

# HOW TO TURN YOUR PASSION INTO A PROFITABLE BUSINESS

by Maricel Gentile



From my Lola's kitchen in Manila to being on Food Network, PBS, and Hulu, my journey as a chef and entrepreneur is proof that it's never too late to turn your passion into a thriving business. My name is Maricel Gentile, and at nearly 60, I feel more energized and purpose-driven than ever before. But this wasn't always the case. I left a secure corporate job in my early fifties to follow a dream I had held close to my heart for decades—sharing the rich and diverse flavors of Filipino and Asian cuisine with the world. Today, I've met thousands of incredible people, built a business that has taken me around the globe, and even had the honor of becoming a Chef Ambassador for K-Seafood. If I can do it, so can you.

Leaving my corporate job was one of the hardest decisions I've ever made. At the time, I felt the weight of doubt and fear: "What if I fail?" But what outweighed those fears was the thought of never trying. My passion for cooking, inspired by my Lola who taught me to love the art of creating meals, gave me the courage to leap. I started small, hosting intimate dinners and cooking classes in my home kitchen. These gatherings weren't just about food; they were about connection, sharing stories, and celebrating culture.

Starting a business later in life comes with unique challenges. You may feel like you're racing against the clock, but the truth is, your years of experience are your biggest asset. For me, the challenges ranged from navigating social media to learning the nuances of running a culinary business. I made mistakes, worked long hours, and faced moments of self-doubt. But every challenge taught me something invaluable—resilience, adaptability, and the importance of leaning on your support system.

My big break came in 2019 when I received an unexpected email from Mr. Park and Mr. Um, representatives from K-Seafood and the Korean Ministry of Fisheries. They were looking for a chef to promote Korean seafood to a Western audience. Honestly, I thought it was a scam at first! But after a meeting where I presented a multi-course tasting menu featuring Korean seafood, their faith in my authentic approach led to an incredible partnership. Becoming a Chef Ambassador opened doors I never imagined. It's proof that when you pour your heart into what you do, people notice.

My first community and biggest supporters have been my family, my husband Paul, and my two sons - Paul Martin and Paul Michael (yes, I live with three Pauls). Find your supporters, your first community - be it a spouse, a parent, a sibling, a friend, a co-worker. That one person or people who believe in you so much that they are always rooting for you. If you don't think you have one of those people in your life, then you be your own top cheerleader until that one comes along. One of the most rewarding aspects of my journey has been the relationships I've built. Through cooking classes, catering events, chef's table dinners, and my culinary travels, I've met thousands of people who have become more than customers—they've become friends. I've learned that food has a unique way of bringing people together, creating lasting connections that enrich both your life and your business. Build your community and create something that is larger than yourself.

If you're thinking about turning your passion into a business, here's what I've learned:

- **Start Where You Are:** You don't need a perfect plan or endless resources. Begin with what you have and let your passion guide you.
- **Embrace Challenges:** Every obstacle is an opportunity to learn and grow. Don't let fear of failure hold you back.
- **Build Your Tribe:** Surround yourself with supportive people who believe in your vision. Their encouragement will keep you going during tough times.
- **Stay Authentic:** Your authenticity is your superpower. Whether it's your story, your product, or your service, people connect with what's real.
- **Never Stop Learning:** Stay curious and open to new ideas. I've embraced digital tools, explored new cuisines, and constantly refined my craft.

This one I am still learning - not everyone will cheer you on, some people who you think should be your biggest supporter won't be, and may be your biggest detractor - just smile, and move on. Love them from a distance until either they come around but don't entertain their negative energy.

As I approach 60, I feel a deeper sense of purpose than ever before. My passion for Filipino and Asian cuisines has led me to incredible opportunities. I've traveled the world, from Tokyo to New York, and I'm not slowing down. In the early spring of 2025 I am even releasing my first cook book, which is my journey through Asian cuisines and my story of my journey from my Lola's Kitchen to here today. Age is just a number when you're fueled by passion.

To every woman reading this: it's never too late to pursue what sets your soul on fire. Whether you're starting a business, learning a new skill, or chasing a lifelong dream, know that the journey is worth it. There will be challenges, but the rewards far outweigh them. Your passion has the power to transform not only your life but the lives of those you touch along the way. If I can do it, so can you.

Let's rise together, fueled by passion, purpose, and prosperity. The world is waiting for your story.

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