

Interviewer: We're here with Tareq Hadhad today from Peace by Chocolate. Thank you for joining us.

Hadhad: My pleasure. Thank you for having me with you today.

Interviewer: At NSBI, we're really excited about learning about success stories across the province, and small business and medium-sized business. So, you know, we love the story about Peace by Chocolate. Maybe you can tell us a little bit more about your story and how you started the business.

Hadhad: Right. Landing in Nova Scotia in the first place is really the greatest opportunity that we have ever had, because we were thinking when we came to Canada among the wave of 25,000 Syrians in late 2015, when the country decided to step in and help those who are fleeing the war and persecution and seeking safety and peace ...

So for us, really, to land in this province was such a great motivation to launch our business that we have been very excited about in Syria, and it was destroyed in the blink of an eye in 2012 when the factory got bombed and all the employees left and my father left. Thanks God that all my family survived, but, at the end of the day, we lost everything. It was really a moment when we were thinking about the despair and unthinkable uncertainty that we were living such a life in Lebanon.

Canada has given us the opportunity to live again and the opportunity to restart our lives – not only regarding the business, but also the regular-paced lives, and I would say that we decided to not take anything for granted. You can lose the base of your lives in the blink of an eye, so don't take anything for granted. Just be always thankful and grateful.

And that's what we did by starting the business, digging down and filling the gaps into the community. We found out that the people in Antigonish, they're really in need for manufacturing facilities, and we came here with nothing, but we had our experiences and our skills that it was really easy for us to translate into something tangible, something meaningful to the community, and we help our community grow, because we believe that immigrants, when they come here, they translate their skills and their experiences into the ideas and filling the gaps and just helping the economy growth to spear forward.

Interviewer: Right. So what's so special about doing business in Antigonish, and also Nova Scotia in general?

Hadhad: I would say for the startups it's absolutely amazing to decide to be in a small town where you have a family of 4,000 people rather than being in a big city or a

big province where, if we landed in Toronto or Vancouver or Montréal, I truly believe that it would have taken us 10 to 20 years, because you can't stand out easily in a big city. You can stand out very easily in a small town where you have everyone around you. Everyone will support you to have that great exposure – not only nationally, but internationally.

So Peace by Chocolate, it would not have started that great idea in a big city because we would have been busy in just understanding our life, our pace of lives. While in Antigonish, everything was sorted out. Everything was ready for us, really, to just go, and we just started a business, make the few pieces of chocolate, and get the great feedback from the community, which was very amazing when we saw 200 people came in to buy our first pieces of chocolate [inaudible 00:03:11] town.

Interviewer: So we've seen in the news, obviously, the brand. Your story has gone viral nationally, internationally. What does it mean for you and your family to come to Canada just over two years ago, and now have such great success?

Hadhad: It's not only nationally, internationally. We have been to space.

Interviewer: Well, I was going to ask. Yeah, so how did all that come about?

Hadhad: It was phenomenal. The whole story has been growing in such an unexpected way. We were very surprised to see that NASA and the people of NASA ... Really, we were reached out by them, and [inaudible 00:03:45] that connection with such beautiful-hearted astronaut, Andrew Feustel. He's a Canadian-American astronaut.

But to see the pieces of something me and my family and our team have made in the town of Antigonish, Nova Scotia – very heartwarming, very rewarding, and that's absolutely great motivation. So for my family and me just seeing that our company has been growing significantly since 2016, from having no employees in 2016 to really expand to 35 employees now in 2018 – hopefully to double that number very soon – I would say it's a phenomenal thing that we have never imagined.

And for my family, it's more than the business. It's the message why they are here, and we always say that we lost our factory in Syria in the blink of an eye when the war just started in Damascus and we don't want to lose it again in Canada, so we want to make people really aware of the importance of peace and these core values of life.

Interviewer: So we could almost say that you guys are the ultimate exporters. You've taken a product across Canada, across the world, and now into outer space. What does it

mean today to be at an event where startups are pitching and talking about their businesses and how they want to export? What does it mean to be involved in that and to be able to bring your message to those people?

Hadhad: It is great that we always learn from each other, and for all of those people who are looking forward to start their businesses, so they always look for inspirations. They always look for people that they took the same path before them.

What is really important about entrepreneurship is that you don't have to follow the rules. You don't have to follow the path that everyone else has taken. You can create your own path, and people, they understand that. [inaudible 00:05:27] my favourite [inaudible 00:05:29], Reid Hoffman, he said entrepreneurship is jumping off cliffs and building a plane on the way down.

So everyone here understands that. Everyone here is very excited, really, to share their ideas and their skills, and it doesn't take so long until you will become a phenomenal translated idea into reality, but first of all there should be two factors: patience and persistence. Without really you persist on your idea and without your belief in it, nobody will believe in you.

And the last thing about this idea specifically is that if you are an immigrant or a newcomer to any community, it is your responsibility at the beginning to go out and speak about your ideas. No one will come to you and ask you what you are going to do. It is your responsibility to go and share your ideas.

That's exactly why I'm doing all of these public speaking engagements across the country – more than 400 speeches so far in two and a half years, and media interviews, and just speaking out about why we are here. Because so many people, they don't really understand about what other people across the globe are facing. They're suffering or losing their lives, their businesses, everything they have been built.

But they are opening their arms to us, so we wanted to tell them what really happened for us, tell them why did we come here, and for generations to come of the family – not only for our family, but for future immigrant families to Nova Scotia and across Canada – to understand that nobody was [going/born 00:07:02] to immigrate, and when we come to any new society, we are here to be grateful, we're here to be thankful, and we are here to give back to those hands that were giving to us.

Interviewer: Well, thank you so much for sharing your message-

Hadhad: My pleasure. Thank you so much.

Interviewer: ... of exporting, of peace, of immigration. We really appreciate it.

Hadhad: Really appreciate it. Thanks so much.

Interviewer: Thank you.