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"I WANTED TO MOVE FROM ANALYZING RESULTS TO CREATING THEM": CYNTHIA SAMANIAN, MBA 2012

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Cynthia Samanian came to HBS with a clear sense of purpose, in her words, "to pave a path to entrepreneurship." She had been working in finance at General Electric but wanted to be more involved in the creative side of business. "I didn't like looking at what *had* been done," Cynthia says, "but preferred to be on the side of figuring out what products could be. I wanted to move from analyzing results to creating them."

At HBS, Cynthia immersed herself in entrepreneurial coursework and club activities. After graduation, she took on a role that would allow her to shift from her previous strengths to her new ambitions. At Path, a mobile application startup based in San Francisco, Cynthia joined as a business analyst, but

during her five-year tenure, moved to design and product development, becoming Director of Product Management.

Meanwhile, Cynthia sustained a passion she'd had since childhood: food. "We always sat together at the table for dinner," she says. In her adulthood, "I used cooking to recreate that warmth and connect with friends."

Although "going to culinary school and working in a restaurant was not for me," Cynthia says, "I wanted to pursue a career that would be personally fulfilling. As exciting as product management was, it didn't mesh with my desire to work in the food space."

When Path was acquired in 2015, she had the financial means to take some time planning her next move. "I didn't have to jump to a new job right away. I decided this was the opportunity to go all in on food."

Finding the right recipe for success

In 2016, Cynthia founded Confetti Kitchen, an online media company focused on millennials and featuring recipes, cooking tips, tutorials and other food-related content. The plan was to grow an audience of sufficient size to attract advertisers but, she says in retrospect, "It wasn't the right business model for me." Cynthia knew she wanted a positive cash flow business that could launch without VC support, and that she preferred challenging project work to the day-to-day management of content. These critical lessons would inform her next move.

Most importantly, she stumbled onto something that was both personally rewarding – and profitable. "To promote Confetti Kitchen, I hosted pop-up dinners to build community around recipes from our site," she says. "I found that I loved creating in-person experiences over digital content."

In April 2017, Cynthia decided to pivot away from Confetti Kitchen. "I had no energy, no funds, and no focus. I was exhausted by trying to do too many things," says Cynthia. "At this low point, I considered hanging it up and going back to tech."

Instead, she realized she may have a new opportunity: "I could create the events I loved, but change who was paying and who would be attending." Food brands, she realized, had the wherewithal to sponsor events and a powerful motive to build bonds with social media influencers focused on food, wellness, and lifestyle content.

Cynthia designed and produced her first new event in June 2017, bringing together 15 hand-picked influencers to a dinner party, sponsored by four food brands, celebrating the summer solstice. "The influencers and brands loved it," she says. "The attention to detail and level of intimacy made it feel different from other events." Building on its success, Cynthia produced another event in August featuring one exclusive sponsor. "I proved I could get one sponsor to pay as much as four."

By December 2017, Cynthia had "let go of everything but brand-sponsored events," and in January 2018, she went all in with her new concept: experiential marketing for food brands. "My sweet spot is mid-sized, organic food brands that are eager to connect with influencers and media offline. We do everything from design to production to even analytics reporting. Our model saves marketing teams time and money, and yields an experience that looks and feels as though it was done in-house."

In September, Cynthia rebranded her business as Hidden Rhythm. She has a brand, a business model, and a team. "It took a while to get here," she says, "but we now have focus. People know what we do and who we do it for."