

# Time's Up!

Two intensely passionate entrepreneurs turn to Coach Kevin when they outgrow their award-winning design firm

Isabelle Mercier Turcotte and Margarita Romano are probably the most passionate, inspirational and energetic creative directors/graphic designers one will ever meet. In the mid-1990s, in their early 20s, Mercier and Romano established an award-winning creative and graphic design firm, and over ten years built a roster of stellar client names - names that most design firms dream to include on client lists. The problem? It just wasn't enough; Mercier and Romano, partners in both business and life, outgrew their company.

Mercier and Romano, both educated in scenography and graphic design, established Scenario Design in 1996 in Vancouver, British Columbia's historic Gastown district. The pair didn't come to this decision by happenstance; both came from a long line of entrepreneurs so the decision to start a business was a natural one.

Success came quickly for these creative thinkers and bold designers. Whether it's brand identity, corporate communications or environmental design, visual communications was the firm's forte. Mercier and Romano helped identify clients' brand promises, and then through bold graphic designs helped build and manage their clients' brands in the marketplace. For clients, that meant more attention, more results and greater success; for Mercier and Romano, that meant the same with a host of significant industry awards and recognition.

## VICTIMS OF THEIR OWN SUCCESS

This kind of recognition is great – except when it forces you to change your business model. Major companies began to take serious notice of this award-winning firm and the great work being produced. Mercier and Romano got their first taste of being a victim of their own success after landing one of the largest casual food restaurants in Western Canada as a

client. The dynamic duo would have to expand and bring on additional employees to keep up with the demand, both in the market, and from their new client.

The transformation was not easy. In addition to developing creative strategies and designing spectacular work, Mercier and Romano had to take on new roles as managers. Mercier openly states, "I'm a great leader, but [not a very good manager]. I'm a big picture thinker and I don't like getting caught up in the details of managing employees." In addition, as a result of growing at rates of 400% to 500% per year, managing growth and cash flow, and learning how to work with the right clients – and say no to others - became priorities.

Client demands started to consume Mercier and Romano's lives. For example, one client kept the pair on their toes having the team put campaigns together at the last minute, rather than working with the pair to create long-term strategic plans and campaign concepts. The client insisted on being involved in every aspect of the creative process, right down to camera angles during photo shoots. And this client often reacted to competitors campaigns, leaving little room to create new innovative concepts. For fast moving, entrepreneurial designers, working with this client became cumbersome. The team derived satisfaction from strategizing and creating, working efficiently and having fun; and, they just were not having fun.

With both their business and personal lives suffering, Mercier and Romano turned to Coach Kevin, a business coach that specializes in helping successful entrepreneurs and business leaders get what they really want in business and in life by using breakthrough strategies to overcome obstacles. After deeply analyzing the situation, what was his recommendation? They would have to raise the bar on the types of clients that they would take on, and only take on

clients that valued strategic thinking, long-term planning and innovative designs and concepts.

After carefully considering the situation and the impact some clients were having on their lives, Mercier and Romano decided in 2003 that it was time to raise the bar, and if certain clients were unable to meet the expectations set forward, they would have to take the leap and sever the client relationship. The decision to stop working with one of their largest clients, at the time, was difficult. "Letting go of one of our clients, who at the time brought in fifty percent of our revenue, was a difficult decision. It resulted in cash flow challenges and at times paying to be in business," says Mercier. Rather than downsizing the business and letting go of employees, working with Coach Kevin, the pair decided to focus on filling up the pipeline with new clients - clients more suited to their style of working and personality. And despite the initial financial impact of ending one major client relationship, Mercier and Romano were happy with the decision and the strategy to find the right types of clients for their business and style of working.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Business grew both through referrals and expanded projects with current clients that met the bar on the team's expectations. The team added stellar clients including several prestigious real estate developers, a leader in specialized energy technology for the transportation industry, and a world wide manufacturer of soft-soled leather footwear for newborns to four year olds. And existing clients, including one of the world's largest banking and financial services firms, expanded the scope and breadth of their relationship with Scenario Design. But despite their success, Mercier and Romano reached a point where they realized that they were spending more time running the business versus designing, the latter of which they deeply enjoyed.

"We have great employees, a fantastic list of clients, but we were asking ourselves - what's next? Is this all? It just wasn't challenging anymore. We were spending a lot of our time just problem solving which isn't fun. Life for the past ten years was almost solely about our business, and we felt like it was time for life to be about us for a change," says Mercier.

They had gone as far as they could with the business without taking it to the next level - a full-blown ad agency; a challenge, given that Mercier and Romano were not interested in creating an ad agency. Nor would they enjoy building an agency of this scale, because they would essentially be taken away from what they really loved, creating, strategizing and designing.

*"This situation is like fitting a square peg into a round hole," says Coach Kevin.*

*"Entrepreneurs need to create their business environment in a way that is congruent with their personality, style and philosophy - and structure it in a way that fits like a custom-made suit."*

For Mercier and Romano, the business model didn't fit anymore.

## COMING TO TERMS

One of the biggest things for Mercier and Romano was coming to terms with the fact that they had outgrown the business model. Coach Kevin could see their dilemma. For ten years they had simply been the best in their profession, winning award after award for their graphic designs, attracting - and sometimes firing - high profile clients, and earning well above the industry average for their work. They were fiercely passionate about their business - but both knew they were not using their full potential.

Change didn't come easy. For nearly two years, Mercier and Romano continued with the business, despite their realization that something had to change. According to Coach Kevin, "Isabelle and Margarita's challenge was the fact that they had envisioned themselves as long-term designers and it was exceptionally hard for them to wrap their heads around letting go, especially with nothing else to jump to. But if they didn't move on, they almost certainly would have stagnated and ended up hating their business or worse, their life. For an entrepreneur, it is really hard to let go of something that you've built."

## TIME TO LET GO

The first step was to take a month off to clear their heads. Near the end of that month, Mercier and Romano definitely saw things more clearly, and concluded that they would need to make a change, quickly. During their next coaching session, Kevin asked "What do you really want? If you had a million dollars in your account, what would you do?" Mercier and Romano responded "Travel." The pair, along with Coach Kevin, then walked across the Granville Street Bridge, a landmark bridge in Vancouver. Coach Kevin challenged them to decide between two options. And they had to each individually decide by the time they made it across the bridge. Do they remain in business and if so, what changes need to be made to make it fun and enjoyable again? Or, if they travel, do they keep running the design firm? Mercier and Romano both came to the same decision; they wanted to take a year off to travel, and they didn't want the business to remain a responsibility.

Dedicated to their employees and clients, the pair decided that rather than closing shop, they would merge with another branding and graphic design firm that would hire their team, acquire their studio space and work with their clients. The process took nearly four months with the deal finalized at the beginning of 2006. "Once they made the decision, my role was to keep them focused and remind them of what was important. It's a big emotional change to let go of a business and all the attachment surrounding the business, especially when you don't know what you are going to do next," says Coach Kevin.

## A CREATIVE SABBATICAL

So what's next for Mercier and Romano? "I don't know yet," says Mercier. For now they are off on an adventure, first to Indonesia and Singapore for a month, and then next on a road trip across Canada for three or four months to visit their friends and families in Quebec. After spending so many years, completely dedicated to their business, by choice, both felt it was time to spend time with each other and with family.

But successful entrepreneurs, especially those at such a young age, don't retreat for long. According to Coach Kevin, "Serial entrepreneurs usually always go onto something bigger and better, particularly when it's something they've outgrown."

## GET WHAT YOU REALLY WANT NOW

Coaching has played an important role in the growth of Mercier and Romano and the growth of Scenario Design. Mercier shares this advice with entrepreneurs in a partnership, "If it's a partnership, it is imperative that both partners participate in coaching. If it had just been one half of us, it would have been a lot harder. If one person grows at a faster pace than the other, it's challenging; the partner coached would waste too much time explaining and trying to coach the other to move forward."

On Kevin's expertise in helping them get what they really want, she adds,

*"Kevin really has the ability to determine how we feel and what we truly want. He can uncover the real problems; you sometimes think it's an obvious problem, but it may really be something else that you don't see," says Mercier. Kevin is a strong individual who won't let anything get in the way of results and of what we truly want. If he takes on a client, it is because he believes in that client and will do what it takes to ensure success. He gets the results and we all come out winners."*

Romano adds, "It is important to have a coach that has a strong personality. I've met a few others that didn't have a strong personality, and they just don't have what it takes to make people like us successful. I suggest [if people are looking for a coach] that they find out if they are working on themselves. Kevin is constantly working on himself; he has his own coach which shows that he believes in self-improvement and wants more out of his own life."

## About Coach Kevin

Kevin Lawrence is a business coach, speaker and agent of change, who is driven by a relentless passion for helping entrepreneurs and business leaders get what they really want, in business and life. He deeply believes that entrepreneurs can have tremendous business success along with an enriching, adventurous and fulfilling lifestyle, taking a 'have your cake and eat it too' mentality to an entirely new level.

With more than a decade of hands on experience as a business coach to hundreds of entrepreneurs and business leaders across Canada and the United States, Kevin is an expert at helping clients overcome major obstacles, deal with tough decisions and capitalize on new opportunities to achieve breakthrough results. His strategies, style and savvy approach have helped his clients increase revenue, profitability and productivity; build higher caliber teams; attract ideal (and eliminate headache) clients; and, reduce stress levels and hours worked so that they are freed up to live their personal version of outrageous quality of life.

**For more information, visit [www.CoachKevin.com](http://www.CoachKevin.com) or call 1-877-564-6224**