

Spotlight On:

Michele Partridge | Owner and Artistic Director
The Drama Class, Est. 2012

Life Story

Born and raised in Vancouver B.C., Michele Partridge was introduced to classic films and musical theatre at a young age. Still, Michele was very shy at school until she discovered drama class in grade 9, and knew that this is where she belonged. Although she found her craft at a young age, Michele insists that there's no age limit to finding creativity through acting. The beauty of the arts is that they're always there for you.

Michele has been teaching drama for 24 years, and The Drama Class, serving the White Rock/South Surrey community, is her third acting school.

What motivated you to start your own business?

It was my 12-year-old daughter who motivated me! I had sold my second acting studio to focus on raising my kids, and when my daughter was 12, she said: "I want to go into acting." I searched for a studio for her, but decided in the end to open my own, and it grew from there.

What inspired you to become an entrepreneur?

I've always been very creative and had an entrepreneurial spirit. I was an actor and thought that if I started my own theater company and produced my own shows, I could cast myself in the roles that I want. It worked! It all started from there.

Who is your role model/mentor?

I'm constantly finding new role models and mentors. But I've always admired Jane Fonda and Oprah Winfrey – incredibly powerful, creative women who continue to do what they love.

How has networking played a role in the growth of your business?

I love connecting with people and learning from them; networking has been a huge factor in the growth of my businesses. When I meet people, I try to figure out how we can work together and what we can learn from one another. If I can't help someone, I try to connect them with someone who can. Networking is a must for any business – I don't think you can own a business and not love networking.

What has been your biggest lesson learned about being your own boss?

My biggest lesson has been to listen, get all the facts, and take time to make big decisions. When I was starting out, I would go with my gut and make snap decisions, but these would often backfire. Now, I do my research and weigh the pros and cons.

What has been your greatest reward to date as an entrepreneur?

Being an entrepreneur has given me flexibility to be there for my family. As an entrepreneur, I can set my own hours and decide whether to commit to certain things. This freedom has allowed me and my husband to raise our family in the way that works for us.

Why is it important for you to give back to the community through your business?

Our instructors and actors sometimes volunteer at events in the community spreading the word about the performing arts. I've also co-founded the Peninsula Arts and Culture Alliance (PACA) as a way for our local arts and culture businesses and non-profits to work together, promote our events and learn from one another. Volunteering has been great for my business (it's part of networking), but it's also about meeting new people and making the arts available to those who would otherwise not have opportunities to be involved in the performing arts.

Tell us a little-known fact about your company

My 12-year-old daughter helped create the logo for my business! My whole family is a huge part of the business – they're always helping with painting, creating sets, and other tasks. They love it.

What advice do you wish you had been given when you first started?

When I speak at film school graduation ceremonies, my advice is always to be humble, to listen and learn. We need to realize that we don't know everything, and that's okay. We're all continuously learning.

What advice would you give to someone looking to start a business?

Create a business plan. Planning is essential, so do your research and have a plan for six months, one year, and five years. The plan will inevitably change, and you will need to adjust, but creating a plan makes you think about things that you otherwise wouldn't have thought of.

I also recommend listening to your gut about people. First impressions are very important!

The Bottom Line:

- The Drama Class employs 10 instructors and two office managers.
- They teach 200 students every three months, ages 5 and up.
- They continue to expand their reach by bringing the arts to new and innovative forums. They have recently begun facilitating corporate parties, staff appreciation days and leadership camps.