

- Introduction: This episode of Beyond the Bottom Line is brought to you by the Program on Entrepreneurship at the Yale School of Management where we're educating students for business and society.
- Georgia Sills: Thank you so much for coming to the School of Management. We're so excited to have you. Just to get us kicked off, if you wouldn't mind telling us a little bit about yourself, and your background, and what you're working on.
- Hallie Meyer: Totally. So, my name is Hallie Meyer. I actually graduated from regular Yale in 2015 and I have since been doing various things in the world of food. Starting with a home cooked meal delivery service that I started here with some law students, called Umi Kitchen.
- Hallie Meyer: And then, took a bit of a break from food to do some work in the South Bronx with AmeriCorps, through a program called City Year. Which, if you don't know it, you should check it out and ask every 18 to 25 year old to apply to do a service here with City Year.
- Hallie Meyer: And I'm now in the process of opening an ice cream coffee bar, Italian inspired, called Caffe Panna in the Gramercy neighborhood of New York.
- Georgia Sills: Great. So, what does it mean to be an Italian inspired coffee ice cream store?
- Hallie Meyer: That's a good question. The first thing it means is that it's not fully true to things Italian. I think you can kind of go a few ways when you take a culture and try to open a food establishment after it.
- Hallie Meyer: You can either say, "Okay, we're going to try to be so true to this to the point where we may even have things on our menu that New Yorkers don't want. We may not have things that New Yorkers do want."
- Hallie Meyer: But, for example, I plan to offer sprinkles because there are going to be kids who want to come and get an ice cream cone and they want sprinkles. And if there aren't sprinkles, that's not going to make their day, right? In Italy you'd never see sprinkles. That's the first thing that it means, that it's not exactly true to all things Italian.
- Hallie Meyer: But, it is Italian inspired in that I spent a lot of time cooking in Rome and am totally in love with the café bar gelateria culture there. So, a lot of the flavors are inspired by the way that Italian gelaterias use fruit and also more design related things like a standing bar, stools, just sort of different components here and there.
- Georgia Sills: So, tell me a little bit about what it was like to work in an Italian gelateria.

Hallie Meyer: Oh, it was a blast. I was at a place called Otaleg in Trastevere. Otaleg is actually gelato backwards. Like, O-T-A-L-E-G. Yeah.

Georgia Sills: Very inventive.

Hallie Meyer: Yeah, very. So, it's a cool place because Rome is filled with a lot of good food, but it's also filled with a lot of tourist traps and it's surprisingly easy to eat poorly there if you don't do your research. Especially with gelato because Americans go to Rome thinking, "Great, I'm going to have the best gelato of my life."

Hallie Meyer: But most of the gelato that you can see and is displayed in the street, it's actually not made on premise. They're maybe churning it there, but they're buying their base from somewhere else and we can get really ice cream nerdy here, if we want to.

Hallie Meyer: But, point being is that sort of recently there have been quite a few newer more artisanal gelaterias that have started to pop up where people are saying, "Hey, let's make our own bases. Let's use seasonal fruits. Let's not pile cookies and pineapples on top of our gelato."

Hallie Meyer: You know what I'm talking about? You've seen that, right?

Georgia Sills: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Hallie Meyer: So, Otaleg is one of these places and the store started in a place called Colli Portuensi, which is a little bit out of the city of Rome. So, very like neighborhood spot, not a place tourists would go.

Hallie Meyer: And just recently, last year, they opened this shop in Trastevere. And Trastevere is sort of now more of a touristy area and that's the shop I worked in. It was teeny, teeny, tiny. The kitchen was not bigger than a small Toyota. You know those? What are the cars?

Georgia Sills: The Camry?

Hallie Meyer: Yeah, exactly. Like, it was tiny. The owner of the shop, a guy named Marco. Ciao, Marco, if you're out there. Doubt it.

Hallie Meyer: The owner of the shop, one guy who was kind of the gelato maker, I guess you would call him. And, I pretty much just went in and was like, "Hey, can I spend a few weeks just like [staging 00:05:37] with you?"

Hallie Meyer: And I had known them because of the time I previously spent in Rome eating a lot of gelato. So, it was more just like we have this relationship, let me see if I can help you make gelato.

Hallie Meyer: But, the way we did things was just so Rome and so different from the way that restaurants and ice cream shops, specifically, do their production in New York or anywhere in the U.S. We would open at noon and close at midnight.

Hallie Meyer: I was only doing back of house, so I would get in at nine. We'd get a bunch of fruit, sometimes I'd run to the market in the square close by and be like, "Oh, hey, these cherries look great. Let's do this."

Hallie Meyer: And then we'd just be spinning for two and a half hours and once that was over we had a full case of gelato, so that's an approach to production that is very gelato. Like, when you're spinning it daily and you're not letting it harden overnight or 48 hours. Sometimes there's like a hardening phase with ice cream, but not with gelato.

Hallie Meyer: And so it would be like, "Oh, Marco got this case of beets. He needs us to make gelato with beets."

Hallie Meyer: So, he's a little bit experimental in that way, too. But, he pretty much let me make whatever I wanted to, so I was able to test out flavors and use my base sometimes. And he would criticize it, be like, "[foreign language 00:07:08]."

Hallie Meyer: Like, there's too much fat because my base is a little bit more like it's an ice cream base, so it's got higher fat content than the traditional gelato, but people liked it.

Georgia Sills: So, what draws you to ice cream?

Hallie Meyer: Ah, so much. First of all, it's delicious. Second of all, I think the thing that I really discovered this past year, when I was doing City Year, is that the real reason I love it is because you can talk about it with anyone. Like, literally anyone is excited to talk about ice cream.

Hallie Meyer: Whether that is a fourth grader at PS 154, who suddenly is listening to you and following directions because they're excited about what you're talking about, to an old dude who just like rum raisin. So, everyone kind of has an ice cream connection.

Hallie Meyer: So, I like that it's an accessible topic. I think it just comes down to that. It's an accessible topic and it makes people happy and you can't be upset when you're eating it. You have to enjoy it.

Georgia Sills: How did your time in AmeriCorps at City Year shape your decision to kind of get into this and even your decision to pursue ice cream?

Hallie Meyer: Yeah. So, first of all I think doing City Year was the best professional decision I have ever made. Not that I have made that many, because I'm 25. But, of the

decisions I've made, this is one that I'm really the most proud of and also feel like I got the most out of.

Hallie Meyer: I think a lot of people sign up to do service thinking that they're going to give back to the community. And, yeah you are, but I got so much out of that and I'm just so grateful for that.

Hallie Meyer: I went into City Year a year ago August. So, a year and a half ago. Just sort of had signed up to do a year of whatever was needed of me. And I had, kind of on the back burner, I know I want to own an ice cream shop someday.

Hallie Meyer: And I remember the first day of our training, we were doing some kind of intro thing and there was a fun fact and I was like, "You know what? I'm going to try this on for size. "It's like, "My name's Hallie from New York, New York. I'm serving at PS 154X and I'm going to open an ice cream shop someday."

Hallie Meyer: And I was like, "Oh okay that sounds sort of reasonable." And I always wanted to do this, literally always since I was a kid. I just never really said it seriously.

Hallie Meyer: So, throughout City Year, it was really important to me to bring into the afterschool programming that we ran some component of food education or just like food literacy. So, I would bring in local entrepreneurs to talk about their food businesses and when we weren't doing that we needed something very hands-on for the kids to do.

Hallie Meyer: In public schools in New York there's really not much of a kitchen to work with, so we would do things like Miss Hallie would bring her home ice cream machine and make ice cream with the kids. And make salsa and salads and things that you didn't really have to cook.

Hallie Meyer: So, throughout that time I was really kind of refining this love affair with the idea of ice cream. Like, my students started calling me the ice cream queen and I just liked it. Everyone can relate. I know I'm sort of hammering this home, but I think there are very few things that we can all sort of rally around, especially today.

Hallie Meyer: So, when I was working at PS 154, one of my former colleagues, cooks, from Umi Kitchen, which was a startup I worked on just out of college, he was from the neighborhood, Mott Haven. And he was opening an empanada shop and he invited me to start selling my ice cream at his Monday pop-up throughout the spring.

Hallie Meyer: And I was like, you know what? Why not? This is a great way to continue to get involved in this community. And so, every Monday from March through June, we would take over this café called the Mottley Kitchen. Which, if you're ever in Mott Haven, check it out. Some of the best pastries in New York. I swear to god.

Hallie Meyer: And so we would take it over, he would sell his empanadas, I would sell my ice cream. And, literally, during my lunch break at school I would run over and scoop the ice cream, come back.

Hallie Meyer: And then after afterschool I would go home and take over my parent's kitchen and make a ton of ice cream. It was like, thank you mom and dad for letting me do that and use your kitchen as the production facility, which no longer happens. Don't worry.

Hallie Meyer: But, I think, in terms of what I learned from my experience working at City Year that I will take forward, really had more to do with leadership and creating a culture on a team of people and unifying people around the task at hand.

Hallie Meyer: And, it's not super logical. Okay, fourth and fifth graders, ice cream, service. But, it really just makes so much sense to me. I was able to have the experience of leading a genuinely diverse group of young people in very emotionally charged work.

Hallie Meyer: People were coming at this work with very different backgrounds and intentions, but we all had to still do it because we were doing it for the kids. So, there were a lot of challenges that I face and was able to find solutions for that I 100% plan on applying to Caffè Panna.

Hallie Meyer: Like, everything from the power of wearing a uniform every day to morning circle where we all go around and say our joys and appreciations, we establish our goals for the day. Really like small culture things that make a huge difference in bringing a team of people together.

Georgia Sills: So you mentioned that you had a prior startup, as well, called Umi Kitchen. And this was before your service at City Year. So, can you tell me just a little bit about that and maybe what you learned in that that you'd like to apply moving forward?

Hallie Meyer: Yeah, so Umi was a home cooked meal delivery service that I started with two co-founders, actually, who invited me onto the project when I was an undergrad at Yale and they were law students, Jason and Khalil.

Hallie Meyer: They had this idea that there were amazing home cooks out in New Haven and there were customers who wanted to buy home cooked meals. So, we kind of ran a pilot here in New Haven and I had been involved with food stuff with the Yale Farm here. I had a catering company on campus.

Hallie Meyer: I was always kind of doing that, involved in the world of food on Yale's campus, so it just was super exciting to me that I would get to take that interest beyond Yale and into the New Haven community.

Hallie Meyer: And we ran a successful trial here one summer through the YEI Fellowship and then decided to raise some venture capital and launch it in New York. So many learnings. I'll have to narrow it down and focus on the biggest one that's influencing how I'm approaching Caffè Panna differently.

Hallie Meyer: So, we raised \$1.4 million. We wanted this to be huge. We wanted it to be the Etsy for food. Instead of having this vision of scale from the get go, the way I'm approaching Caffè Panna is really in a much more specific way. So, I want to have one profitable location before I think about anything else.

Hallie Meyer: And I'm very explicitly holding myself to three goals. The first is to have a super happy, empowered team of people working with me. The second is to have absolutely delighted guests who are enjoying the best ice cream in the city. And then, third is to have this one profitable location.

Hallie Meyer: And once I've gotten all those three things done, that's when I can say, "Okay, and what's the next step for growth?"

Hallie Meyer: So, I would say that's the biggest learning is to... For me, I work better when I'm really doing things on my own terms, sticking to a very clear vision before asking bigger questions and asking so much of the business to be more than it is. I can't start selling grocery store pints if I haven't had people come to the store yet.

Georgia Sills: By taking this focus with Caffè Panna, are you afraid of missing out on any big opportunities?

Hallie Meyer: Absolutely not. I mean, maybe that's crazy, but I'm just really not. I think that if that were my ambition, maybe yes. But my ambition is to do what makes me really happy, which is to be the bouncer of this great ice cream café.

Hallie Meyer: And I think that's a really important thing, too, is to be so comfortable and so able to articulate... And I'm still working on this. Really be able to articulate, what is your dream job for yourself? Not only it's easy as a founder to get eaten up by your business and then forget, what is it that you envision for yourself?

Hallie Meyer: So, in creating a plan and vision for what success looks like for Caffè Panna, it's really important that alongside I also say, what does success look like for me? What is my role on this team? And then also... Oops. Spilling water everywhere. And then also, what other roles do I need to fill in, given that this is my role?

Georgia Sills: So, how do you stop yourself from getting swept up in all the lingo surrounding entrepreneurship? So, at Yale and at a lot of MBA programs, people like to think really big, and like to think about conquering the world, and becoming the Amazons and the Googles. How do you stay on that path that you've defined?

Hallie Meyer: I don't think I have an answer for that, but I can certainly speak to why it's more appealing to me to start small before thinking on that scale. I think the power of

business in community is just so powerful. And if you can't make it good for one small community, then you will probably end up hurting the world if you try to make it bigger.

Hallie Meyer: So, for me, so much of the reason I've ever wanted to have a business is because it's just so fun to create value for the community you're in. And I think that I wish people would hold themselves to that standard a little more. You take, but you create more value than you're taking.

Hallie Meyer: I don't really have anything wise or articulate to say around this, but that's just where my head is at right now. I'll probably have a lot more learning once I operate in a single community for a year.

Hallie Meyer: But I think it also just comes down to personality. If you're someone who feels successful when you make one person happy and you have a positive interaction where you empower one person, then it's a lot easier to be able to say, "I don't need to change the way that the world eats ice cream. I can feel good about adding value to this community."

Hallie Meyer: Not that there's anything wrong with feeling like you want to really change something, but I just question people who say they want to disrupt things for the sake of disrupting. Like, how are you adding value, is the question.

Georgia Sills: Yeah, so you talked a bit about the importance of positively impacting the community that you're hopefully going to be a part of. Can you talk a little bit about how you chose the neighborhood you did in New York and maybe why you didn't choose somewhere like Rome, which it seems like you love a lot?

Hallie Meyer: First of all, if I tried to do this in Rome I would get eggs thrown at me. And people would be like, "Who is this American girl trying to do this thing?"

Hallie Meyer: So, Rome is always going to just be the place that I go to for inspiration, but I don't think that I will ever try to have a business there.

Hallie Meyer: I think that it's important that we think about the word community very broadly. I remember, actually, this past year during City Year my job as the team leader was to make sure that my team was delivering the service to our students excellently. And everyone was motivated a little bit differently.

Hallie Meyer: For me, I was really motivated by this idea that this was actually like national service. This was like, yes, in a very small specific community, but it was national service that we were doing because hopefully we were helping to end the high school dropout crisis.

Hallie Meyer: But on a more specific level, we were enriching students' lives, we were creating programming, and just being cheerleaders for them throughout the day. And to

some of my team members, they really were more motivated by the idea that this was community service and not national service.

Hallie Meyer: So, I think that we all kind of have these different ideas of what community is and I think it's important to be flexible with that. So, for example, I'm opening up in Gramercy Park. Gramercy Park is the neighborhood I grew up in. There aren't a lot of people that live in Gramercy Park who need jobs, but New York City is a place where there's tons of people who are really qualified and ready to be empowered by the food industry.

Hallie Meyer: I sort of had this dream, originally, to have Caffè Panna be like a jobs training program for, maybe, previously incarcerated high schoolers. So, like young people who are kind of coming out of this really awful, traumatic experience, but could have the potential to be really empowered by the food industry.

Hallie Meyer: Which is kind of like this uniquely empowering, to say that word again, kind of industry because you're literally making other people happy. There's nothing that makes me feel better about myself than when I can make someone else happy. And I think food is just very unique in that way.

Hallie Meyer: One of the things that I do hope to do, and that I've started doing a bit, is hire from a local high school called the Food and Finance High School, which is incredible. It's actually just a public high school in New York, but it has this extra culinary programming called the Food Education Fund.

Hallie Meyer: So, students who qualify for free lunch are graduating with all these industry certifications and they are getting amazing experience in the food industry in New York. So, I hope they all come work for me, is my point.

Hallie Meyer: I think there's just so many ways that a business can add value to its community in the experiences that it provides for its team members, in the ways that it engages them in other activities in the community. So, maybe that's saying that one of our training days every month is actually going to be like a day of service.

Hallie Meyer: There's so many things you can do, as a founder, in general. It's your responsibility to do them in exactly the way you would want to do them.

Georgia Sills: What is your favorite flavor?

Hallie Meyer: It depends on the brand, obviously. So, I'm just going to go with my favorite flavor that you can get shipped nationwide because I think that that speaks to everyone. And it's from Salt & Straw. It's salted chocolate ganache and almond brittle in a delicious plain base. That's their base. They're based in Oregon and they do ship nationwide for a pretty penny, but it's worth it.

Georgia Sills: Towards the end of every episode we like to ask, what book you would like to give as a gift if you had a friend ask you?

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Hallie Meyer: I think the most influential book for me this past year was a book called, For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too. It's by, I forget his name, but he's just an amazing writer.

Hallie Meyer: It was super helpful for me in my experience working with City Year. And I think that everyone would have been better off if they'd read it. Yeah. And I certainly was.

Georgia Sills: Great. Well, thank you so much for your time. This was a great conversation.

Hallie Meyer: Thank you so much. Let's talk about ice cream more.