




RightBrains CAREER GUIDE

Inspiring stories from role
models in digital technology

A photograph of two young women, Sharina Kiesebrink and Jessica Eijgelsheim, sitting on a black metal railing. Sharina is on the left, wearing a light blue denim jacket over a grey top and black pants. Jessica is on the right, wearing a bright red blazer over a white top and dark jeans. They are both smiling at the camera. The background is a blurred indoor space with warm lighting.

Sharina Kiesebrink
Jessica Eijgelsheim
Founders
Code Qube

CREATIVE THINKING AND SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT SKILLS MAKE US A SUCCESSFUL TEAM

Sharina Kiesebrink and Jessica Eijgelsheim developed the Code Qube, an interactive lesson that teaches primary school children how to build a website using HTML and CSS. Combining their coding and design skills, they invented a tool to introduce young children to the world of technology.

How did you come up with the idea for the Code Qube?

Sharina: Before we were business partners, we were best friends. We met on the first day of university and clicked instantly. Though we both studied communications and multimedia design, I followed the design track, while Jessica learned to code. One day, we decided we wanted to combine our skills for our final project and graduate together.

Jessica: We learned programming from behind a computer. A teacher projected the code on a big screen, and we typed it over and over again. After one lesson, we thought, this could be taught in a totally different

way. It could be physical, like putting together puzzle pieces. We started from there.

The Code Qube teaches children to code in three steps. First, they're introduced to the code through a video and games. Then, they use what they've learned to build their own code by writing with markers and rearranging magnets on a board. In the final step, they make it digital: they type the code onto a tablet and create their own website.

Were you nervous the first time you brought the Code Qube to a classroom?

Jessica: Our first lesson was a complete failure! We brought the Code Qube to a school, and the children weren't engaged at all. After this, we went back to the drawing board. We began consulting with teachers to see what teaching methods work. We also observed the children and asked them about how they like to learn. We repeated this ten times. Eventually, we developed the tools that the children wanted and needed to learn. We began to see our methods working.

How are your lives as entrepreneurs different from those of your friends who work for established companies?

Sharina: Before this all began, we had no intention of starting our own business. In fact, we took a business class at university, and when the teacher asked if anyone in the class wanted to be an entrepreneur, we

looked at each other and mouthed, 'Nope!' But once we started, we realised how great it is to be your own boss and make your own decisions. We do have to work a lot. When you work for a boss, you can go home after a long day and forget about your job. But as business owners, even if we're tired, we have to open the emails and answer the calls.

Jessica: Your own business never stops. It's 24/7. We're always WhatsApping each other our ideas in the middle of the night. We often kiss our weekends goodbye because we have to work. There's also the administrative side. We had to learn how to market our product and do taxes. In the end, though, we love it. Every day is different. One week, we could be working in a classroom with thirty children, and the next week, we could be teaching five kids with very high IQs. The variety makes it fun. It's also funny to see what the kids create. We must have seen hundred websites about games. Things like this keep it light.

What resources helped you as you established your company?

Sharina: In the beginning, we had several mentors. We joined Starterslift, a group that helps young entrepreneurs. It helped to have people to fall back on and ask our questions. They helped us trademark our name, set up our administration and learn about running a business. We also pitched our product at competitions, through which we won office space and funding for our first prototype. There are many resources out there for young entrepreneurs, but nobody comes to you asking if you want to take advantage of them. You

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have to do research and audition and find your own way to get something out of it.

Have you faced any challenges because of your age?

Jessica: Sometimes people don't take us seriously because we're so young and because we're women in technology. They think we do this as a hobby, but they don't understand that we are launching a business. We had to learn how to value our time and our efforts and how to say no to people. This is a negative aspect of being young.

Sharina: But there's also a flip-side. We stand out because we're young and we're women. We've found that because of this, people also want to help us. When

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we needed a 3D drawing for our prototype, we brought our concept to a local business. The owner said, 'You're so young, and you have such a great idea. We want to encourage you, so we'll have an intern do this for free.' It's really nice to know there are people out there rooting for us to succeed.

What advice do you have for young people who want to start their own businesses?

Jessica: It's really important to believe in your own idea. When we decided to turn our project into a business, one of our teachers told us our idea was dumb and that it wouldn't work. We could have believed her and stopped right then and there – but we were stubborn. We've learned that you have to stand by your own ideas, even if others tell you that you won't succeed.

Sharina: Keep in mind that you'll have to work at it. Maybe as you go, you'll see that you have to do it differently. You may have to scrap it, try all over again and do it better. That's another important point: you have to learn to be okay with making mistakes. You have to make mistakes to learn anything. We are still learning, and the learning never stops.

*Sharina Kiesebrink
and Jessica Eijgelsheim*