



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

MEET THE AUTHOR

Columbia native Lindsay Odom recently received her degree in Communication from Clemson University, and is spending her summer as Endeavor's first intern. In addition to social media responsibilities, she's interviewing many of Endeavor's members to learn (and share) more about marketing, agency life, entrepreneurship and what it takes to create meaningful work for clients.



MEET THE MEMBERS

Who: Melinda Lehman

Title: Founding Partner

Company: Happen North America

Website: happen.com

"AROUND THE WORLD AND HOME TO GREENVILLE"

BY LINDSAY ODOM

It was my first time on the job at Collaborators & Cocktails. I was busy checking people in, and being introduced to all of our guests, wondering how I was going to remember everyone's names. When Melinda walked in, Sally and Shannon quickly filled me in on her background – she has two adorable chocolate labs, started a business in Canada, competes in IRONMAN triathlons, and renovated an old Greenville synagogue into her dream home. While that was certainly impressive, I was amazed that Melinda remembered my name and was quick to ask me about my transition from Clemson to Greenville. It's the little things that count, right?

I didn't know much about Melinda's professional life, but I knew she was a busy woman because she was always in and out of Endeavor. She explained to me, "Happen is an innovation company with a strong focus on commercialization – helping clients come up with great ideas and ensuring in-market success, which is often one of the toughest things to do in innovation."

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Try something **new**, and **pay attention** to the element of it that **clicks** for you...

Innovation. It's a broad term, so I wondered what Melinda's daily schedule looked like. I was surprised when she told me about some of her global clients. Yes, global – including Celebrity Cruises based in Miami. “We worked side-by-side with a design team in Turku, Finland to do real-time prototyping.” If you're wondering what that means, prototyping is a way to test a product idea quickly and inexpensively by creating extremely simplified versions of that product. “We redesigned the cabin guestrooms, and used the insights we collected to innovate other parts of the ship. They even modeled other cruise ships based on our research,” Melinda said. “We also worked with a major beverage company to help them develop a beverage for children. We tapped in to some consumers right here in Greenville using Endeavor's conference facilities, who provided some incredible information for our North American data. This laid the foundation for our work in Thailand and India.”

All right, so you basically have the coolest job, I thought to myself. But how in the world (no pun intended) did she get her foot in the door? Like most 22-year-olds, she didn't know what she wanted to do after graduation. But Melinda did know that she was interested in consumers, and the root of what it is they're looking for. After spending a few years as a marketer and researcher with Procter & Gamble, Pfizer, and Kraft, she decided to pursue her passion of market research consulting at a small firm called Sklar Wilton & Associates in Toronto.



There, the light bulb went off. “Not only did I discover that I loved marketing and being able to tap in to what consumers want, but I also learned to love entrepreneurship, because I was able to observe two partners run a successful company,” she told me. Her enthusiasm for innovation intensified when she joined a global innovation company. “They asked me if I wanted to open a Canadian office, which I leapt for,” Melinda shared with a smile.

Eight years later, Melinda became a partner in Happen and opened an office in Toronto and New York. “I was living on a plane every other week going back and forth from Toronto to New York, but my heart was being pulled toward Greenville,” she said. “I thought there had to be a way that I could do the job that I love from the city that I love. Two years ago, I decided to make the transition to operate as much as I could from Greenville and still run projects in other parts of the world while being able to work with really talented people.”

Today, Melinda stays busy coworking on projects in wealth management, FMCG and telecommunications. She also leads marketing training for BASF Corporation across North America, the largest chemical producer in the world. She's not too busy to give back to her native country either, as a member of the entrepreneurship council at her alma mater, the Richard Ivey School of Business of Western University in London, Ontario.

It's interesting to think about how this story started, with a woman who didn't know what she wanted to do with her life. Her advice? Pay attention. “Talk to as many people as you can. I always remind students to take the pressure off of yourself to be an entrepreneur right out of the gate. Do it when you're ready, because you will evolve over time as you become more experienced. At Procter & Gamble, I found the thing I loved to do – crafting insights and transitioning those into growth opportunities – and it didn't feel like work,” she said. “Try something new, and pay attention to the element of it that really clicks for you, because if you find your passion, you can always turn it into something bigger.”