

Jennifer Larson is a technology entrepreneur, charter public school founder, and mother of four children. She is the visionary force behind SchoolBzz and passionate about finding innovative ways to engage parents and supporters in their child's learning journey.

What was the best business advice you received while launching your EdTech Startup?

Obsess about the problem, not the solution. It's the difference between being a customer-focused company and a product-focused company. If you obsess about the problem, you are forced to stay connected with your customers and deliver a solution that best meets their continually evolving needs.

What things did you do early on that you would do differently today?

I believe we are here today because of all the bumps and bruises from our early days.

A few things we could have done differently:

- We looked (perhaps not aggressively enough) for a technical co-founder. Unsuccessful in finding someone in our early days, I wish we would have spent more time networking to find this individual. (And actually, we are still looking.)
- We hired a sales person early on anticipating faster growth. I became very hands-off with the sales process and probably missed an opportunity to better understand that process and exactly what was needed to close contracts. Moving forward, I'm driving all sales and business development until we are confident we have product market fit and a steady stream of incoming leads and new clients.
- We thought raising money would be easier than generating revenues during our early pilot days before we really had a product to sell. Today's strategy is solely focused on revenues and growth.

What inspired you to start your EdTech startup?

A colleague once said to me, "Are you looking for a job to fund your passion? Or do you want to make your passion your job?"

I had spent 10 years in the software industry (before kids), and even though I loved the endless possibilities of technology solutions, something was always missing. So the answer was obvious for me: I wanted a career I was passionate about. As a founder of two charter schools, mother to four kids, and active volunteer, education was my passion.

I discovered the problem I wanted to solve while I was in graduate school. About halfway through my program, we started missing things at our kids' school; an orchestra performance, a non-uniform dress of choice day (and the list goes on). Our school was using so many different tools to push information to parents, it was overwhelming.



About SchoolBzz

The SchoolBzz team has been collaborating with school leaders for over 15 years. From communication plans to parent engagement programs, we understand the challenges families are facing, and we are committed to ensuring schools have the support and resources they need to build a thriving school community.

Connect

Website: <https://schoolbzz.com/>

Email: jl Larson@schoolbzz.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/jenniferclarson/



I happened to be taking a business class at the time, and I decided to make this the focus of my feasibility study. I wanted to see if other parents had a similar experiences. Parents told us they were frustrated they didn't know what was happening at school. Many of them said their teachers thought they didn't care, and this couldn't be farther from the truth. These parents were busy and simply didn't know where to get the information they needed. They didn't know how to support their child at home. And this has a direct impact on a child's success in school.

What was the biggest challenge you encountered, and how did you mitigate the risks?

Besides the obvious, no contingency plan for a pandemic!

Biggest challenge: We created a software product without a technical co-founder. This was not intentional, but we have been unable to find an individual with the long-term vision and experience we desire. Oftentimes, we have found the people that truly understand the problem we are trying to solve are parents themselves.

How we've mitigated the risks:

- We learned as much as we could on our own including a lot of research, webinars, and events.
- We built a great network of technical advisors.
- We focused on strategic partnerships with organizations with strong technical teams such as Amazon Web Services (AWS), Schoology and Powerschool, and Broadnet.

Although there was a benefit to this, it allowed us to envision a solution that was not limited by anyone's technology experience or pre-conceived ideas.

What was the best resource you discovered that enabled your success?

I am a huge fan of the [Lean Canvas](#). It's a one page business plan template that I use to quickly sketch out product ideas and marketing strategies. It's how we quickly determine if a new idea is worth pursuing, and it's how we keep our team aligned to a common goal.

What advice do you want to share with today's EdTech startup?

Build a company around an idea you are extremely passionate about, know your "why," and don't give up! Startup is tough. K12 is tough. Develop a really good network of supporters including friends, family, partners, entrepreneurs, and customers. You will have days where you feel like your entire world is crashing down, and you need to know who you can call to remind you why you started this venture.



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