

Tyler Spooner of The U Group & Co: How I Reinvented Myself In The Second Chapter Of My Life

An Interview With Wanda Malhotra



Wanda Malhotra · [Follow](#)

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Many successful people reinvented themselves in a later period in their lives. Jeff Bezos worked on Wall Street before he reinvented himself and started Amazon. Sara Blakely sold office supplies before she started Spanx. Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson was a WWE wrestler before he became a successful actor and filmmaker. Arnold Schwarzenegger went from a bodybuilder, to an actor to a Governor. McDonald’s founder Ray Kroc was a milkshake-device salesman before starting the McDonalds franchise in his 50s.

How does one reinvent themselves? What hurdles have to be overcome to take life in a new direction? How do you overcome those challenges? How do you ignore the naysayers? How do you push through the paralyzing fear?

In this series called “Second Chapters; How I Reinvented Myself In The Second Chapter Of My Life” we are interviewing successful people who reinvented themselves in a second chapter in life, to share their story and help empower others.

As a part of this interview series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Tyler Spooner.

Tyler Spooner, 34, is the CEO and co-founder of The U Group & Co., a technology company committed to restoring transparency and ethics in the data industry. Launched in 2018, U Group operates one of the world's largest consumer-focused datasets in the USA, Canada, and Australia. Its platform gathers consumer data from both physical and online receipts and rewards customers who opt-in via their app, ReceiptJar. The company's proprietary AI software, U Vision processes over 1 billion transactional data points annually, providing brands with accurate, depersonalized consumer behavior data and significantly reducing bots and fraud that have plagued the market research industry.

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Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we start, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your childhood backstory?

My childhood was unconventional and marked by difficult moments. While I struggled in my youth, the journey has given me the resilience required to be an entrepreneur. Orphaned at the age of 10, I spent the next 8 years navigating the foster system. I struggled with dyslexia, which hindered my ability to learn and gain knowledge. The classroom was overwhelming, and I dropped out of school at 14.

Soon after, I found myself entangled with gangs and making money on the streets. My sister, desperate to remove me from this lifestyle, gave me a one-way flight to Australia, hoping I could find work in the mines and succeed without a formal education. However, my timing was off, and my arrival coincided with a downturn in the mining industry, making it difficult to find work — even being turned away from McDonald's.

My fortunes began to change when I secured a night cleaning job. With the launch of Audible and audiobooks, I devoured business books by authors like Jim Rohn and Tony Robbins and learned about Fortune 500 companies such as Coca-Cola. By 23, I knew starting an entrepreneurial venture was my way out of poverty, and I registered my first business, a commercial cleaning company.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

I've always liked a quote from Steve Jobs, which reads “You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something—your gut, destiny, life and karma, whatever.” This perspective has helped me a lot over the years.

You have been blessed with much success. In your opinion, what are the top three qualities that you possess that have helped you accomplish so much? If you can, please share a story or example for each.

The three qualities essential to a successful mindset are:

1. **Constant curiosity** is key to success because it means you continue to learn and grow, improving your ability to lead and innovate. I constantly find myself dissecting an industry to understand where value is being made.
2. **Grit** is essential because there are always many failures and setbacks on the path to success. Being able to dust yourself off, learn from your mistakes, and persevere is a key part of the entrepreneurial journey.
3. **Team player mentality** is crucial because success doesn't come from working in isolation and you are only as strong as your team. Successful leaders can identify talent and create a work culture that allows everyone to reach their potential.

Let's now shift to the main part of our discussion about 'Second Chapters'. Can you tell our readers about your career experience before your Second Chapter?

When I relocated from New Zealand, I didn't have a big friend network. So instead I would consume audio books, which restructured my way of thinking about things. By the age of 23, I had registered my first business, a commercial cleaning company. I hustled to make it a success. I door knocked businesses and sold contracts during the day and cleaned the offices with my team at night. It was the first time I had experienced any wealth and I was really hungry to succeed. However, the grind of the work started to wear me down. In 2016, I realized it was time for a change.

And how did you "reinvent yourself" in your Second Chapter?

I had to rely heavily on charities when I was younger. When I sold my commercial cleaning contracts, I was helping out with food rescue charities and found myself frustrated with inefficiencies inherent in the charity sector. For example, one charity was trying to raise money for a new truck, when another charity's truck was available but it couldn't be utilized due to the government funding process. I naively thought I'd build a business to solve it. The sale of my cleaning business funded my first technology venture, a start-up called "FeedMee App". I didn't know anything about tech or start-ups, but an app seemed like a good idea. I think I was naive enough to not know what I didn't know, and think I was invincible. I reached out to app companies to get quotes and found people to build a prototype, and away we went. I started networking and got into the Founder Institute, which helped me to understand 'tech'. We won a local app award and from that we joined an Accelerator (Plus 8), going through their bootcamp.

FeedMee was my attempt to combine technology and social responsibility, a value that remains paramount to me today. The original app provided users access to a digital library of restaurants to place orders, with each delivery resulting in a meal donation to someone in need. When this business model proved unsustainable, we pivoted to a hand-picked grocery delivery service, which generated a quarter of a million dollars before we realized the logistics were impractical. While both businesses weren't financially successful, these experiences proved highly valuable in introducing me to the world of customer analytics and the value of transactional purchasing data.

I launched my current endeavor, U Group, in 2018 with a mission to

enable the fair trade of data between people and brands. We deploy proprietary AI software to meticulously capture and organize hundreds of thousands of receipts per day, and reward customers who have opted-in via our app, ReceiptJar. Brands get accurate trend and depersonalized consumer behavior data, across multiple retailers and shopping verticals, from verified users — significantly reducing bots and fraud that plague the market research industry. It's now one of the world's largest consumer-focused transactional datasets, processing over 1 billion data points in the USA, Canada and Australia, and we've paid our users over \$3.5m for their data — emphasizing ethical practices and valuing consumer contributions.

Along the way, I had to constantly suppress the doubt. That's what you struggle with most at the start — an imposter syndrome. And I had to learn how to control my disappointments and learn from them, to fall forward, not backward. It's okay to fail, but don't wallow in defeat.

Can you tell us about the specific trigger that made you decide that you were going to “take the plunge” and make your huge transition?

It was a serendipitous incident that really triggered my reinvention. I was cleaning a bathroom when the toilet brush broke, and I knew at the very moment it was time for a change!

What did you do to discover that you had a new skillset inside of you that you haven't been maximizing? How did you find that and how did you ultimately overcome the barriers to help manifest those powers?

I wasn't big on listening to music, so when Audiobooks launched around 2015, it freed me from the educational limitations imposed by my dyslexia. It allowed me to feed my curiosity and learn about businesses and entrepreneurs who inspired me. I started listening to 'Living an Exceptional Life' by Jim Rohn, and motivational speakers like Eric Thomas, Les Brown, Zig Ziglar and Brian Tracy, as the algorithm recommended them. I realized that starting my own business was the key to changing my future, and audiobooks provided me with the knowledge and insights I needed to pursue that path.

How are things going with this new initiative? We would love to hear some specific examples or stories.

This year U Group & Co is projecting AUS \$17m+ revenue, following an incredible 2-year growth strategy that took my business from \$230,000 to \$11m. Since our inception we have built one of the world's largest consumer-focused transactional datasets, processing over 1 billion data points in the USA, Canada, and Australia, and paying people fairly for their data. Our mobile app has been downloaded over 2 million times. It's been the #1 shopping app in Australia and in the top 50 in Canada and the US and we are proud that we are profitable while emphasizing ethical practices and valuing consumer contributions.

Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

My co-founders, Jason and Brenda have played an integral role in my journey. Without their hard work and faith in my ability to lead the

company, I wouldn't be where I am today.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started in this new direction?

I managed to secure a seven-figure contract with a major international client without ever meeting them face-to-face. The entire partnership happened over Zoom. This experience made me realize how technology can truly bridge geographical gaps and inspired me to continue running my global company from the most isolated city in the world.

Did you ever struggle with believing in yourself? If so, how did you overcome that limiting belief about yourself? Can you share a story or example?

There have been many times when I struggled with believing in myself. We spent the first few years living in the office with no money in the bank and maxed-out credit cards. It's tough to maintain confidence during such low periods, but having nothing to lose also gave me the freedom to be aggressive in pursuing my goals. Our first investor was someone I reached out to on LinkedIn when we were on the brink of giving up. It made me realize that you only truly fail when you stop believing in yourself.

In my own work I usually encourage my clients to ask for support before they embark on something new. How did you create your support system before you moved to your new chapter?

Given my relocation to Australia, I really didn't have a big support network outside of my co-founders. Over the years, they have become my ride'n'die team in all aspects of life.

Starting a new chapter usually means getting out of your comfort zone, how did you do that? Can you share a story or example of that?

I had to hustle to find investors, advisors, and clients since I didn't have a network in the industry. To start my cleaning company, I pounded the pavement and knocked on doors. When I started in tech, I saw LinkedIn as a way to find potential partners. It was the modern-day cold call, and I would send messages to people who I thought could help me build the business. This method of finding partners created the motto I live by: "Ask for advice and get money; ask for money and get advice."



What are your “5 things I wish someone told me before I started” and why?

1. Starting something new from nothing will take *everything* from you. You have to be willing to sacrifice relationships, friendships and health for something you really believe in. It helps to go in with your eyes open.
2. You need more friends that are willing to tell you ‘your baby is ugly’ (so to speak). A lot of people might tell you they would use your product, but that’s not always the reality. It helps to hear the truth.
3. The first investor is the most important. No one told me that, but I

soon realized how imperative it is to find the right investor that believes in you and sets the tone.

4. Financial acumen is key. One of our critical hires was our CFO, Steve Bodeker. Before that the founders were doing the bookkeeping on Xero on the side.
5. You need a solid grasp of unit economics to track signals and forecast business success.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be?

I've struggled with homelessness and poverty, and now I'm fortunate enough to enjoy the finer things in life. I want to inspire people to recognize the benefits of giving back, whether through financial contributions or by offering their time and services. By helping to improve their community and the lives of those less fortunate, individuals can achieve significant personal growth and develop greater compassion.

We are very blessed that some very prominent names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this if we tag them. :-)

James Currier is definitely someone I would like to meet. His success

with his own companies, as well as his investments, is unmatched. He is also a pioneer of user-generated models, viral marketing, A/B testing, crowdsourcing, and other influential growth techniques which have inspired my work.

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Thank you so much for sharing these important insights. We wish you continued success and good health!

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A *bout the Interviewer: Wanda Malhotra is a wellness entrepreneur, lifestyle journalist, and the CEO of Crunchy Mama Box, a mission-driven platform promoting conscious living. CMB empowers individuals with educational resources and vetted products to help them make informed choices. Passionate about social causes like environmental preservation and animal welfare, Wanda writes about clean beauty, wellness, nutrition, social impact and sustainability, simplifying wellness with curated resources. Join Wanda and the Crunchy Mama Box community in embracing a healthier, more sustainable lifestyle at CrunchyMamaBox.com.*

Wellness



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Wellness Entrepreneur, Lifestyle Journalist, and CEO of Crunchy Mama Box, a mission-driven platform promoting conscious living.

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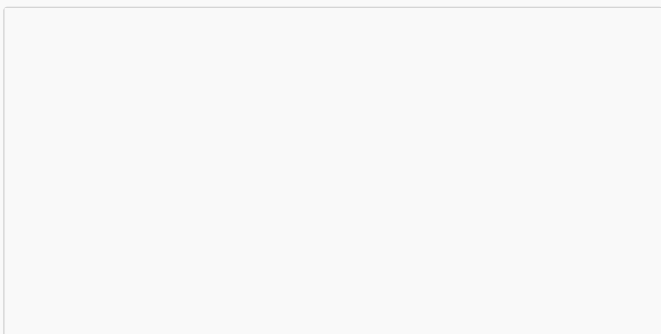
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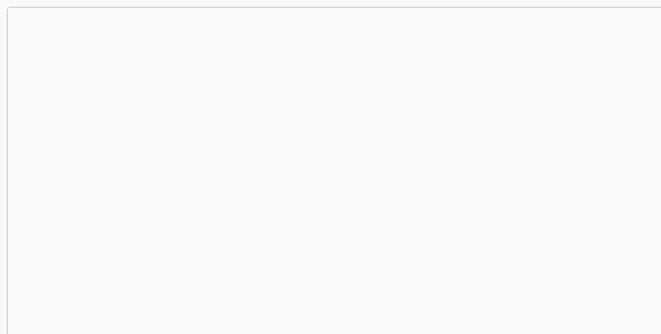


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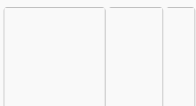


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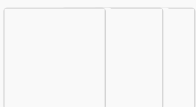
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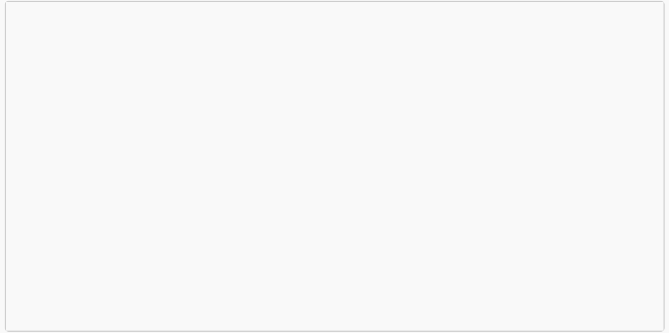
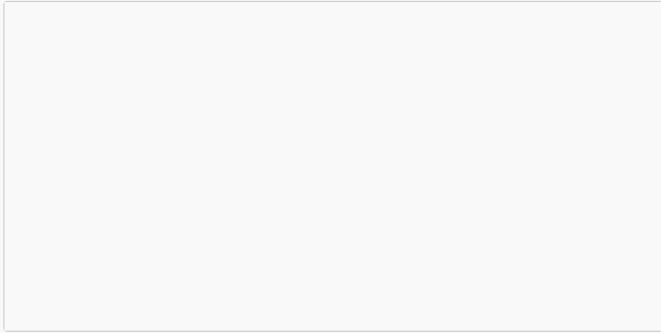
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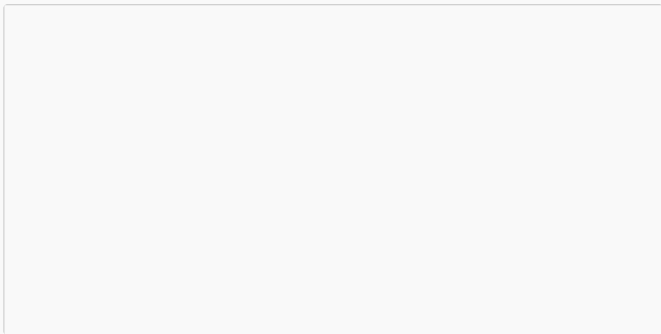
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