

DARE Q & A with: Tena Clark



Tena Clark founded DMI Music 15 years ago. She is a preeminent songwriter, and is one of the rare female producers in the music business. She is among the most influential women in American media. She is an award-winning songwriter and producer and has contributed to multi-platinum movie soundtracks as well as television and commercials. DMI is at the forefront of entertainment and music marketing, crafting strategies and activations for global brands that include Build-A-Bear, Cisco, Delta Air Lines, and General Mills. Tena is a graduate of the University of Southern Mississippi.

Q: What is the biggest risk you've ever taken?

A: I had a comfortable life as a writer and producer of music and decided to start my own company in 1997. I felt there would be an upheaval in the music industry due to the Internet and I wanted a way to deliver and create music in a new way without brick and mortar companies. I evaluated this for six months and was told by friends that they did not think I was on the right path. In fact, people told me I was nuts. Despite the feedback it proved to be a great move, but it was a very risky and scary move.

Q: Where did you get the courage and confidence to do it?

A: I got my business acumen from my father and my creativity from my mom. My mother encouraged me to pursue music as a career but I was always challenged by my father who kept asking me if I was making money by pursuing the music business. My mother always expressed her pride in me while my father continued to question me. However, my father always encouraged me to take risks. He told me I would never make a dime if I didn't take risks. He said when you fall down you don't curl up and go in a hole; you dust yourself off and get up and try again. Because my father continued to question my desire to be in the music business, I think it made me persevere so that I could prove him wrong.

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Q: What advice do you have for building self-confidence?

A: You have to start somewhere and standing on the sidelines and shutting down after the first “no” is not going to get you ahead. Don’t give up. Just keep moving forward. You need to believe in yourself and have passion. You don’t need money-- you just need determination. Doubting is what holds people back.

Q: What is the biggest mistake you have ever made? What did you learn and how did you recover?

A: I have a hard time saying no. I am a workaholic who juggles too many projects instead of focusing only on the best ones.

When I look back I’ve always had to travel but I never missed what was important to my daughter. They grow up so fast and I wish I had turned off the phone and said no to other opportunities more often so that I could have been more present in my daughter’s life.

In terms of mistakes in business: I feel like I am loyal to a fault and I have kept people when I should have let them go. One of the things I look back on with regret is listening to my legal team when we had to let some people go who had been with the company since the beginning, but whom the company had outgrown. Our legal team would not let me be in the room when tough discussions were held. Looking back now, I wish I had been there anyway.

***“Above all else
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Q: If you had a young woman you cared deeply about entering the workforce today, what single piece of advice would you have for her?

A: Above all else keep your integrity and do not sell out under any circumstances. If it doesn’t feel right—it ain’t right. Eventually it will catch up with you.

I have always said I will never write a song that I cannot stand before God and my daughter and sing.

Q: How did you make the leap from middle to senior management? What advice would you offer to others who want to make this leap?

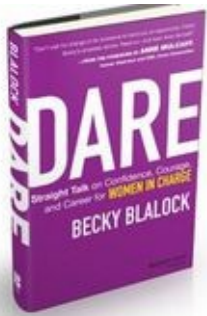
A: Play up. Don’t play with someone at your level if you want to get better. The minute you think you know it all you can put a sign saying “closed” on the door. You must keep learning and keep seeking advice-- good, bad and ugly. Surround yourself with lots of mentors. (cont.)

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A: (cont.) If you surround yourself with mediocre people you will be mediocre.

Q: What is your greatest fear today?

A: I fear that I am not making an impact. I believe I should be making a positive difference for someone every day. It's not about the money or celebrity – it's all about what I'm doing today that makes a difference and makes me worthy of breathing the air on this earth.



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