

**Lisa Druxman
Stroller Strides**

Lorin: Lisa, give us a sense from your perspective of your story, because I've heard pretty amazing things about it.

Lisa: Well, it's fun. It's definitely fun! Amazing to me!

Lorin: Tell us the amazing part. Tell us how you got where you are today.

Lisa: It was one of those "aha" moments. I had always wanted to be a mom and when I found out I was pregnant, it was the best thing in my whole life, but it was also the worst news because I was a full-time working woman in the fitness industry.

Lorin: Wow!

Lisa: I was working sixty-hour work weeks easily and not thinking anything of it and realized that wasn't going to mesh very well with being a mom. I kept thinking, "What am I going to do?" I really was distraught, because there are not that many career opportunities out there for women who want to have something that is supportive of motherhood.

Lorin: Exactly! This is a really important point. Your perspective is so critical.

Lisa: It wasn't that I didn't like working. I loved to work, but I just wanted to be able to be a mom, first and foremost, and not sacrifice that! Literally, through my entire pregnancy, I had no idea what I was going to do. I still knew I needed to get back to work. My maternity leave was precious to me, and there was no way that I was going to drop my son off at the gym daycare so I could get a workout done. So, instead I created a workout that I could do with him, which was kind of a natural for me with my background. The funny thing was we found it was the best hour

of our day! He loved it! He thought it was hysterical watching me do squats and lunges and getting the fresh air. I loved finally getting my body back and getting exercise, but what was missing for me was I knew nothing about motherhood. That is so funny now, because my whole life revolves around it, both work and my personal life. I just started a class in my local neighborhood and the whole idea came to me within one workout.

I thought, okay, I am going to start a class. I know I can help other moms get their bodies back. They can help me with everything I need with mothering, from nursing to sleeping. You name it; I needed help with it. I even came up with the name, Stroller Strides, in that workout and was pretty proud...

Lorin: Oh, my God, I love it!

Lisa: ...but I didn't have any vision of it being a career. I only pictured it to be maybe a little extra something. So, I still thought I had to go back to work. Long story short, I started a class in my local neighborhood with a few moms. Word took off and it exploded in San Diego and, within a very short time during my maternity leave I realized, "I don't have to go back to work! I can turn this into a business!" I asked my husband to take a leap of faith with me and I created the most amazing business for my family where, at the time, I was only working a few hours a day. My son got to come to work with me every single day. I could work around his nap schedules, bring in an income, and best of all, do something that I really loved and was really stimulating, and I was really a business owner! It was the best of all worlds and I was perfectly content with that. It satisfied our financial need, as well as every emotional and intellectual need, but we started getting requests very shortly, within three months, from all over the country, either women who wanted to start the program or wanted to join the program.

It was then that I realized, “Wow! I might be onto something.” More than thinking of it as a big business, where we could make lots of money, I thought, “Wow! If I could share the blessing that I have had for my family with other moms across the country, that would be my greatest gift.” And, that’s exactly what we did! So, we turned it into a franchise. We started that first year of franchising with just ten locations because we were thinking, “Gosh, I know it works in beautiful California, but does it work in hot places like Arizona or Texas, and in cool places like New Jersey?” So we picked ten and said, “We are going to experiment on you and we’re going to see if it works!” And it worked! They took off and the rest is history! The business has been totally bootstrapped and grown organically. My team has grown every single year in terms of who runs it and how we make it happen, but, as far as our plans go, we’ve never taken our eye off of that original goal of creating careers that are supportive of motherhood and supporting women through motherhood.

Lorin: What was it that had women across the country know about you? I remember hearing about you, and so...I don’t remember when this was, but I remember hearing about your business and saying to myself, “That was brilliant.” Did you do a CD? Did you do a video? What did you do?

Lisa: No, two things happened. The first thing was word of mouth. For the entire time that we’ve had our business we’ve always tracked how people heard about us and, no matter what, the number one way is always word of mouth. And I think that’s the neat thing about doing business with moms. Especially in today’s viral and social media way, word can spread very, very quickly. So, our clients are blogging about us and writing about us on websites and that wasn’t going on as much eight years ago.

Lorin: That’s great!

Lisa: If you were taking classes in Virginia, you called your cousin in Texas and told her about it. So it was very much word of mouth, but I also have to bless and thank the media, because we have been very, very lucky as far as our media exposure. We've created a lot of stories that have come out of this company, everything from the business opportunity to the actual classes. So, once you get media exposure it helps you get other media exposure. When we first went on the *Today Show* for the first time...

Lorin: That's right! That's where I heard about you!

Lisa: Yeah! We've done the *Today Show* three times and we've done *Montel Williams* and *CNN* and *Access Hollywood* and *Inside Edition* and United Airlines and the neat thing is that when we first got on the *Today Show*, then we got coverage in *Entrepreneur Magazine* and *Incredible Things*. Then someone read *Entrepreneur Magazine* and we got something else. So the media has spread the word more than any advertising or anything we could have ever done with any purpose.

Lorin: And, they're talking about how great you are and what you are up to for good reasons, because they want to get the word out and it's timely in the world!

Lisa: Yeah! We still put all of our focus into P.R. rather than in traditional advertising. There are just so many stories that can come out of your business! There are lots of stories for us, from post partum depression to childhood obesity to franchise opportunities for moms. I mean, create a story! They are looking to cover it.

Lorin: And, your timing seems really right, because kids need to see their parents exercise in order to get that it's of value!

Lisa: In today's day and age of childhood obesity and diabetes, we *know* that we need to change our physical activity and how it is to model it for these kids. So, there is another story!

Lorin: So, to date, how many franchises do you have and how's it going?

Lisa: To date, we have three hundred and six franchisees. We have a thousand locations nationwide in forty-seven states. It's growing really well. We were very nervous about this year based on the economy and yet, we are still growing. I don't want to push my luck to say more, but so many women who have been laid off are saying, "You know what? I don't want to work for someone else again. I want to have some control over my business." So, a lot of stay-at-home moms who now need an income are coming to us. We are kind of getting it from both ends due to the economy and we are still having growth, which is great!

Lorin: Are your franchises physical locations or how does that work?

Lisa: That's the neat thing about it and the reason that it's so low cost and such a turnkey franchise. They don't need a brick and mortar location. Our franchisees meet everywhere from parks and skating rinks to traditional health clubs, and a lot of malls. Our franchisees are everywhere from LegoLand to zoos to indoor science museums.

Lorin: Love that. Beautiful!

Lisa: Very creative.

Lorin: It's sort of a sign of the times. What a wonderful, great story. Some women set out with grand visions of their business and it happens exactly the way that they see it. You didn't. You didn't have a vision for your business.

Lisa: No, not at all. I actually think it's hysterical, because before I started this, I did have a grand vision for this women's health club day spa. I spent probably ten thousand dollars on a business plan and years focusing on how I was going to make it happen and yet I launched this without a business plan.

Lorin: Well, I totally get that! Some people are too attached to the vision and they strangle it. Sometimes we just have to let it go and let it do its thing. But the thing that you did have was a vision for what you saw for your life – the big picture – but maybe not the how-to's of getting there.

Lisa: We created our mission statement very early on, probably in my first three months of the business, and it stands today: "Stroller Strides helps moms to make strides in fitness, motherhood and life." Sticking to that has helped me grow this business, because I keep asking, "Does it fit this?" Are our classes and our offerings helping give women the strength they need for motherhood and to move forward in their lives, both for our franchisees and for our clients, and is it doing that for myself? The only way I have been able to take care of my own family, while growing the business, is in terms of still being able to be focused on them rather than me making a lot of money. I continue to hire more and more people to do the things that need to get done so that we can grow the business.

Lorin: What would you say to women that either do have a vision for their business and/or life or don't? What would be your advice around vision, if anything?

Lisa: You know, I once read a book that had a chapter titled, *A Burned Out Brain Won't Start*.

Lorin: That's a good chapter title.

Lisa: I think that so many moms, so many women in general, but especially moms, are so busy outputting, taking care of everything and everyone, doing all the things that need to get done, that they never get clear, quiet time to just be open. I preach this a lot on my blog and in my articles and people are always going, “Yeah, right. Do you really do that?” But I believe tremendously in the power of quiet. Whenever I am most overwhelmed and most overbooked I will take an entire day off, go with blank paper and nothing else – no phone, no email, no nothing – and just sit at a park looking at the ocean and expect nothing to happen and just sit. That open space, with nothing coming in, is where vision comes from for me. Some people feel like they don’t have time for that. Well, to me, you don’t have time *not* to.

Obviously, part of my business is exercise and so I do it a lot. But whenever I recharge, it’s not the same as when I go for a long run by myself and think. I don’t do it with a purpose; I just do the run! And, all of a sudden I come back with a million ideas and clarity.

Another thing I continue to do regularly works for me that ties into a lot of my articles and lectures is to ask women to take a look at their “to do” list, which can’t even fit on a single page, there’s just so much that needs to get done. I then ask them to take a separate piece of paper and write down the three most important areas in their lives. When I did that exercise myself, it was my marriage, my kids, and my business, and I should say myself, tied into all of that in between. I realize how very little of my “to do” list had to do with my kids, except maybe an orthodontist appointment, but nothing to better them or who they are and nothing to do with my marriage. So now I rethink goal setting and “to do” lists and make sure that they tie into areas that are important to me.

Lorin: So, when you have a vision and it’s time to get some goals on paper, what’s your rationale? I’ve spoken to thousands of women over the years and it’s interesting

that some people think it's really critical to have written goals, some think you shouldn't write anything down, and some don't even believe in having goals, believe it or not!

Lisa: Oh, gosh!

Lorin: I am curious what your perspective is on goals and accomplishing them.

Lisa: I have to know what my target is. There are too many things that need to get done in any given day and every given week, month, or year, and if you don't have direction, you'll never get done what you want to get done, because there are more things to get done than there are hours in the day! So every day you have to make choices about what you are going to get done. Every year, I do a grand plan of my goals for the year and then I break them down so I can say, these are my goals for the month, then I break them down weekly and daily. Do they change? Absolutely! In fact, two days ago I looked at my goals for the year and kind of snickered because what I wanted to accomplish changed. And I think that's totally fine, but at least I had a plan. It wasn't by accident that it changed. I start every day looking at my current "to do" list, which is so overwhelming, and I say, "What are my three M.I.T.'s (Most Important Things)?" I didn't make this up. I think got this from Tim Ferriss from "Four Hour Work Week." What are three most important things I need to get done today? It has to be realistic that I can get them done today. What will I be proud of if I get these three things done today? I make those the things that I focus on first and then the rest falls in place after that.

Lorin: Perfect! You could actually be teaching for Big Fish! The next thing I'd like to have you speak to is this whole notion of having a balanced life.

Lisa: I knew that was going to be one of your questions, and the reason I knew is that I have been writing for www.Entrepreneur.com for three years on mompreneurs

and I can't tell you how many have asked, "Can you write another article on balance?" I'm like, "But I've done that!" and they are like, "Yeah, but..." I guess it's something that we ALL have to work towards every single day and I sometimes feel hypocritical that I write on this and speak on this, because I can't tell you how many days that I don't have it together! I think that you will never feel perfectly balanced and so I kind of acknowledge that to take the pressure off the fact that you are never going to get everything done. Instead, again, pick from those little areas of your life – work, home, or whatever and say, "What are the most important things in each area I can get done?" That ends up making me feel balanced!

Lorin: Beautiful!

Lisa: I interviewed Julie Aigner-Clark from *Baby Einstein* years ago and I asked, "What is the best piece of advice that you have to give?" And I was shocked at what she told me, but it's correct. She said, "The best piece of advice that I give to you is...hire a housekeeper." Her point was only *you* can parent your kids and only *you* can run your business, in terms of being the voice and the vision of it, but it really doesn't matter who does your laundry or cleans your toilet or maybe runs your errands. So look at your life and figure out what can be delegated out. A good example for me was social media. I am overwhelmed by blogs and all of that kind of stuff. One thing that I did this year was to hire some bloggers to blog on my behalf. Now, I wasn't comfortable with someone being my voice, but what I allowed them to do was take blogs I have already written and then repurpose them. I have 10 years worth of articles they can pull from, and that helped spread me farther and longer, without me having to do the work.

Lorin: That was a great idea! I love that idea for us control freaks.

Lisa: Yeah, I can't let anyone else *be* me, but you can pick from my stuff and you *can* sort of be me!

Lorin: That's great! Beautiful, great idea! I love that. I feel really strongly about how women do business and I think that there are some qualities that women have that I want to underscore. One is around what having an intention means to you and the other is what intuition means. For some people they are very separate and for some people they overlap in some ways.

Lisa: One thing that has been true for me is that there are times when I have been so focused on my mission and what I have wanted to accomplish for my business, that I am willing to maybe not make the best decisions, according to what an outside business consultant would think of as a good business decision, based on my intentions for the business. Any franchise consultant will say about many things in my business, including the cost of my franchise, "This is ridiculous, you'll never make money; you don't charge enough." But I am looking at it differently, saying, "Well, I want it to be affordable to my franchisees, to real moms. My intention was that it was not supposed to be for big business owners. They already have enough opportunities."

Lorin: I love that.

Lisa: My intention was, "I wanted this to be for moms!" I'd be making a heck of a lot more money if I thought of it just as a business. But, at the end of the night, I feel good about it!

Lorin: Perfect! So, you are using your intuition on how to price your products, even though a franchise expert might say, "That's too low or that's not the right price!"

Lisa: Absolutely. I don't know why I keep hiring consultants over the years, because every time we're at a tipping point where we feel like we need an expert's opinion, we bring someone on and then we totally disagree with them and I'm thinking, "Why did I just pay that?"

Lorin: Exactly. When it comes down to the bottom line of making a decision for your business, you totally trust your intuition and you rely on it. There is no business model or research that's helping you decide that; it is totally gut!

Lisa: Yes, and another example of good intuition where we are following our gut is we have had the opportunity for years now to bring on investors and partners but my husband and I continue to say "no" because our gut tells us as soon as we do that it's going to be about the money. Then, I would have to work how they would want me to work, but right now, I still can take my kids to school and pick them up and go to work again later at night. It's totally my call! If I want to take a day off every week to be with my daughter, then I can do that! I don't have to ask anyone and our gut tells us that as soon as we bring on partners or investors that is going to change.

Lorin: That takes us beautifully into the next topic. I feel really strongly about how women are being so fully responsible for their businesses, their lives, their homes, and I think that there's a whole new age of responsibility beginning to show up that has to do with choice and confidence. They tend to go together. It sounds like you kind of sort of stepped into that whether it was on purpose or an accident. There was that moment when you did that workout exercise that gave you the vision for your business. You ran with it and took full responsibility for it and never looked back.

Could you speak to how responsibility has affected the success of your business in your life and how you see that you have so many choices? That is such an

abundant thing versus feeling stuck into a corner, because I think choice helps us feel abundant.

Lisa: I think that the most exciting thing for me about being a business owner, since I started Stroller Strides after so many years of working for someone else is I finally get to walk my talk. I worked at the same multi-million dollar health club for a decade! Even though, technically, I was the boss, I really felt very much pigeonholed by what the owners of the company wanted. There were so many times that I wanted to do things differently and I was shut down, because this is what the owner wanted. My greatest freedom with Stroller Strides is I have been able to do it exactly how I want to do it and not have to ask anyone. I take full responsibility if it flops and feel great when it works and there are some times that I have taken big risks.

We are kind of taking one now. We are going to move into these huge offices after being home-based for eight years. So, my gut is telling me, “You know what? Now is the time. We will figure it out and it will work.” There are other times that I am super conservative but no matter what the situation, I feel like I have such freedom to bring on the team members that I want and not have to ask anyone. I am surrounded by the most amazing talented group of women. The energy is unbelievable. I couldn’t trade that for anything.

Lorin: There’s something about walking your talk. I love that phrase. And with your business, it sort of flows back to that other question about intuition – that if you trust your gut and say now is the time, you are fully responsible for that decision, You can say even more confidently, more responsibly, that you *do* have this choice and you are going forward with it, taking full responsibility for the outcome, whatever it may be.

Lisa: Yep!

Lorin: That's entrepreneurship at its best and I think women sometimes tend to play small there.

Lisa: Yeah.

Lorin: What I am hearing is that women who are really successful are not playing small. They are constantly and fully responsible for big decisions.

Lisa: Whenever I speak to aspiring mompreneurs or entrepreneurs, I find that their biggest hold back is risk. They don't want to risk their home. They don't want to risk whatever stability they have. I say, "Just take that leap!" Because I don't want to lose my home either, yet at the same time I realize no matter what happens we'll figure it out. We'll pick ourselves back up. So, when you finally release that, when you say, "What's the worst that can happen?" the world's at your feet.

Lorin: So, how did you get to that place where you said, "What's the worst that can happen?" Because if your gut is saying that you can do it and you trust that voice, that is huge. That will propel you into action – into a fully confident, responsible place.

Lisa: I agree.

Lorin: That places you in a very powerful place to create – to create success, a bigger business, more healthy people in the world, whatever it is! I am wondering if you can speak to what comes to mind as a woman about the way that you need to *be*. And that's like the key word there. What are the components you feel need to be in place in order to create, to manifest, to grow, and to create big goals?

Lisa: I just think there's that belief in yourself, and everything to me comes back to motherhood in a good way. Since I have become a mom, everything that I think about and do is just the model that I want to be for my kids. From the food that I eat to my dealings with clients by employees, I think, "Is there something that I would want to teach my kids in my behavior? And, if there is not, then that's not the right path for me and so it's totally changed my outlook on life. I guess everybody should feel like that, but it holds me accountable in a completely different way.

Lorin: You are wanting to, again, walk your talk. There's also an undertone that I am hearing that it's a place of giving – giving to yourself, giving to the world, and a place of gratitude, too.

Lisa: Oh, gosh! Yeah! I feel like the luckiest and most blessed woman every single day for the opportunities that I have had, because I get women who come up to me telling me they had the same ideas but they didn't do it. The other neat thing that has come out of it, with the success of our business and seeing our dream come true, is that now I feel like anything is possible. I do sense this when I speak to others because we entrepreneurs, once we do something, we're thinking, "Well, why can't I have a television show?" "Why can't I write that?" "Why can't I develop videos?" We all believe that anything is possible and I think that that is great, and, in a sense, anything *is* possible if you just go for it!

Lorin: I love that! Anything *is* possible. I love the innocence in that statement and yet it's total confidence.

Lisa: Yeah, I mean, you just kind of go for it! I wrote a book! It wasn't super successful, but I did it, and I've learned now for the next time how we will make it more successful.

Starting in 2010, I have a video series coming out that's going to be on national television! Again, I think that success builds on success. I think, well, I did this so why can't I do the next thing?

Lorin: Don't you think it's all about what you focus on? Some people will focus on the lack of success or things like the book that wasn't successful versus the things that are.

Lisa: Oh, my gosh! You and I speak the same language. I believe one hundred and ten percent that what you focus on you will achieve.

Lorin: It's the principle in our first book: "What you give energy to will grow."

Lisa: I think that we entrepreneurs are a little delusional. It's like we only (let ourselves) hear the good things. For example, we could go to a job interview that maybe didn't go so well, but we'll only see the good. That positively skewed vision is what gives us the confidence and the belief to move forward.

Lorin: Yes, so it's where you put your energies. That's great! You also sound like you've been a student of your mistakes.

Lisa: Oh...yes, yes, yes! I don't mind making mistakes. I don't mind making mistakes, but I don't want to make them twice.

Lorin: Good!

Lisa: My favorite thing about interviewing other entrepreneurs is asking about two things: "What were your challenges that you overcame?" and "What mistakes did you make?" I think it's because I want to learn from everybody else, so I don't have to make the same ones. Reading about other entrepreneurs and the

challenges they've overcome gives me such a juice! For example, read about Mary Kay Ash. Everyone told her that her business could not happen, that she was bankrupt and it shouldn't happen, and then look at how successful she became. It makes you think, "You know what? I can't allow this little stumbling block to get in my way!"

Lorin: So, what would you say your biggest mistake has been and what did you learn from it?

Lisa: Our biggest mistake was that we did not do our due diligence in the type of attorney that we used when we started franchising. We hired an attorney who didn't specialize in this area and she recommended a license and not a franchise.

Lorin: Oh, wow!

Lisa: So, we actually started as a license and got a year into the business, which took off like crazy! She was right that it was much easier to sell! Then we got a letter from the Federal Trade Commission saying they believed us to be a franchise and not a license and we needed to defend ourselves across the country.

Lorin: Oh, no!

Lisa: We literally spent tens of thousands of dollars that we shouldn't have in converting to a franchise.

Lorin: So what's the latest with that?

Lisa: We were in such a bad position that we had to offer full rescission to every single licensee. It could have bankrupted us! Luckily our licensees were so happy that they didn't mind making the transition, but it was a very scary position to be in.

So, my advice is to find the money to hire the *right* experts – the right professionals in the right spots.

Lorin: And, on the flip side of that, you also just said that you would find yourself hiring consultants but that you end up making the final decision. So, there is a fine line there of when to decide to use an expert and when to give *yourself* credit for being the expert.

Lisa: Yes, there is. Absolutely! I think for me that the things I don't claim to have any intuition on are legal matters and accounting matters. So, those experts are the ones I listen to, but the ones that are more about creating what the model should be for my business are the ones where I end up using my own gut.

Lorin: That is a really important point. I think women across the board would say that those are probably the places that we are not experts, unless we *are*, of course. However, many of us are not and there are places we should not be using our intuition!

Lisa: I allow my controller to one hundred and ten percent control me, because I would just spend! She tells me what we can afford and what we can't and I trust her.

Lorin: One chapter in the book is called "What do men have to do with it?" Would you like to speak to that topic?

Lisa: When I sit in interviews like today I often say "we" when I refer to my husband and I, so people naturally assume that he and I are in business together. We aren't. He has a regular job, but I think it is totally important to have a supportive spouse. Even with all of our confidence and bravado, there will be times that you are going to doubt yourself. There are going to be times that you are going to want to throw in the towel and it is good to have that sounding board there. My husband

has actually given me great advice, which is kind of funny because he's not an entrepreneur at all. In fact, he's the farthest thing from it. He hates risk, but he has believed in my vision and has truly let me put a lot of risk onto our family to make it happen. But, any time I have considered throwing in the towel, he always says, "That's totally fine. I support you in doing that, but I want you to tell me that again when you have gotten over this hurdle and you're in a good time. Then you can tell me that."

Lorin: That's a great response!

Lisa: I grit my teeth and get through whatever horrible thing that we're dealing with, whether it's a legal thing or a money thing or whatever it might be, and I get through it and then he'll say, "Oh, do you still want to sell the company?"

Lorin: That's a great guy.

Lisa: Yeah, so that actually has helped me a great deal!

Lorin: And the other thing is that you are sharing enough so that he can *be* that for you.

Lisa: Yeah, and I do...I am a big believer in that Mars and Venus thing. I believe that our minds, men's and women's, are *totally* different, but there are benefits to the female brain and there are benefits to the male brain.

Lorin: Absolutely.

Lisa: The reality is that a lot of the business world is made up of male brains. So, I think it's also good to sometimes have a male brain, because my business is so estrogen-based, I can't even tell you. Every client and every employee we have is female! So, for me to sometimes hear a male perspective on something can be

very helpful, because our business partners and sponsors are not necessarily women.

Lorin: Well said. I do think that if it weren't for men and their paving the way in so many ways, we would not be doing all that we're doing. Women-owned businesses are booming all across the country!

Lisa: Yeah! Definitely!

Lorin: So is there any last bit of advice you'd like to share?

Lisa: I would just say that this is my advice for parenting as well as business: "Start as you intend to finish." I find too many people who start their business thinking it's just going to be a small mom and pop operation, and that could have been mine, too. Then they realize it's not set up; it doesn't have the foundation that it needs to be a grown up in the big world. So, even if your business is really small, do it right! Hire a professional graphic designer for your flyer or your business card or your website. Don't do it homemade and then have to fix it, because the image that you portray, even if it's the smallest business, might be the last one someone has! So, I think just start as you intend to finish.