

Naz Kosar

»» What is the organization?

Ulfah Arts provides a point of engagement with the arts, especially for women, predominately Muslim women. Ulfah Arts works from grass root to professional artists. Through hubs of activity they become socially, economically and emotionally active - an opportunity to learn about things that can transfer to employment and education.

My work now is about nurturing talent but you can't develop people if they don't have a professional path to go down. Ulfah Arts uses art as a tool to help women economically and socially.

»» What was the Turning Point in your career?

I was working full time and doing Ulfah Arts as a hobby, as a personal interest. Work got really too much. They started thinking I was making lots of money, which wasn't true. I was so miserable in my job. I was fed up.

There were so many opportunities and ideas coming through Ulfah Arts, so I sat down and weighed things up. I decided to leave my full time job and concentrate on Ulfah Arts. I haven't looked back since then. I have something. Whether you'd call it an organization or a business, I don't know. Whatever it is, I've set firm foundations.

It's been interesting and a challenging journey. I have just thrown myself into doing things without fully acknowledging what it is that I have been doing, but I have been learning along the way. Recently, I had to sit myself down and say, "you are the director and you have an organization and you have to believe that because if you don't no one else will". My outlook has changed since then. I have been looking at Ulfah Arts as an organization, separate to me.



A Lion Through Adversity

»» How were you initially funded?

I had a good start. I got a grant that I invested in the right areas which is carrying me through. I am in the process of identifying support organizations to help me with that. Everywhere I've been I got little bit and the rest I have to work out. Much of the time I have to do lots of unlearning, come back to "me" and look at what I want to do.

"On bad days, I think, why am I bothering?"

»» What's been your Driving Force?

Proving that I was right. When I first started, no one (be that the woman on the street, people from the community or the art organizations themselves) knew what I was talking about. I always got – 'we kind of understand but it's not worth doing'. I believed in it and felt passionate about it. On bad days, I think, why am I bothering? But every day I'm a step further. I'm too far down the road. One day I'll have a massive organization and lots of people working for me. Even if you ask the most successful person who has made lots of money, they will still think they haven't got there yet. Your ideas are constantly evolving and the goal posts are always moving.

»» What personal qualities have helped you to succeed?

Self-belief. I've always had the belief in myself but not necessarily the confidence and these are two different things. You have to be determined and you have to enjoy it. Having the passion and determination together has really helped.

There are times that I haven't enjoyed it. It has been hard work. But now I have the time to do what I want to do and that was worth it. The tough times are a really good test to see how passionate and determined you are about your idea.

Once you get through the first year it does get easier, and I sit back now and think "I won't have to do that again." My brain has opened, before I could only see a little but now the vision is clear. There are so many possibilities.

»» What have been your biggest challenges / barriers?

So many challenges, so many barriers, where do I start?! I hated the initial setup. The first 12 months were hell – the battle with the technology and the mobile phone. The computer crashing, leaving me with no data, those kinds of disasters. I went along to a reputable organization that sold me some software that I thought would save me money! They came to install it, and didn't warn me about foreseeable problems.

I was a mere novice but I didn't have the time to go to the training. My computer crashed and I lost half of my work. I have made lots of these types of mistakes. Sometimes I think I could have got to where I am a lot quicker, but then I think that the massive learning I have had has strengthened me. You tend to get strength from littlest of things and that keeps you going.

The challenge has always been that I'm doing such a new thing. It is something that nobody else has done. It's something you can't touch or feel but it has been a concept that I had to prove and I've had to believe in it myself. Explaining to people what I do in words alone is impossible. But at least now I have evidence that I can show people. We've been in newspapers. It's something that is visible that people can see, and it couldn't be easier.

The hardest thing is being on your own. I don't have a husband, and my family doesn't have a clue what I'm doing. I'm completely isolated. I do have one or two good friends and I probably wouldn't cope without them. They are my strength.

Working alone can be isolating at times and you can lose confidence. When you start your own business, you live outside your own confidence zone, you need to take risks, and for that you need certain qualities. If you are not prepared to do that, then forget it. Some days, I do think about how I will pay my mortgage next month, but something always comes up.

"I don't look at quick financial rewards, they are my long term objectives"

Through dealing with the challenges, my personal character has developed. I remember ordering 10,000 leaflets and they came unfolded. My heart sank. How was I going to fold all these? What was I going to do with them? I sat down to fold them myself, and my mum came and started to fold them too, and then rest of my family joined in. I didn't need anymore help.

»» What motivates you?

I am self motivated person. I'm up at 5 o'clock every morning. If I'm passionate about something, then that's enough to get me out and about doing things. Some days I do get de-motivated and if I switch off it's really hard to get back into it.

It's kind of hard finding a balance between doing the work and also having the time to switch off. I am trying to get the work-life balance right. Some weeks I'm good at it, and some weeks I'm bad. Balance is not a constant thing. It's something that you need to work on, on day to day basis. I prioritise my time. If I don't feel I will get any value out of a meeting then I will cancel it. I feel mean doing that at times, but I need to prioritise and get better at planning my week.

Ulfah Arts has never been done before, it's a pioneering concept and you feel more isolated because when you do go out networking, they haven't got a clue what you are talking about. At the same time I know I am 20 years ahead of a lot of people and that gives me lots of satisfaction

»» What's next for Ulfah Arts?

I'm in an interesting position. I have laid the foundations and it can go in several directions. I'm trying to find people who can advise me on which direction to go in. One option is for the organization to become funded as a proper arts organization.

That isn't very appealing because it means you have to keep going back for funding all the time. Another model that is more interesting to me is the social enterprise model, and I'm looking at that more closely. I'm very open. I have visions for the projects that I am doing. I am thinking about doing more work on a national level and developing a national profile for the organization.

»» What is your vision for Ulfah Arts?

I've had three or four people who have been working closely with me to draw up what they thought Ulfah Arts was all about, and none of them got it right. They have all captured a little bit of it but they haven't captured my true vision. I've learned that it is for me to develop my vision in small chunks working closely with other people. What I do know is that Ulfah Arts wants to develop professional routes for those interested in pursuing a career in arts such as within a professional production, or in a play featuring Muslim actors including women.

Also, Ulfah Arts has a mailing list rather than a membership base. There is massive amount of expensive administration needed for this. I will look at developing this side of Ulfah Arts fully in year 3.

»» Who have been your inspirational role models?

I get inspiration from different people. I don't idolize just one person. I have lots of mottos. My mum used to tell me mottos, which keep coming into my head. My favorite one is "Hard work will always be rewarded." I have always worked hard and haven't always waited for the rewards, but when I look back and see the work that I have done with Ulfah Arts, I have been rewarded.

»» Share some words of wisdom?

If you are looking for quick financial rewards, don't set up your own business. I don't look at quick financial rewards, they are my long term objectives. Having your own business is about your own development and identifying those areas. I know I've had a wacky idea. I've brought people along with me, have skills, and am a unique person. I will never feel like this working for someone else.

If you do good work people will talk about it. Take that leap of faith, that risk - if you don't, you will never know. You are in charge and you can decide how much pressure you want to put yourself under. I'm getting better at that and am enjoying it. I'm really easy and will go with the flow.

Be confident about your expertise. You have to 'big' yourself - no one else will do it. I always do, I always think "Naz you are so incredible, I forget how good you are sometimes!" Give yourself a pat on your back when you do something good. I'm still numb when other people call me for my expertise. Don't give up! Please, please, please don't give up. Believe in yourself even if no-one does. You know what you are talking about. You must do it. It's so easy to give up. Be a lion.