

BUSINESS PLANNING AND SETTING GOALS

Profile: Allen and Karen Kaeja, dancers (company: Kaeja d'Dance)

It isn't easy to pigeonhole Karen and Allan Kaeja. The multi-talented duo are award-winning dancers, choreographers, teachers, educators, filmmakers, producers, programmers, mentors and much more. They are as likely to be found working in local communities and schools as on national and international stages, on screen and off, producing exceptional contemporary dance work, award-winning dance films, and empowering education and outreach programs.

That's part of the reason they created Kaeja d'Dance in 1991: "We were established independents who were choreographing, dancing and teaching, and involved in many organizations. We were involved in so much that we created Kaeja d'Dance to encompass all these different things," Allen remembers.

Allen says that from the beginning he and Karen set goals and timelines for themselves. They intended to make their living from dance and dance-related activities. Creating an umbrella structure helped to define that goal and forming a not-for-profit company with charitable registration also allowed them to expand their financial potential. Karen recalls that "there were some grants and foundations you simply couldn't apply to otherwise."

Balancing so many activities created a lot of stress but all their experiences were also learning opportunities that enabled them to strategize business formats for the future. "We were teaching thousands of kids. We would teach in the morning and then run to rehearsal all afternoon. It's the same pattern with our dancers today. There was so much demand for our teaching that it wasn't leaving us energy for creativity, studio and family. We were going to let teaching in the schools go. But then we came up with a new plan for how it could work, so we began to teach our dancers to teach the work -- therefore getting it out farther, to more people, to more teachers who could then use it themselves. And it freed us up to a certain degree."

Businesses often incorporate spin-off activities and the Kaejas think of their activities as a river with many tributaries. "We create a main stage work. Then it tours and is honed further. I create the script for a dance film that we create from it. And then shortly after, it is honed further into a matinee version for schools while the film tours the world for years," says Allen, describing their business cycle. Everything is inter-related. Nothing stands alone.

For the Kaejas, planning is crucial. As a young couple intending to combine family and dance careers, they had to know not just what they were doing in six months, but also two years ahead. "Our fathers had the same approach -- unless you pay cash, you can't afford to buy something. So as we began to plan our company, our vision for production, we understood that foresight was really needed," Allen recalls. "For our first concert together in 1991, we began in 1989," says Karen. "We had to plan for the finances,

know the timeline for publicity, know our audience, to whom we were marketing, how to reach them and how long it would take, secure the dancers and other choreographers and ensure they had time for rehearsals. We had danced for many people, and knew that if you don't plan far enough ahead, you are scrambling and won't have an audience. You've got to get the business stuff together so you can be the artist you need to be on stage."

Their planning activities often start from an understanding of their own needs and of gaps in community resources. Allen emphasizes that he co-founded the Fringe Festival of Modern Dance because there weren't any venues for independent choreographers. Offering a festival format for self-presenting artists helped promote efficiencies and grabbed attention. One of the reasons Karen co-founded the Festival of Interactive Physics was a personal goal to study. The festival invited guests to Toronto for workshops, helping to expand community resources while offering Karen, then a young mother, opportunities to study without travelling.

Above all, the Kaejas say, dreaming and passion underlie everything they do. Allen maintains that: "You have to believe what you are doing and act on those beliefs, on your passion. But be real. You have to live in both worlds -- the dream and reality are not separate." And when Karen looks back, she is most proud of "having carved a living out of what we love and have a passion for, and that I can give so much of this to other artists who want to make a life of their art form as well."

Reflection Questions

1. How would you like to see your creative enterprise grow?
2. Have you articulated some preliminary goals for the short-term, mid-term, and long-term?
3. Do your plans respond both to your needs (creative and practical) and to the needs of your audience or artistic community or others?