

## **Mallika Chopra**

### **Intent.com**

Lorin: Mallika, what was your vision for your business? How did you get started and how did you come up with the idea for it?

Mallika: I actually have a long history of being an entrepreneur. After I graduated from college, I went to Brown University, and during my senior year at Brown, Michael Jackson and I came up with the idea for his Heal the World Foundation, which was a result of him performing at the Super Bowl in 1993.

Lorin: Okay, I didn't know this. This is great!

Mallika: I helped him launch that, which was quite an amazing experience because Michael was at the height of his career at that time. Then, as we all know, he had legal issues that came up, so I went through quite an experience with Michael with all that was happening. After Heal the World did not survive all of his legal woes, I traveled for a time and then, when I came back, I decided to aggressively pursue a job at MTV in New York. I joined their International Marketing Division. It was a wonderful opportunity to join them, actually, when they were launching in Asia. So, I worked on the launch of Asia while based in New York, and I had a great mentor there who really supported me. In a few months, they were going to launch MTV in India, so I went to India as the first person for the relaunch of MTV in India. So again, the entrepreneurial spirit was in that, as I was the first person in India for more than a year. It was an amazing experience.

Lorin: Wow! Good for you!

Mallika: While in India, I met my husband and got married, so I left MTV. We lived in India for awhile then came back to the U.S. and completed our MBA degrees at Kellogg Graduate School. This was about ten years ago, in the heyday of the Internet, and we had an idea for a company. We chose to create the CNN or ESPN of the self-help industry. I think that what really influenced me and has been a

huge influence in my career in general is that I have been very fortunate to grow up with real pioneers in thinking and in business, whether it has been celebrities or politicians or philosophers. One of the things that I also realized was that my time at MTV was an incredible learning experience. I actually had a particular moment when we had just sold a big promotion to Coca-Cola and we were driving back through a slum. I saw MTV on a little TV in a corner of the slum with the children who had no shoes or clothes watching the old MTV shows over there, and I just felt like this is not my calling. I have the opportunity to really use my talents and resources to do stuff for the world that I feel good about. So, when I started this new company, the idea was really to create the CNN or the ESPN of the self-help industry. I always felt that there was no branded kind of media company in this category.

Lorin: So, that's your vision, really.

Mallika: Yeah, yeah, exactly. So, I dropped out of business school to launch that company. We got a lot of financing. Ultimately though, I think we did not have a business plan. We kind of followed what was happening ten years ago in this category. We had this very premier management team, all incredible talent from around the world, and spent a lot of money building an infrastructure. Then, when the market crashed, it couldn't survive that; it really wasn't sustainable. After that, I went back to Kellogg in Chicago and finished my MBA. I was pregnant, actually, (chuckling), so I had my first daughter and I finished in between breast feeding and doing other stuff. I was very fortunate, because, for me, the driving force and support system that I have had in my life is my Mom and the mothers in my extended family. So even when I went back to Kellogg, my mother-in-law came from India to help take care of my baby, and my mom's sister came from India to help me take care of my baby *and* my mother.

Lorin: Wow!

Mallika: So, it's really because of the moms in my life that I have been able to do so much. When I finished my MBA, I decided I wanted to be home with my kids, and it

was a lovely time, because I really could be with my children at home. I wrote two books inspired by them. One was called, *100 Promises to My Baby*. The other is, *100 Questions from My Child*.

Lorin: Those are great titles!

Mallika: Thank you. For me, a lot of my life is trying to balance being a mom and also taking on different projects that I feel strongly about. Ultimately, for me, the most important thing is my family. I see this with so many of my friends who are kind of in this quandary and all the struggling with should they be working, or should they not be working. There is always some sort of guilt about whatever they are doing. I think, for me, it's very important that I have always found that balance and being at home with my kids in the way that I want to be.

Lorin: So, do you feel like you've truly found it?

Mallika: You know, again, I am very fortunate. I think it changes and it's always changing, so when I first had the kids, I was able to go back and it was a great time to be a student, because I had all of these moms supporting me. After that, I just was at home and I was able to write my books. I found someone who has now been with my family for seven years, and I can't even call her a nanny; she's more like another mom in our family, and she has provided a lot of stability. I have basically worked at home while she's been here. I have written my books and launched different things. Because of her, I feel like I have a sense of security. Plus, my mother is in town once a week, so I just have a great support network.

Lorin: In order to do the vision for your life, in order to do the other things you wanted to do, besides parenting, you had to develop a village. You had to develop and create your own village of people.

Mallika: Absolutely. I feel like the community that I have been able to develop around me – mostly women and caretakers – is really the reason that I have been able to do different things.

Lorin: That's interesting to me, because, in your case, it's not been your husband, it's been the women. It's been other women. It's been surrogate moms. It's been your mother.

Mallika: Yes, and what I would say though that is the wonderful thing about my husband is he lets them overdo it! (Laughing) So, when I went back to Chicago, he obviously had to continue working. He's a venture capitalist, so he travels back and forth every weekend from L.A. to Chicago. But we have created a community in our house, which means that our house is very busy with tons of people in and out. Because my husband also comes from a family where his mother was very successful and worked a lot, he is really accommodating to that culture as well.

Lorin: It sort of gives...not that there is permission, but it's like that's the norm for him.

Mallika: Yes, exactly.

Lorin: So, what happened with the vision of creating a CNN type of self-help industry?

Mallika: Yes, well, basically I was at home and I wrote my books. Then, a group of us – my father, my brother, my husband and I, and, actually, a director, Shekhar Kapur – used to email each other a lot about different things that were happening in the world. We came up with this idea to just put up a blog, which was started a few years ago. It was just called Intent blog at first. We used to write about random things that were happening and then I started inviting my cousins to join us, and then other friends, and some good, leading thinkers also joined us. This started so completely different from my original vision, but it's very organic and we really just started putting something up and we found that it took off by itself.

Lorin: Interesting.

Mallika: About a year and a half ago, my younger daughter started going to school. I decided, "You know what? I have more time," or I thought that I would have more time, not realizing that I actually don't have more time. So what I had never been able to accomplish with my potential ten years ago, and what was developing within our blog by itself, led me to say to myself, "Let me try this." I

was very fortunate that I have had angel investors who really believe in me and believe in what we are trying to do. These angel investors kind of came on board over the last year and a half and we really have supported this new site.

Lorin: Beautiful! So, the vision has come...it's in process.

Mallika: It's always in process. Really, I think that the vision is the same in that, if we can use new media, which I think is very powerful as a tool to help people lead better lives, then we define wellness, not just personal wellness, but also social, global, and spiritual wellness. That incorporates a well society and community in human rights and social rights. It includes a healthy planet and everything that is being done to save Mother Earth and provide a connection to spirit. Where it originally was more of a self-help type of vision ten years ago, I think that my family's vision has definitely evolved beyond the personal, to the social and global, as well. Intent definitely captures that and it is ever-changing!

Lorin: It *is* ever-changing. I am curious how have your intentions and your intuition affected your business? Ten years ago, you had your vision and I am hearing you speak in a really gentle way of it evolving.

Mallika: For me, I grew up very much with intention as a driving force. It was something my father always talked to us about. He used to kind of have us state our intents every night before going to sleep. It was different from wishing or praying for anything, it's more just putting out these subtle intentions and planting the seeds that will grow and bloom over time. So, intent was always a big part. The brand was very important to me, so that's why it took time. I took two years to buy Intent.com from the guy who had owned the domain name. He's the blogger on our site and loves what we are doing. That's been very fulfilling, to know that we've been able to take something that he had an intent with in the mid 1990's and grow this site around it.

I think the main thing that I've learned from ten years ago to now is that the urgency and getting swept away by overall market dynamics is something that's very easy to do. But, because this has been an evolution over a long period of

time, that urgency has gone and we have really focused more on figuring out what we can build organically as a community. That, to me, is now the only way we can truly do this.

Lorin: In other words, have it grow organically, but at the same time let the urgency guide the intention. Am I hearing you correctly?

Mallika: I think what I am trying to do is to get away from urgency totally.

Lorin: Okay. Got it.

Mallika: Because that creates an unreal pressure and we are really trying to process this very differently than I have approached my companies in the past, which is let's really let it grow by itself.

Lorin: I see, let the organic things happen and not get swept into the pressures of society and the pressures of urgency.

Mallika: Yes, and I think in that way I have been fortunate that people who have invested in the company are truly angels as well.

Lorin: Literally!

Mallika: Yeah!

Lorin: So, how can you help people understand that there is something that you do that is very unique? I want to capture it, because my sense is that this is a new way of leadership. There is something about manifesting. There is a vision that you are hanging onto tightly and that's the original one you had to create the CNN of the self-help industry, yet at the same time there is a letting go and letting it evolve and blossom on its own.

Mallika: The vision is there and the vision has been there for a long time. People know that I have been wanting to do this for a long time, so a lot of people over the years, even when I was at home just with my kids and writing my books, would approach me because, frankly, they wanted my father involved in other

companies that they were involved in. Secondly, I think over the last ten years as I have watched different companies evolve, one of the things I really wanted to do was look at new business models, kind of the “win-win” business models. So, part of Intent is to be very collaborative. What we are doing is partnering with those others will see as competitors for us. We are actually partnering with them and what we are doing is saying, “Let’s all join together and go out in the market together.”

Lorin: Beautiful!

Mallika: Even in terms of a sales process, we go out with the Beliefnet and Care2 and other sites that are also attracting this audience, so the whole business model has also been very collaborative.

Lorin: Can you help us understand in your mind the difference between an intention and your intuition?

Mallika: I always think of intent as something like planting a seed of what you hope to aspire to be in the future in your life, and that would be personally, socially, globally, and spiritually. But I think intuition is more the way in which we make decisions as we then live our lives. So, intent is like planting that seed, but intuition is the process of how we feed and water the seed and give it some light.

I think intuition is very important to tap into, but I am definitely still a student of this. Because of my MBA training, and my husband being in D.C. a lot, I am very active in understanding what’s happening in business. But, one of the things we definitely have tried to do with Intent is to follow our intuition more than look at what the market is all the time.

Lorin: Exactly!