

Empowering a Billion Women

Ingrid Vanderveldt

CEO and Founder of Empowering a Billion Women and EBW Distributors

At the age of four, I knew I was called to empower women (and girls) around the world. I was just a little girl, so I didn't know HOW I was going to do that... but every day, even at such a young age, there was a purpose that spoke to me.

It was a calling to help women reach their life's fullest potential. It was an act of faith.

In the 4th grade, the principal of my school called my parents in and told them that I was mentally handicapped (he actually used the "R-word") because I seemed to have a severe learning problem. He said I was hopeless.

My parents didn't believe him.

They had faith in me and faith in my future. They didn't listen to the people who said I couldn't improve, I couldn't learn, that I wouldn't be smart. After instilling so much faith in their daughter and ultimately meeting different doctors, we found out I just had a bad hearing problem and issues with my ears. And once that was solved, I was able to learn, to thrive, to grow.

My parent's faith in me let me expand and evolve as a little girl so I could then use my own faith to expand and support others.

Fast forward many years. Businesses founded. Businesses crashed. I learned the power of capitalism (when used right, how you can really empower and support people across the globe) and also the challenges you face in the business world (especially as a woman). More opportunities came. And many failures ensued.

And then, one day in 2011... I found myself on a dirt road in Dallas.

See, at the time, I was both celebrating and struggling. Two businesses I helped to create and run had gotten sold... but the money I expected from those sales did not come. My future was open, but my finances could've been better. I was debating what was next while spending time on a ranch in Dallas with my husband. I felt like I just couldn't figure out how to create sustainable opportunities for women, for our families, and for ourselves. I kept praying and asking to God, "Please use me in the way you have intended for my life. You have given me this desire to serve, a voice, a call to be more. Please use me to my fullest potential and I will be in service to that call!"

The next day, I was on that dirt road right next to the ranch. The Texas sun was beating down. I was trying to think of my entire life and my actual purpose. What was I here for? Was that dream I had as a little girl even real or viable? So I looked up at the sky and I prayed.

"God, you know, I've had so many amazing experiences in my life. Things that worked out well. Things that didn't work out well. What is all this about!? What am I actually supposed to do with my life? What is it that you need me to do?!"

And what came back in that moment, like some divine vision, was the crystal clear calling for my life's purpose.

"Ingrid, everything that WE (*notice WE, not me, or I*) have been preparing you for is that WE need you to 'empower a billion women'!

Not a thousand or a million. But, a billion. It came as this unbelievably powerful and clear vision and calling. It seemed crazy. It seemed TOO BIG.

At the moment of hearing this "calling", I freaked out. I mean, how can you empower a billion women?? How does one person do that?

Then something came to me that I now realize is so true and I share with others today:

Something truly extraordinary happens when we allow ourselves the opportunity to show up as our fullest selves and show what we are authentically called to do in the world. And it's amazing how the people, resources, and opportunities open up in ways that we could never have even imagined.

So, I heeded those words. And I chose faith.

In that moment, I wondered what could happen if I put my full, absolute faith in this mission, this desire to serve the world and empower its women...

What happened next was HOW I started to get the wheels in motion and make this vision come true.

A [divinely guided] thought came to me... the only way we're going to empower women across the globe is through technology. Technology is what enables change, growth, and connection. And soon after, through a series of synchronicities and connections, I was naturally led to a conversation with Steve Felice, President of Dell (I had been in Rio the year before for DWEN — The Dell Women's Entrepreneur Network).

I began to prepare for a meeting with Steve and let me tell you, I've never been so nervous going into a meeting before! My first meeting with the president of Dell computers... This was my BIGGEST opportunity yet.

Normally I'm confident and can handle meetings so well. Why was I so nervous?

Well, was I really going to tell Steve I was called by God on a dirt road in Dallas, Texas to empower a billion women...?

For the five days before the meeting, I prayed and prayed and prayed. And then in prayer, I asked again, is this what I'm actually called to do? Is this my purpose? And from within and above, I heard a resounding, *YES. This is exactly what you're going to do.*

You're going to go in and you're going to share authentically what your calling is and Steve is going to hear you and he's going to have one of two choices to make: One, who is this crazy person in the room? Please, exit stage right. Or two, what if this person really DOES have faith in her calling and a passion to succeed in it? What if we team up with her and create an opportunity to have this potential to reach a billion women around the world?

Thank god for that meeting. Our 30-minute meeting turned into a 3-hour meeting. We ended up shaking hands on a deal and I became the first Entrepreneur-in-Residence for Dell computers. That 3-hour meeting was supposed to turn into a 6-month trial period, but it turned into a 3-year leadership role.

And within those three years, starting from zero... we built a \$250 million business segment, founded the \$125M Dell Innovators Credit Fund, and started the Dell Founders Club and the Dell Center for Entrepreneurs. I was also asked to be a member of United Nations Foundation's Global Entrepreneurs Council and in 2018 and I was a Recipient of the Global Empowerment Award by the Global Business and Interfaith Peace Awards in partnership with the UN.

That all started because two people said, "You know what? We're going to come together and believe in faith that we are authentically called to do this, and we're going to layer in the business opportunities to see what we can make happen together."

After I finished my role with Dell in 2016, I left to start the global movement, "Empowering a Billion Women by 2020" using technology, global connections, mentorship, and financial advising to empower women and girls across the world. And it's working. We're constantly evolving, working hard, pivoting, and empowering women to be leaders in business, in community, and society.

Now it's 2020. As we all know, the global pandemic is happening (at the time of this writing) and out of this tragedy and intense times, we continued to pivot and find solutions for the people of this world. We expanded the services and connections of Empowering a Billion Women and created EBW Distributors, a women-led, global sourcing and distribution network to get critical medical supplies to those organizations and hospitals in desperate need.

Did I envision this is how 'Empowering a Billion Women' would evolve at the start? Not at all.

But, it all came from faith. First, a little girl's faith who wanted to empower women across the world. Then her parent's faith that she would not be held back and that she could truly live to her own potential and purpose. And finally, a woman's authentic faith in God and how she listened to her calling through Him to truly empower a billion women and make this happen.

So here we are now. Still living, acting, evolving, and moving forward with faith and purpose. Every single day I wake up and calm my mind to sit in this faith and to receive meditations and guidance from God, or the universe, or however you want to call it.

This is our time to walk forward in the world with what we are authentically called to do, to serve other people in faith, and connect with the opportunities and the resources to make that happen. I truly believe—if you follow your calling, anything is possible.