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May 2015

# 10 QUESTIONS

with Julia Charity

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# 10 QUESTIONS

with Julia Charity



### What's the story behind Look After Me, how did you get started and why?

I founded *Look After Me* in 2011 ahead of the Rugby World Cup. It's an on-line market place where guests book accommodation with homeowners who have unused space. We match guests to hosts with shared interests – like cycling, walking, golf etc.

The idea hit me like a bolt out of the blue in 2009. It haunted me and wouldn't go away, so in 2010 I put a Business Plan together. In 2011 I pitched the idea to WebFund, a company who helps technology start-ups. I just about died when they said "you're launching in three weeks!"

**The idea hit me like a bolt out of the blue in 2009. It haunted me and wouldn't go away, so in 2010 I put a Business Plan together.**

### You've built New Zealand's largest Homestay Network and have had success in building strong international networks, how did you achieve this?

I started with my inner-circle – friends, family the Rotorua community and national service organisation Zonta. I also forged links with Tourism New Zealand which lead to an opportunity to be involved in a Korean Reality TV show.

They filmed two episodes in New Zealand. I matched Korean celebrity dads and children with Kiwi host families. The shows were watched by 20 million viewers.

I then helped Air New Zealand and Tourism New Zealand pitch for the rights to film the Chinese version of the show here and was the Project Co-ordinator. Again the celebrities were home-hosted. We made global social media history with 20 billion mentions on Weibo and the shows were watched by 1.3 billion viewers globally.





Daddy Where Are  
We Going- in  
Rotorua  
Government  
Gardens- Julia  
Charity- Project-  
Lead on set

## How do you know you're onto a good idea?

An idea is only as good as the market it serves. I was lucky – people would hear about my business and say 'what a good idea'. Many of these people turned into customers, so that's the real acid test.

Ultimately I want this to be good for New Zealand, so I asked the Tourism boss – Rt Hon. John Key. He said "this is a good idea". I also was encouraged when Rod Drury looked over my shoulder and said "you've got your thinking straight".

More recently I've started working with James Kemp (former marketing manager for GrabOne) – he reckons "you're really on to something". So now I'm starting to believe it.

## Entrepreneurship is completely different from your former career as a Plant Molecular Biologist - why did you start a tourism business?

Yeah it's crazy isn't it? Who starts an internet business at the bottom end of a recession, into one of the most conservative markets in the world, knowing nothing about business, tourism or e-commerce?

But actually there are many transferrable skills I learned from science that have helped with Entrepreneurship. I'm an experienced strategist, I like executing, I'm not afraid of data, I'm an experienced manager and I can communicate well. These are all valuable skills for an entrepreneur.





Alice and Julia bike riding

### **Looking back, are there any things you would do differently if you were to start again?**

Isn't hindsight a beautiful thing? I wouldn't throw money at something and expect it to stick. I learned that from my first web-developer who promised me a Ferrari and delivered a Morris Minor – so due diligence on your suppliers is really important. It seems ironic but I would also learn how to 'look after me' – a valuable lesson when I suffered burn-out and was unable to work for six months. Finally, business is about making money – you don't drive a car and forget to put petrol in. I would keep a better eye on my Profit and Loss Dashboard. I made that mistake a few times. Gulp.

### **What do you enjoy most about being an entrepreneur in New Zealand?**

I love the New Zealand entrepreneurial community! Being located in Rotorua I have found it easy to connect and learn from all of the investment shops and entrepreneurial communities in the North Island. I have been impressed with the quality of support and rate of growth our Entrepreneurial eco-systems now have, compared to even a few years ago. Where else could you pick up the phone and call our top entrepreneurial thinkers and just ask to pick their brains. I haven't been told to rack-off once!





LookAfterMe- Staff-2015



Ngahua Lodge Room

### **What are the most important skills or attributes you would advise new entrepreneurs to develop?**

At first you need to be a good all-rounder and fairly robust to take the inevitable set-backs. Successful entrepreneurs never give up. Be like one of those Weeble dolls – “Weebles wobble but they don’t fall down”.

I think having an insatiable appetite for learning is helpful. You also have to know what success looks like and develop a clear vision and insatiable passion and a realistic, executable pathway towards it.





### Are there any business books or biographies you would recommend?

I'm a big fan of kiwi entrepreneurs who have achieved success. So I've read the TradeMe book three times.

Can you even imagine New Zealand without TradeMe? How much money would eBay be syphoning out of our economy? Right now I'm on my third read of Sam Hazledine's 'Unfair Fight.' It's brilliant.

What are your hopes and plans for Look After Me? What would you like it to be globally recognised for?

There is no doubt that Peer-

to-Peer accommodation Networks like Bedycasa, Homestay.com, AirBnB and Tujia, are revolutionising the way guests book accommodation in Europe, America and China, respectively. Look After Me will continue to be the market leader and consolidate this concept here. We'll continue to pioneer the Sharing Economy as it establishes itself in New Zealand. We are currently seeking investment and are likely to refresh our brand and website.

We would like to be recognised globally as "the best little Homestay Network in the World" ■

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Dr Julia Charity is a Scientist-turned-Entrepreneur, Writer and Performance Poet. She lives in Rotorua with 9 year old Alice. Julia believes people are New Zealand's best asset and is working with the Tourism Industry to ensure we uphold New Zealand's No. 1 standing in the world for how we treat visitors. For bookings or to list your space [www.lookafterme.co.nz](http://www.lookafterme.co.nz)