

Self-Made Woman

Want to know the real definition of owning your destiny? Look no further than **Mahisha Dellinger**, the founder of the hair care brand Curls

BY MARQUITA K. HARRIS



Growing up in Meadowview in Sacramento, California, aka Danger Island, Mahisha Dellinger was a latchkey kid from a single-parent home. By the time she was in her late teens, many of her friends had either perished from gun violence or gotten pregnant. Dellinger's trips to her father's more stable home in Rancho Cordova every other weekend exposed her to an environment where opportunity seemed to flourish. In 2002 she launched her now widely popular organic hair care brand Curls. Now a published author and the host of *Mind Your Business With Mahisha* on OWN, she helps women-led businesses achieve success. With grit, grace and a laser focus, the former Intel marketing manager reached for the stars and never looked back. Here is how she did it.

ESSENCE: Before Curls, you worked for the tech company Intel. What made you strike out on your own?

MAHISHA DELLINGER: I wanted to take back control of my financial destiny and my daughter's future. I was driven by my daughter, Kiana. She needed me to take care of her, so I

had to make that shift. That's when the light bulb went off, and I realized I needed to create a business. I had to own it. That's when I started thinking differently.

ESSENCE: But you didn't leave corporate life right away when you launched your company?

DELLINGER: I did leave Intel because I couldn't continue to be in the office from 8 to 5 every day and really launch a business. I moved to Pfizer, where I was able to have more flexibility.

ESSENCE: How did you secure the start-up funding for Curls?

DELLINGER: I got denied left and right, so I had to use what I had in my bank account. I began smaller than I wanted, which was a good thing. I wasn't yet ready for the retail landscape, so I started an e-commerce space, with a manufacturing batch of about 300 units. Being able to really grow from there was a blessing, because when you start small, you can learn from the small mistakes. The bigger your launch, the bigger and more public your mistakes.

ESSENCE: What helped propel you to the level of success you have now?

DELLINGER: I'm always afraid of being poor again. That's the bottom line. I have this fear that I'm going to wake up one morning and I'll be back in Meadowview. So I work hard. I work like nobody's business.

This interview has been edited for clarity and space.

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EXCLUSIVE
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