people run it.

Julie: I don't know that that is so much conscious or more unconscious, but I think that a lot of successful entrepreneurs share this same philosophy. *I always hire people that are smarter than myself.* I quickly realized that I am better at support, strategy, innovation, and providing resources than I am at being a “devil in the details,” making sure that the wastewater treatment plant gets designed appropriately. So, while I am definitely a doer, at the same time, there are people that do those execution pieces. In the case of Avery Environmental, designing a wastewater treatment plan or management system, there are those who handle that project management much better than I do.

Even at UpSpring Baby, my gift to this company is innovation and strategy – and it's taking care of my employees, hiring the right employees, and bringing in this financing. We have just raised a seriously large sum of money in these poor economic times. We've done really well with that.

Lorin: Beautiful!

Julie: Those are my gifts, as hard as it is sometimes to separate what you're good at and what you are not. At the start, if I didn't have the luxury of delegating, I would mail stuff myself. I would go to FedEx and drop off packages. I would do whatever it takes! But I *do* know where my strengths and weaknesses are, and try to stay in the area of my strengths.

Lorin: I think, as women, that we try to do it all, and we tend to do too much on our own. So, I think that's really important, and I am hearing you say it in regard to both of the businesses. It's like you let go of Milkscreen and merged with Walking Wings to form Upspring Baby because your partners had strengths that you didn't and vice versa.

Julie: Right.

Lorin: Brilliant. I think it's just smart, smart, smart! I am curious if at the beginning of either one of these adventures, you had a vision for what was possible with all of these ideas? Or was it just the idea that you thought maybe someday that you'd get to it? Did you see it beforehand or did you not?

Julie: You know what? The best way that I can describe it is that innovation was the key. I had a clear path in my mind to the thought, "I will bring a product to market."

It's interesting to me that it was Milkscreen, and I am thankful that it was Milkscreen, because it took me down this amazing path to provide wonderful products to mothers and babies. It was very, very clear. You know, I prayed. It's always been something like super-nagging – to have this little notebook that looks at me every night. If I have ideas, I have trouble sleeping so I have to get up in the middle of the night and jot them down.

Julie: I just have always *known* I would do it. But, my husband and I have worked really hard and, in some respects, I have really played the role in our family of providing the financial support, so there is a lot of fear in going after a vision or a product or an entrepreneurial type of venture with the risks that it poses. So, it was just kind of praying and having to get support from my husband. But it has been hard! It's not been easy. Starting Milkscreen while having another job was one of the most challenging things that Jeff and I have ever experienced. So, the vision has always been there, but the defining moment was when I was able to let go and know that these people that I had groomed and taken care of at Avery could take this

business and run with it and do as well or better than I could. Then, my husband, our faith, all of those stars aligned. It's just...it's crazy!

Lorin: I've talked to a lot of women business owners and that has really been a theme running throughout. In other words, when you do the bold thing that you internally know needs to be done, you go for it.

Julie: That's right, and that is my message now. This is the boldest move, I think, of all of the moves that I have made, just in the last year or two. I would stand on the rooftop or I would take out a billboard and encourage women to step across this internal line that they've drawn for themselves to follow their vision. When they do that, the stars align and success follows. You are happy personally, professionally, and that's when life really starts getting good.

I really believe that when you take that step and do what everything in your body and your head is telling you shouldn't do it because of the risk factors, that's when things are okay and things work. Everything comes when you are doing what you love to do and you take that leap of faith. Women are such amazing caretakers and a lot of the reason I didn't take this monumental step earlier is the loving, giving, caring nature I have for my employees, the people that had worked with me at Avery for eight or nine years. I think that is a big part of just women in general. We are such caretakers that we are concerned with what gets left behind. What you really find out is that everything is okay or better when you take that step. I am sure these women are going to go, "We were wondering when you were going to move on to the next phase."

Lorin: They are happy for you!

Julie: Exactly! They are so happy and so supportive and the company is running like a champ! I just have to check in once a month.

Lorin: Wow!

Julie: Yeah! It's great! I think the big point in why women drag their feet and don't ever cross that line is because they are caretakers and they are worried about what they are leaving behind. It could be children; it could be husbands.

Lorin: So, was it following your intuition or was it finally making a decision or both?

Julie: It was following my intuition...more than finally making a decision. Following intuition, faith, and my husband.

Lorin: How would describe the relationship with your husband, and how do you attribute his role in your success?

Julie: Well, I guess I am going to speak from example. One thing that he's always said is that I am the racehorse and he's been kind of riding or supporting the racehorse in kind of a jockey-type of a fashion. It's an interesting analogy, but we made a very clear conscious choice to let me start Avery and let me run that. He's never been a stay-at-home dad. He's a very successful salesman and he's just always chosen jobs that created flexibility, so that we didn't have to give anything up at home. He has supported me throughout all of these ventures, including going to circle time and playing the silly beanbag games with the kids if I was traveling and not able to be there that specific week. So, that's one definition of support.

The other is – and I don't know how many women can really be honest about this – but it was *so* hard to start a product. I had never been in the products business before and so nights and weekends, during the first year of starting Milkscreen, Jeff would sit in on 8:30 p.m. conference calls with our marketing National Public Relations outsource folks, and with our manufacturers and packaging people. He actually would listen in and provide support. Eventually, he quit his job to get the operations of Milkscreen started.

We didn't have any money. We didn't have any funding, except for whatever we were self-funding, so he quit. He got us an office. He got our FedEx carrier lined up. My husband actually made a huge change in his career path to stop, take six

months, focus, get the operations started, and get this launched. So, he believes in me. He absolutely, positively, loves and believes in me.

Lorin: And he believes in your vision!

Julie: Yes! He's kind of seen it in bits and pieces all along with the green notebook. We always joke about it. He took some major risks and if you think about men, it's an identity risk, too, when he tells someone, "Oh, I'm quitting to go start my wife's breast milk strip business."

Lorin: I'd love to meet your husband.

Julie: I know! He's so great! He really took the business to the next level. He didn't just talk-the-talk, he literally walked-the-walk right next to me. We did this event to kind of kick off the launch of our product that supported the Mothers' Milk Bank here in Austin, which is a wonderful nonprofit. He basically put on a pink shirt and pink tie, because that was our color scheme back then, and was walking around helping us with this event, talking to all kinds of moms, telling them about the products. When you have support and love like he's shown, it makes it a little bit easier to walk across that line. But, yes, he saw the vision and he decided to make choices. I feel like men identify and associate themselves with their careers. He has actually done the opposite of that in order to support me. Interestingly enough, we have made a conscious effort to now focus on Jeff and he has had his first week at a new job in something that he is super passionate about and is probably his thing, his vision. So, it's really exciting.

Lorin: My next question is about how you set and achieve the hurdles along the way, the goals? How did you set and achieve them? I am hearing something really important in your stories thus far and that is structure. You had structured the morning for Milkscreen, the afternoon for golf; the structure was there. There was a lot of self-discipline.

Julie: Structure is very important and when my kids were born, I even set a structure for them, because I felt like I would set the structure for them and they would feel

confident and know what to expect. If your baby is well rested, then your baby is well behaved and happy. So, that is just my personality. It's structure and knowing what to expect for myself as well as for my family and my children. Really, I have to say, Jeff, Grace, Reece, and the Big Man Upstairs are top priority.

Lorin: Yep.

Julie: So, we set our structure. It takes just a little bit of extra planning. Cooking the extra chicken breasts on Fridays, making sure that everything that is going on with the kids is set out and ready to go. So, on the personal side I'm very structured; on the business side, my *preference* is to be structured, but when you start a venture with another job it makes it a little bit more challenging. But, I was able to again structure my nine-to-five job around getting Milkscreen started, and then Jeff kind of helped augment and support that. The structure, peace, and really being prepared personally and professionally is a big part of being successful in my opinion.

Lorin: So, talk to me a little bit about the craziness that can happen, when the structure goes away.

Julie: Well, you know what? I really do believe in spontaneity and I practice it with my children. My daughter is very structured like I am. I think that they are just born with it. The whole thought of her getting a "tardy" at school just about sends her over the edge. So, I acted like I was taking her to school one Friday last summer and took her to the lake instead to go wakeboarding. It was just to say here's extra-special time with Mom, and a "tardy" is not that big of a deal, because you have to have some flexibility. Structure is amazing and it really helps to be prepared, but at the same time you need to be able to handle and enjoy spontaneous things.

Lorin: That was such a good lesson for her!

Julie: It was!

Lorin: Oh, my god! I wish someone had done that for me. I was just like her. I freaked out if I missed school!

Julie: I guess because I am so structured, I want Grace to have a little bit of flexibility in her life. Here's another example: I was in China for a business trip and Jeff had the flu and he was watching both kids. She got up my younger child, got him dressed for pre-school, fed him, then woke up her dad and said, "Dad, I missed the bus. I need you to take me to school." Jeff was in his pajamas because he had the flu and said, "Grace, just go in and get a tardy slip. Tell them why you are late and go to class." So, I get an email in China from the principal that says, "I have to share this with you. Grace came in, said, 'I need a tardy, because my mom is in China and my dad just can't do it all.'" (Laughing)

Lorin: Oh, my gosh!

Julie: So, that's my child.

Lorin: How old is she?

Julie: She is now eight. She was six then.

Lorin: That's amazing! Tell me how you figured out the whole work-life balance thing. It sounds like you are brilliant at it. How did you figure it out? What is your formula?

Julie: It involves a lot of communication. We have something called "Everything Wednesdays" and we talk about anything and everything. The kids actually cook on those nights, so it's either Frito pie, pizza or tacos, because that's all they know how to make. Then we just start our dialogues and we talk about our week.

If I am going to be traveling, I talk to them about traveling like, "Grace, what can you do to participate and help while I am gone? Here are some of the things that I typically do. How can you help out?" The same goes for my son, Reece. On Wednesdays, we communicate about anything that's out of the norm, like mom traveling, dad traveling, something special coming up. Also, they've asked

questions like, “Do you have a tattoo? Why don’t we have video games, Mom?” It’s just a forum really to create open dialogue and to keep communication going.

That has really been one part of my formula to success on the personal side, because I am able to say, “Hey, the Milkscreen launched in Walgreens!” And, Grace will go, “In all stores, Mom? Is it in the new planogram?” I mean, she knows the words, because we are constantly communicating about what’s going on at work. So, I feel like that’s a big piece of the work-life balance because it helps us plan for what’s coming up in the next week and gives them a chance to ask any questions and really understand why Mommy might have to run to a business dinner, that type of thing. We just talk through it. And, then, if we have a busy or a heavy week when Mom is traveling, then we plan something like a family golf day and we go play eighteen holes together. We just make sure that that time is balanced and that everybody is getting what they need.

Lorin: There’s a way that you, as a mom and a successful entrepreneur and business owner, *are* with them in the world that’s just so special...

Julie: I’d have to say that it’s quality versus quantity. I am such an advocate for that. I joke because my son is going to be a wealthy land owner, because he beats us when we play Monopoly. There’s no Blackberry in sight. It goes away and the kids know and respect this. We don’t have video games and that’s just a personal choice. We do have Rock Band, because we love to play it together and my daughter is actually in a rock band. But, it’s very, very, focused time and it’s very honest. I communicate with my children on everything going on like, “Grace, I kind of had a bad day today and it’s because you know the sell through on the product is not doing very well.” I kind of explain what that means. My time with her not a “TV on” type of thing. It’s definitely quality versus quantity, and that’s just how I have to do it.

Lorin: How were you able to create two companies, not just one? It’s not like you did it once and it was an accident. You’ve done it twice!

Julie: Well, I believe in culture. I believe that you have to create a culture that is adaptable. We have a lot of “A” players here. We are beyond a start-up, but we can’t afford some of the “A” players at a full-time capacity, so some of our amazing “A” players that come from Fortune 500 companies to help us and to support us are either in a consulting capacity or in a three-quarters time capacity, but you get so much from them. What I have learned is that you get so much out of that thirty hours from that happy mom that is able to spend time with her child, or with a consultant that we necessarily can’t bring in full-time. They’ve got so much knowledge and can deliver so much in ten to fifteen hours.

Julie: For example, they are doing this thing at my kindergartner’s school tomorrow, and I will be there at 3:30 p.m. decorating for this party, because that’s important. We’ve created that culture here and I think that you get so much more out of people when they have a little bit of flexibility. They feel good, they are happy at work. That’s a similar philosophy to what we have at home.

Lorin: You are speaking to being fully present, like whether you are a mom going to decorate at school or whether you are in the office or delivering as you said stuff that needs to be shipped to UPS, you are present one hundred percent.

Julie: I feel like, in most cases, that’s true. We just raised this big round of financing, so I feel like I was very present for that activity, but I really have to say I wouldn’t be successful without my business partner, Lisa Williamson. She is amazing! We are Yin and Yang. I was present for the fundraising, but I have a lot of pain and guilt because I wasn’t present for my staff. That was a road show, so I think that yes, I do think I am very present. I think that hits the nail on the head. But, being a mom, you have some guilt when you do things different ways. When I am having to travel or do something specific because it is necessary for the business, it pains me because I feel like I am not managing or providing the resources for staff at the level that I am used to for the amazing people that work with me.

Lorin: On the other side of that, it sounds like you are really effective. When you are away doing your thing, obviously you are effective in getting the funding and you

are doing the job that really is the best job for you and not just for you, but the business and everybody around you.

Julie: That is absolutely true. There are areas where I am strong: doing PR and doing an interview, fundraising, strategy, thinking up the products. Most of the products that we have are my invention. But one of my biggest weaknesses (and I hope that someone can learn from this) is taking that innovation and moving it through the product development cycle. There are so many steps. I do a disservice to my company when I participate in that kind of product development. There are key areas where I add good input and, in some cases, I have got to jump in and do that, but I am not as efficient or as effective and it is frustrating and hard for me. But, at least I can recognize that. I am honest about it and try and stick to the areas where I am best suited. My partner comes from the corner office at Pepsi. She has a background in consumer products and accounting. She's brilliant! The distribution for our products and our branding is all Lisa Williamson. That is zero Julie Jumonville. Without that, I wouldn't be here. Again, ideas are great or cheap, but execution is key.

Lorin: Yep, and having the right partner.

Julie: So, I don't have the whole picture.

Lorin: You are smart enough to move over when it's time to move over.

Julie: But the problem is, in this size company, you are needed. It's hard. It's challenging for me and I think everybody here knows what my strengths and weaknesses are. What's interesting is that we've created a great culture where Lisa can walk down and say, "I know you are struggling with this. What can I help you with?"

Lorin: Yeah, wow!

Julie: There are people that jump in and help. So, it's great – a very collaborative environment.

Lorin: It sounds like it!

Julie: It rocks. It's so much fun.

Lorin: How many people work in the company?

Julie: Thirteen.

Lorin: Nice size. I love that size. That's one of my favorite size companies.

Julie: It's so great.

Lorin: I am curious about the role of money and/or abundance in your life. How has money played a role, if at all, in your success?

Julie: I love this question! I am *in* for this one! So, Jeff and I have been married...it'll be thirteen years in August. I'm thirty-seven and he's thirty-five. We got married right out of college and have kind of done everything on our own. We had some significant kind of stock options that crashed in 2001 with everybody else's and we basically have started over. Money has not...let's just say we haven't had a cushion. We didn't have a cushion to start Milkscreen. I think we put in \$25,000 and someone else put in about \$12,000, but we had no cushion, except for the small amount that we knew we could use for the time that Jeff was getting the business started. So, we have been on the other side where there hasn't been the security of money to jump off the diving board and start that. And, we still really aren't. UpSpring is really our big savings opportunity, I guess.

Lorin: So, how does money motivate you? Are you doing it for the money or is it totally something else?"

Julie: No, it's actually going to Babies-R-Us, going to Walgreen's, and seeing something that I invented on the shelves. It's starting something and I know the definition of finished is going to be different with anyone that you talk to. I am finished with one product. I took something in a consumer product industry that I knew nothing about, took it from idea to patent to shelf, and that is the most rewarding thing because I can share that with Grace and Reece. You know? I

went from being an engineer to consumer products. But that's been my vision and what I wanted to do. I am trying to train them and want them to be okay at eighteen to the point that they can make the decision to follow their vision earlier than I did. That's my motivation.

Lorin: You've alluded to it earlier, but what role does spirituality play in your life and in your business, and what is your relationship there with that aspect of your life?

Julie: You know, one thing that we consciously did at the beginning of our marriage was address our different upbringings. Jeff and I are interesting. The first thing that Jeff's Louisiana Catholic grandmother said to me when she met me is, "Are you Catholic?" I had to tell her, "No, but I'm really nice!" (Laughing) I'm Baptist. So, at our wedding a Catholic priest and the minister that I grew up with my whole life married us together in my Baptist church, which is just unheard of. I actually did everything that we needed to have our marriage recognized in the Catholic Church, but never did the classes to convert. The reason for that is because Jeff kind of took over the spiritual leadership role in our family and found a non-denominational church when I was pregnant with Grace, through some people that he went to high school with and we went there. He really consciously took that leadership role of spirituality in our family and that's kind of where we are. It's interesting, because a strong Catholic boy has taken a major turn!

Lorin: It's amazing!

Julie: Yeah! Exactly! So, as far as just starting with the first business, the way that that plays into Avery...you know, it's named after Grace (her middle name). I was stressed. I was working really hard full-time and I knew that that's my personality. I am an entrepreneur. I am a worker, but I needed to create a situation where I could have more time with Grace. She was my first child, a newborn, so I started Avery and realized that other moms struggle a ton with that same situation. So, I carried my beliefs and my spirituality into Avery. We had no office. I took all overhead out of the game and really did a good job figuring out a structure to pay these women full-time for working about 24 to 28 hours and I didn't care

when they did them. Some people worked better in the middle of the night, because it was consulting. So, I feel like I carried that over and that still, that model is still in place nine years later.

Lorin: That's great!

Julie: I am very proud of that and that's a really good example of how I carried that into Avery. As far as UpSpring, we just have an amazing open culture. I don't know...I feel like that Lisa and I are beyond ethical and honest and very forthright with our team on our financial position, on sales, on every move – so much so that if someone were to come into our company they'd probably say, "You girls are crazy! You're giving out way too much information."

But you know what? I think that it's really working for us. There is total transparency about what's going on. Each of us is literally going to a Walgreens to make sure that our product looks good on the shelf and seeing how many boxes are there. We are really at that pivotal point for the business and I think it's very rewarding for the people that are there. We hand pick the people that are the company and allow them to build their roles, to take a task and run with it, without necessarily a lot of direction, as many startups do. Everyone will ultimately benefit from the success. It is just great to be able to tell your friends and family, "Well, you can walk into Target and buy our product now. We always say, 'we've come a long way, baby.'"

Every single person in this company, including our office support, has shares in the company. It's really important to Lisa and I. Everybody has ownership in UpSpring Baby and we feel like that is beyond important. So that kind of goes to the financial question that you asked. I hear from all of these entrepreneurs in my entrepreneur organizations, "Equity is sacred! You've got to hold onto every bit and piece that you can." Lisa and I have a little bit different philosophy. We really believe that sharing gets you the productivity and that we are going to be winners because of that.

Lorin: I agree with you. I did the same thing, when I sold the company I was a part of. We were a team of twenty so it wasn't much larger than yours, but it's the same thing. I think that the people that don't agree like the old school of leadership.

Julie: Right, and Lorin, I want to be successful with this company so it gives women faith and a story, just like you've been successful in selling a company, starting your new company, and seeing your vision through. I want to do that more than anything, just so I can see other women do the same thing, have the same type of culture, and share with their employees. At the end of the day, there is nothing that would make me happier on this Earth than for me to be an inspiration to someone else to walk over that line and do the same thing.

I think that culture is one of the keys to success. I think if someone really consciously made an effort to compare different businesses and the different types of cultures to see who succeeds and who doesn't, I feel like it's your team. It's your culture. It's what you set up and what you get out of your team as Kimberly mentioned. My team sucks me in at 8:00 a.m., because they have gone into Walgreens and said, "Oh, the product looks great!" I mean, who does that? So, I think there is something to be explored there with culture and peace.

Lorin: Is there anything else you'd like people to know that you haven't touched on?

Julie: I think that it's important for the readers of this book and for potential women entrepreneurs to know that it's hard work. There is personal sacrifice and it takes perseverance to make things happen. It wasn't all roses. There were things that I did to combat all of that, like maintaining a good dialogue with my kids and my husband, and we all bought into what was going on.

We are fortunate to have many women contact us all of the time and I meet with as many people as I can, outside of work. A lot of times I'll say, "Hey, meet me at Waterloo," because they have a park. "Bring your kids and you can run your idea by me while I am with my kids." But, I am very honest with folks and kind of give them two or three steps. "Let's see what the market says about your product. Is there any IP (Intellectual Property)?" Start with two or three things. I'm very

honest with women about whether they've got something or they don't, because I don't want someone to go through the hard times and the hard steps and the financial burden that Jeff and I went through if we know that it can't get there.

In most cases, I can refer people to two or three key things to check out on their own. I tell my personal story, the good and the bad; I have them check an IP (Intellectual Property, which is doing a patent search), and I suggest they do a market survey through Zoomerang (which surveys 300 moms) to see what the interest level is for their product. Those three things right there really help people. I share anything and everything that I can. Do you need a distributor list? Done; emailed. I will help anyone at anytime, because that's how we got started.