

Shine!

Inspirational Stories
of Choosing Success
Over Adversity

Volume 2

Featuring Michele Devlin

PROMINENCE PUBLISHING

MIND OVER FINANCES BY MICHELE DEVLIN

From all appearances, particularly on social media, I have a successful life, and it looks like it was easy to come by. My husband, Steve, and I have been married for 17 years. Our jocular teenage son is a blessing every day and our over-friendly and rambunctious border terrier, Ted, rounds out our little family. In a few weeks, we are off to travel through France and Italy and make a point of getting away every 3 to 4 months—preferably to a warm, sunny location because I crave it! We have an idyllic life on the Sunshine Coast and in Vancouver, with homes by the ocean in both areas. I am the CEO of two successful financial companies that I co-own with Steve.

I've written before. I started as a junior reporter while in college. During my time collecting classes at university as a professional student, I managed to beat out master and doctorate students for a job with a world-renown Economist, which ultimately led to being published in his book. Recently I co-authored the Amazon best-selling book *Simple Success Strategies for Women Entrepreneurs*. Not bad for the kid that was told not to go to college, let alone university—because she was “too stupid” to go.

I wasn't stupid, just dyslexic. A trait I passed on to my son, who has an affinity for science and fortunately attends a school that recognizes he just learns differently than the status quo. And, thank goodness for Google! It gave me the crucial resource every dyslexic person needs, an on-demand resource centre so I could look up the word quo because my spell checker couldn't figure it out either!

I wasn't as lucky to have the education my son is now getting, but I did figure out how I learned and that realization opened up my world to possibilities I thought were beyond the reach of this poor kid from Surrey. In adulthood, I had control over my destiny. I had control how I learned. I had control where I learned, and I had control of what I wanted to learn. Education gave me confidence in myself that I knew I had but sometimes didn't let shine through. It was my foundation; it held my values, it was the rock I could go back to—even if only for a visit in my mind.

Our businesses are a reflection of our values and our life choices. That foundation I received in university is something I carry with me in all that I do. Start with building the foundation, creating the infrastructure to hold the concrete that is so malleable upon pouring and so strong when it finds its place, fills in the cracks and turning into the pedestal of strength to hold the living space we call home. Because if we think about living space, it's more than an actual house or other dwelling unit, living space is creating the life we want to have.

WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I love the pursuit of knowledge and education. I am a researcher by nature; I spent quite a few years in university, and I often feel uncomfortable if I don't know something. I love to learn. Even when faced with the daunting news of stage 3b colorectal cancer, I had to learn about my affliction, what was entailed in treatment and how to recover. So, when I come across people going through something that I have information or the knowledge on how to get it, I typically jump in and offer whatever help I can give them. If I can make someone's life easier, I will try. I've been in that place, and I'd rather not see people sitting there any longer than they need to. People came to me too in my time of need, to make things easier for me and that's what life is about. We're not here just to carry on our own individual lives. It will rapidly become a very lonely world if all we are concerned about is ourselves and even lonelier when we need help and there is no one to give it.

We all go through really tough times. If people don't get help or the resources they need, they end up in a place where depression or anxiety can set in. The world doesn't become a better place with the world not sharing. I hope I come across that way, that I'm caring and I want to help people. I want people to feel secure, to feel loved, and to feel their worth.

I can remember when I was a kid always looking for the fairness in life's situations. I really didn't like it when things weren't fair. Some people would attribute that to being a Libra. Maybe, but I do know that I don't think it's fair when people lose their hard-earned money. I don't want people to lose money. We've lost money in past business ventures – we almost went bankrupt once – and we've lost money in the markets, at a time when we couldn't afford to lose any.

Steve and I were buying our first house on Sunshine Coast and the stock market started tanking, so we pulled money out of our retirement savings plan as fast as we could because we were literally losing money every day! That's when we first started questioning the traditional method of savings and questioning our knowledge on how money works. It's amazing how fast you pick up financial knowledge when your money is disappearing!

We help people now because we learned from going through life's challenges. We want to help others to avoid that. Everybody goes through adversity. In life, there are moments of utter joy and moments of deepest despair. To know happiness is to know sadness or there would only be one state of being. You will go through adversity, so you need to know how to not only survive it but thrive despite it.

There's enough adversity in life; money shouldn't be one of them. Challenges happen. Loved ones will pass away, they will get sick, there will be losses and failures in life but if I can help one aspect of that through what I know, I will. This is true even in our business where we help people set up their financial lives. I want to help others get through those tough times a little easier, and that's why I do what I do.

WHAT INSPIRED ME TO MAKE THE DECISION TO DO WHAT I DO

I can't pinpoint one thing that inspired me to make the choices I did, to decide to do what I do. It was an entire life that led up to it. And, it would take an entire book to go into it all, maybe even in a few volumes! So, I'll whittle it down to an event, a few key people, and a book.

We had a very successful business venture, worth a few million dollars, and things looked pretty rosy. Steve and I built it quickly, but about 3 years into it, we saw our business market starting to change. We could see what we were doing might be phased out because of new and upcoming technological trends. We browsed through business ideas online and in franchise magazines. We found one that looked promising and fun to take on. We researched it heavily, went to all the professionals, and everybody said it looked good on paper – but unfortunately reality can present a very different scenario.

We both soon realized what we thought was a good investment of our time, energy and money, turned out to be a very bad decision—particularly financially. Just a year into it, Steve and I were losing so much money, we decided we had to get out as quickly as possible before we lost everything we had worked so hard to get. We had to start liquidating our assets and our house might have to be included because we couldn't see how we could continue to afford to live there.

Fortunately, we pulled all our resources together with the guidance of a dear friend who also recommended a financial software solution that used the principle of cash flow to pay off our debt. That same friend sent us a book. A book that would impact our lives so much, it changed our career paths. It was Pamela Yellen's book, *Bank on Yourself*.

That's when we discovered how to use participating whole life to protect one's whole family in case something happens, like a death. But we also discovered the living benefits aspect to it, the equity that builds up into what is called the cash surrendered value. That cash value builds up over time as you pay your policy and can be used to fund life's purchases or pay off debt.

GOING THROUGH TIMES OF ADVERSITY

I've been through a lot of adversity. For me, being faced with bankruptcy was pretty scary, but it wouldn't be the be-all and end-all. It certainly isn't the worst thing I've been through! I've been very poor and on welfare. I've had serious health conditions, even before my recent one with cancer. It all made me look at life differently. So when our family was faced with this financial disaster, Steve and I thought, "We've got this issue, we're faced with adversity, we're probably going to lose everything—how are we going to survive?" For me, I had intuitively thought that way, "How am I going to survive? I know I'll get through it. It might not be fun or pleasant, and it will likely be scary, but I'll get through it."

I started out in adversity. I was born with a heart condition that would not be identified until my 20s. While I was studying at university, my condition worsened enough that I needed surgery. I couldn't work during that time, let alone return to school. Fortunately, my surgery was a complete success.

Right before my time at university, I had been married to a man that didn't treat me very well. I found myself on my own with nowhere to live and a suitcase of possessions in the cab of my truck as I prepared for my first week of school and a new job I had just landed before fleeing my marriage. My life was literally turned upside down and in what seemed like the blink of an eye, my life was entirely different.

I grew up in a low-income family, so I learned about financial struggles from an early age. My family shopped at thrift stores well before it became trendy because we had to. I think it was for my 7th birthday, my mom gave me a beautiful royal blue bike with a banana seat and handle bars with tassels! I had never had a new one! I loved that bike! I can still see it in my mind, even though I owned it only for a week. We lived in an apartment building, and I had locked it up to grab some lunch before heading out again. Upon my return, I saw that someone had cut the lock cable and stolen my bike. My mom, a single parent at the time, could not afford to replace it but someone gave me a bike to use. I can tell you I remember that bike too, it was old and rusty, but at least I had something to ride.

I know the things that come up for people, and if you're taken care of financially, it's one less thing you have to worry about. There are enough struggles in life without having to worry about your finances. So when we were close bankruptcy, that urgency "to know" kicked in again. It became very obvious that although I had more financial knowledge than the last time we were in trouble, it wasn't enough. I could manage the creditors, but I didn't know enough to make this situation work very well for me, so I set out to learn how to keep us away from bankruptcy.

HOW WE OVERCAME THIS PROBLEM

We had to learn very quickly to save as much money as we could. To pay down as many creditors as we could but in amounts that would keep them happy and allow more room to spread out what money we did have. One good thing was our credit score. It was still intact and still quite respectable. We had managed to make all our payments. But we were right on that cusp. If we didn't change something or do something, if we just sat there and waited, we would have gone under. It's like looking for a life preserver when you fear you may drown. We started talking to friends and realized we weren't the only ones going through tough times. The stock market was bad, and people were losing money, so we weren't the only business owners having a tough time.

We talked to a friend in the States, and he taught us how cash works in the world of finance. How banks use cash, how they invest their money, how to identify interest rates, how you can pay off things at opportune times so you're using it to the best leverage you can, and how to shift money around to leverage it better. Sometimes it seemed like we were taking from Paul to pay Peter, but it worked. It was all about knowing how things connect and how you can move money on certain days at certain amounts to make it all work to your benefit rather than that of the creditors.

We sought out a good accountant and lawyer to give us advice on cash flow and understanding what our options were. We protected ourselves in case something happened to us. We read Pamela Yellen's book and learned in a hurry how to use whole life insurance to pay off our debt. Then we built up our equity in our whole life policy so we could take that money out as a policy loan, a line of credit against the equity in our cash value to pay off our debt. We just kept chipping at it.

Fortunately, before venturing into our oh-so-doomed business, we had hired the help of a lawyer who had expertise in the business we were taking on. He told us to make sure we incorporated our company so that if we experienced a loss, we could write it off in the future and our personal assets would have more protection. Crucial advice that would save our bacon!

Now faced with a failed business and mounting bills, we had to find a way to make money. The very financial software we were using to get us out of debt was also our career a solution for the time being. We had learned so much about it that we decided to sell it and teach people what we knew. While we floated on our new venture, still chipping away at debt, we read more on Pamela Yellen's concept, Bank on Yourself, and others like it: Nelson Nash's *Becoming Your Own Banker* and Garrett Gunderson's *Killing Sacred Cows*, amongst others. The more we learned, the more passionate we became about helping others take control of their financial life. That was the start of the very successful businesses we have today. So from adversity came need and from need came opportunity and from opportunity came success.

MY INTERNAL RESOURCES

As I mentioned, I love research, and I love learning. It's not something I thought I would have been drawn to as a child because of my dyslexia. Despite discouraging words from others, I did go to university. To prove them wrong, I stayed there for 9 years! Well, not really. I absolutely loved my studies, and of course, there were some adversities that kept me there longer. During that time, I had to discover how I learned because there was no one to turn to to show me. I had to figure out how I could stay in academia and thrive.

I have always tried to stay positive, not to say that I didn't have my moments. We had some scary days where the whole world felt like it was not just resting on our shoulders but bearing down on us, trying to push us to the ground and bury us. How I started my day was important. It's not like I woke up and said, "This is going to be the best day ever!" I woke up thinking, "It just is what it is and it's a good day". Sometimes it feels easier to be in a bad mood but I always found the days that I didn't approach with welcoming gratitude to be quite tough and dark.

When my son was born, I had made the decision to welcome him to his day with a big smile, a good morning exclamation and wrap him in my arms—even on days I didn't feel like it. You may feel like crap on the inside, but if you make yourself get up, smile at your family and hug them, it's amazing how quickly that feeling can disappear. It's mind over matter, and my whole life has always been that way. I didn't grow up with the resources many people had, we were poor but I had my mind, and it was rich. No amount of money gets your mind to that place. It may pay for a parking spot, but unless you're living with that mindset, you'll just be towed under.

For me, it was about perspective. I analyse things a lot. It sometimes seems constantly, for the good or the bad. If I can see things in my mind, then I can take the steps I need. I'm a big planner, and I see connections where many people don't. I contemplate different scenarios in my mind, assessing situations and anticipating my best decision depending on how I see a scenario actually pans out. In other words, I have a plan A, B, C and often and D and an E. Taking a high-level approach and pulling it apart to find the details so I can plan my next moves—it's rather like playing chess and trying to plan for several moves beyond your opponent.

Information is power. I didn't wait for things to happen, I made them happen. But there were times I didn't. What I mean here is, as I was looking for a solution or trying to make something happen, I would run into so many stumbling blocks, it would make me stop to consider if I was doing the right thing. I would take a step back and think, perhaps this shouldn't happen, and you need to take another direction. All good plans are made to be broken. I found rigidity in life often led to unhappiness. Compromise was the order of most days. Mindfulness and self-awareness along with the attitude that I will get through this adversity and I will take from it what I can, learn what I can learn, is what won the day.

Steve had already been through a lot of personal development, having learned about thinking processes and self-help. We made a good team. We also had support in what we were doing from friends. I don't think our family really knew what was going on. Admittedly, some people thought we were crazy. It's still astonishing to me to look back and think how neither of us worked much for almost a year. We were busy learning! We were working enough to make our payments on our bills, and just doing what we had to do. We had plans, but if opportunities came along that seemed to be a good fit, we made an adjustment, and we had open minds. If it earned us money, we did it. If we had to sell it, we sold it. We just did what we had to to get through.

Sometimes people come across adversity, but they aren't doing what they need to do in order to keep things afloat. Often a sacrifice is needed. As tough as it is, it's the way to freedom. We did think of selling our house and were willing to do that if all else failed. We created a plan, that if things didn't turn around by a certain date, then the house would go up for sale. We did end up keeping our house, but we sold things like our travel trailer and a piece of recreational land we had purchased some years back. Just those two things brought in about \$40,000. Garage sales and clothing consignment stores brought in some more money.

Another time when my car broke down and we couldn't afford the \$2000 repair, we sold it as-is for the most money we could get for it; we bought a car for a few hundred dollars and used the leftover money to pay another bill. That car is etched in my lungs. It was so dusty I could barely breathe. I had to drive with my windows open and all the interior lights were burned out, so we couldn't drive at night. The floor boards had rusted out, and the road was visible through them. It was akin to a glass bottom boat but not nearly as endearing or interesting! It's a simple example, but we had to make sacrifices in life to get through things. If it meant that things had to be sold or a tough decision had to be made, then that's what happened. Tough now doesn't mean tough forever. Steve and I knew that we could make money; we did it. We built up a whole bunch of equity, we made a whole bunch of money, and then we lost it. That's life. Life is full of ups and downs.

Not long ago during a conversation with a friend, she said, "I just want to live happily ever after," and I said, "There is no happily ever after. That's a falsehood. We go through ups and downs." That's what life is, and it's how you get through those ups and downs that make you content in life. There are sad moments, and there are happy moments. You can't live in the extreme happiness all the time. You don't go anywhere if you do that. If you're so busy being happy, you can't do anything else. If you're so busy being sad, you can't do anything else. There are things that will bring you down for a long time. I'm not saying people need to pull themselves out immediately. It's about working through it for however long it takes. Recognizing what is going on and working through it. It may not be easy, just doable.

Time is also a consideration. I often think people expect a tough time should be solved and disappear overnight. It can take years to work through an adversity, particularly if there are several others peppered in along the way. Losing that business and putting everything on the line to change our lives, took years to do. We didn't become successful in the blink of an eye. All this happened a decade ago.

There are other losses in life that are even tougher to manage. Money is money, you lose it and you make it, you lose and you make it again. Dealing with a critical illness or the loss of a child, those are adversities that are much tougher to deal with.

I've witnessed incredible strength to carry on in those circumstances. I had my own illness to deal with. Would the cancer I had take my life or would the complications from the treatment take me first? What should have taken several months to go through actually took a few years. I can't even pin the word recover to it. I didn't go back to the person I was. I think the most impactful realization I have had is, it's not about recovering so much as it is able accept a changed life and the person one becomes after going through adverse times.

THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON I LEARNED

Perseverance or stick-to-it-iveness in relation to mindset is the most important lesson I learned. In my darkest hours, people would often say to me, "You're so strong". I find it tough to think of myself in those terms. Instead what is going through my mind is, "I just did what I had to do." I had to persevere; the option not to wasn't conceivable to me. To be honest, when I was going through cancer, I would have a pity party every once in a while. I stayed in the Pity Hotel for a night or two and then I checked out. I didn't live there. I let myself go through the self-pity, experience it and learn from it. The days I was full of pity were not much fun. I had some pretty horrible days and some beyond my control due to medications and whatnot. But when I could control it, I did. It was easier to smile and take on my day with gratitude than to be filled with despair and fear.

Adversity has fear in it. Fear of what is going on and how you will work through it. Fear of how your life will look when it is done. Adversity bothers us so much because we're afraid of what's going on. Think: "How can I change my situation and how can I get through this? If I stay here, it's not going to change, and I'm going to be afraid forever. Or, I can make the choice in how to get out of this." You have the power to persevere.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

"The Bank on Yourself Revolution", Pamela Yellen

"Becoming Your Own Banker", Nelson Nash

"Killing Sacred Cows", Garrett Gunderson

"What would the Rockefellers Do?", Michael Isom and Garrett Gunderson

"Simple Success Strategies for Women Entrepreneurs", Michele Devlin et al.

"Transform Your Life, Business & Health". Brian Tracey and Stephen Devlin, et al.

"The Secret to Lifetime Financial Security", Stephen Devlin and Pamela Yellen, et al.

The religious or spiritual book of your choice.

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Michele Platje Devlin is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Compliance Officer of MacDev Financial Group Corp. co-founded with her husband, Stephen Devlin. More recently they established SET Financial Solutions Inc., home of the Bank on Yourself™ concept for Canada. Michele and Stephen are highly regarded in their industry and hold several awards, along with their dedicated team of advisors across the country. Michele's ultimate vision is to empower women to take control of their finances with safe and effective strategies that serve and protect them in life, wealth and legacy. Financial Control for Life!

Michele is a consummate entrepreneur and has held various executive titles over her professional career, which was built on her education and expertise in continuity planning, business and government operations, public and corporate policy as well as compliance and privacy regulations. Under Michele's leadership during her three-year term as President of the Gibsons and District Chamber of Commerce and directorship from 2009-2013, the Chamber built a Visitor's Information Park to greet travelers upon their arrival on the Sunshine Coast. This collaborative community project developed from a sustainable financial framework created by Michele and her team. In 1999, Michele and three partners formed Concept Plus Risk Management Group, an analytical policy planning consulting company specializing in risk management. As Director of Risk Management, she strategically managed policy initiatives and project management cases that included response to 9-11 and anthrax threats.

Early in her career, she held a prestigious research associate position with the Department of Economics at Simon Fraser University from 1997-2001. In this role, she provided research, editing and writing support to faculty members on various academic publications in multiple disciplines. By 2006, her contribution to the book *Economic Transformations: General Purpose Technologies and Long Term Economic Growth* with Dr. Richard Lipsey was published. Michele holds a degree from Simon Fraser University in Communication and Geography, with a special interest in Economics. A scholarship award sent her to study abroad—earning her international certificates in Strategic Management of Technology in a Global Environment from the Politecnico di Milano and in Strategic Management of Telecommunications in a Global Environment from the Helsinki University of Technology.

Today Michele splits her time between homes in Vancouver and the Sunshine Coast of British Columbia with her husband and business partner Stephen Devlin and their teenage son. As a colorectal cancer veteran, her passion project is managing the Facebook page *Literally Kicking Cancer in the Ass*, aimed at raising awareness and informing the public about the disease. In her downtime, she enjoys spending time with her family, traveling, kayaking, skiing and walking along the beach. She has a natural curiosity about life, the environment and the experiences that shape modern society and is an active life-long learner. Her family is her greatest pride and joy.