

Built to Scale

Stephanie Breedlove fulfilled her entrepreneurial dream in a big way. Now she's committed to growing her next venture—to support and mentor her fellow female entrepreneurs—to even greater heights.

By Shelley Seale, Photos by Annie Ray, Hair and makeup by Laura Martinez, Styled by Niki Jones



Though Stephanie Breedlove did not start out with the entrepreneurial bug, the past 20 years of her life have been spent off-roading, a term she uses to

describe traveling a path that is not typically opted into by women.

Breedlove, who successfully started, grew and then sold a business for \$55 million, now mentors and invests in other entrepreneurs, and just released her first book, *All In: How Women Entrepreneurs Can Think Bigger, Build Scalable Businesses, and Change the World*.

During all of this, she and her husband and co-founder, Bill, raised two children and maintained a happy and stable family life. Yet she hesitates to use the word that is often employed to describe such a feat: balance. For Breedlove, the idea of balancing these various facets of life means each part takes up no more than its allotted share on the scale, in order to maintain harmony, and that each aspect of life is aligned and cooperating without incident at all times. She describes balance as a scale that must be perfectly still in order to hold everything in place with no bumps along the way.

“The probability of success is zero. Yet we keep chasing it, and then feel like a failure when we don’t attain it, which begets guilt, stress, fear and a lack of confidence,” Breedlove says. “It seems to me that the act of balancing, of keeping everything perfectly controlled and delicately placed to maintain harmony, prevents spontaneity. It removes chance, serendipitous happenings, new ideas, change and the possibility of growth. It removes the stuff that brings joy to living.”

Instead, Breedlove embraces the concepts of integration to manage the peaks and valleys of real, everyday life.

“It should be normal to give more attention to professional demands in one moment and personal demands in the next,” Breedlove says. “We can’t give everything equal amounts of our attention all of the time, and we can’t be singularly focused either. Life is constantly moving forward, and we are tasked with managing the roller-coaster ride over those peaks and valleys at

an enjoyable and sometimes exhilarating level.”

This thought by Breedlove is a liberating option for many women weighed down by expectations that they should be able to “do it all” and balance careers and personal lives equally at all times. It’s an approach that has worked extremely well for Breedlove in her journey through marriage, jobs, having children, a business startup, acquisition, angel investing and becoming a speaker and author.





Hailing from coastal Texas, Breedlove moved around as a kid. Her father was the first in his family to attend college and her mother was a traditional homemaker. As children, Breedlove and her two younger sisters crisscrossed the Midwest and Northeast and changed schools frequently due to their father's corporate career, until he returned the family to the Lone Star State to pursue small-business ownership, buying a hardware store in Bryan-College Station, Texas. There, Breedlove worked summers in the family store, attended junior high and high school and graduated in 1983 as one of seven valedictorians.

"I did not always know that I wanted to be an entrepreneur," she says. "I was not that lucky or clear in my understanding of the path to finding my best talents."

Instead, she headed to Austin to obtain a degree in finance from the University of Texas. In her junior year, she reconnected with Bill Breedlove, who had been a friend since their teenage years. The two married after graduation and settled in Houston, where Bill Breedlove went to work for

Tenneco and she completed her master's degree at the University of Houston, in 1988.

Once she was done with school, the couple decided to go on a life adventure and moved to Denver, where Breedlove landed a job at Accenture and gave birth to two sons. By then, entrepreneurial dreams had begun stirring inside her, which was somewhat uncharted territory for a woman in the late 1980s.

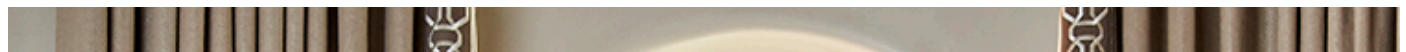
“It required me to be my own hero, with very few women ahead to help me see what I could be,” Breedlove says of being stuck in the corporate world. “I had to spend time doing things that taught me who I am not.”

As a top-down thinker who saw decision-making and problem-solving through a very broad lens, Breedlove was quickly constricted as an employee. She wanted more than the corporate box allowed for, at any point on the ladder.

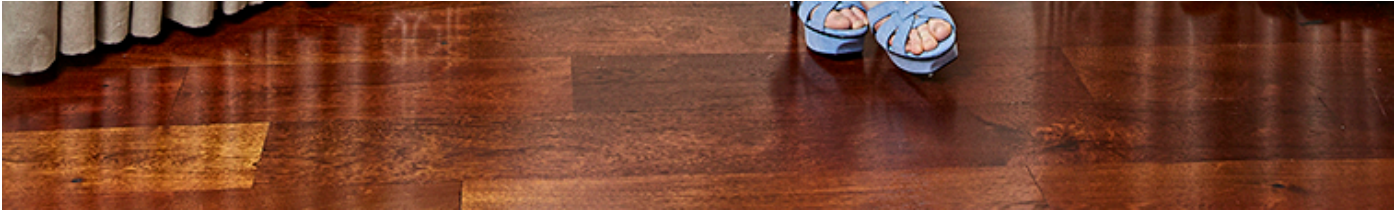
Being a parent as well contributed to her desire to be her own boss. She wanted her time and talents to make a bigger impact. If she was going to spend time away from her sons to build a career, that time needed to have maximum value. Her husband was beginning to feel the same way.

“We began to talk regularly about the fact that we may just have the skill sets to be successful entrepreneurs,” Breedlove recalls. “We thought we would enjoy the challenges and ridiculously hard work that come with being the captain of your own ship.”

Their business idea was born out of their personal experience, and they couldn't get it out of their heads. After the birth of their first son, in 1991, the Breedloves, both working parents, hired a nanny to help. At that time, having a full-time nanny was not necessarily a common form of child care.







“She was not a babysitter,” Breedlove says. “She was our third parent. We were a team, and we wanted to treat her professionally. We provided paid vacation, sick days, a health plan and annual reviews and raises. We also paid her legally, withholding taxes and paying employer taxes.”

The couple muddled through this new process on their own, unable to find outside expertise in the form of nanny-placement firms or accountants. On the heels of this experience and many discussions about it, their confidence that the entrepreneurial life was a better path than the corporate one grew, and an idea began to percolate.

“We believed that dual-income families would become much more common, that women would want to continue to pursue careers after having children. What if we started a company that helped families pay their in-home caregivers legally, offering payroll processing, tax remittance and HR services?” Breedlove remembers. “Our company could take care of the stuff we had been struggling through. As crazy as it sounded when we talked about it, it felt right. With the opportunity technology brought to business in the early 1990s (internet, email, fax machines, cell service, affordable software, etc.), it became clear that there were now tools in the marketplace that allowed startups to compete with larger companies to offer quality services that were cost-effective for the consumer. We began to feel that the timing was good for taking the leap.”

When Breedlove went on maternity leave from Accenture after the birth of her second son, in 1993, it provided the perfect opportunity to test the business concept in a low-risk way. The couple built a “minimum viable product”—startup speak for a basic, stripped-down prototype—with basic

automation and simple, cost-effective marketing materials, and rolled out their nanny-hire services to families in three states: Colorado, California and Texas.

Breedlove & Associates was officially launched. Though it only brought in \$3,000 that first year, in the second, the revenue climbed to \$17,000 without a single penny or hour spent on additional marketing. At that point, a decision had to be made about moving forward with scale and intent.

“Our entrepreneurial hobby began to kill us,” Breedlove recalls. “Doing it on the side was not a recipe for success for the business, nor family life. Operating our test was no longer a few hours per week in the evening or on weekends; it was considerable time taking me away from my family. Our growing group of clients deserved better.”

Without personal wealth or a network to tap into for funding, financing strategies were limited. Erring on the financially conservative side, it was decided that only Stephanie would take the leap into the venture full time. She quit her job in 1995, the family using her husband’s salary and \$40,000 in savings to pay the bills.





“Was it crazy hard work? Absolutely,” Breedlove says. “Could I be an entrepreneur, a good mother and a good wife? Did I have what it took? Was I ready to be uncomfortable? These are doubts and questions shared by every woman entrepreneur. Realizing you are not alone is an important part of the process for success.”

She focused on being self-aware, staying optimistic and believing in her ability to start and operate a business single-handedly.

“I saw failures as beginnings of something better rather than an ending and a loss. I listened but kept perspective, preventing others from deterring me. Embracing my weaknesses allowed them to be managed,” she says. “I quickly learned that there is amazing power in doing really hard things.”

It all paid off. The company experienced strong growth, and by 1998, necessitated more high-level power. Breedlove knew a partner rather than upper management was the investment the business needed. Her husband quit his job and joined her in the company full time.

Although it was scary putting all their eggs in one basket, both as entrepreneurs and for their family, the gamble paid off. During the next 15 years, Breedlove & Associates grew from a fledgling startup to having nearly \$10 million in revenue. It served more than 40,000 clients and became an integral player in enhancing the professionalism and quality of in-home care as the nation’s largest provider of household employment payroll, tax and human-resources services.

“As the captain of my own endeavor, I found balance, flexibility, fulfillment and confidence,” Breedlove says. “This spilled over into all areas of life, producing more happiness and enjoyment in marriage and parenting. My boys were finding enjoyment and unique experiences being with Bill when I traveled. This was a strong reminder and a positive example that the traditional norm is not the only way to build a happy family.”

In 2012, Breedlove received a phone call from Sheila Lirio Marcelo, the founder and CEO of [care.com](http://www.care.com). Breedlove & Associates had received interest from business suitors before, and Breedlove had been watching [care.com](http://www.care.com) very carefully.

“While we weren’t actively looking for an acquisition, we were paying attention,” Breedlove says. “We wanted to be forward-thinking and prepared for any opportunities that came down the pipeline. We would have felt we were letting the company down if an opportunity came along and we weren’t able to take advantage of it.”

After about 10 weeks of getting to know each other, care.com acquired Breedlove & Associates in August 2012.

“We were ready for larger scale growth,” Breedlove says. “It felt natural and organic for us to join forces. For me, this was a true entrepreneurial dream: to build a company of scale and value, and then shepherd it into a relationship that would allow it to grow to new heights, bringing greater value to the industry and to clients—without its founders.”





She and her husband spent the next two years working with [care.com](https://www.care.com) during the transition to make sure that their 20 years of industry experience were shared with the 7-year-old [care.com](https://www.care.com). During that time, the team grew from 30 to more than 50, and revenue went from doubling every four years to doubling every two and a half years.

“This transition time was incredibly valuable for all, and every founder that executes an exit should view this as absolutely necessary to ensure your entrepreneurial baby has the opportunity to move onward and upward with maximum success,” Breedlove says.

It was finally time for some rest. In late 2014, the transition was complete and

the Breedloves formally took their exit, along with a yearlong sabbatical. They visited family, traveled, played golf and read. At the time, Breedlove thought she would eventually start another business venture. Instead, she began to realize her value as a mentor.

“I learned that although my story is not extraordinary, it is not common in today’s evolution of women in entrepreneurship,” she says. “This makes me a role model and an agent for change.”

Research has shown women and men entrepreneurs share similar motivations, see the reasons for their successes largely the same way and face many of the same challenges. Studies have even proven that the willingness to take financial risk is largely the same for both sexes. Yet men are two times more likely to start businesses than women, and their businesses are three and a half times more likely to cross the \$1 million threshold.

“Although experts widely agree that women entrepreneurs often face unique challenges, it doesn’t seem they are often held back from success,” Breedlove says.

“The main roadblock is simply getting women to start and then to choose to grow a business in the first place. People are three times more likely to make the leap into entrepreneurship if they have a mentor or role model. This is where women like me can be of real value.”

Knowing this, and wanting to put her own experiences to use helping other women entrepreneurs, Breedlove spent the next year researching and writing a book. The goal was to fill the gap in female business role models, and to encourage women to start and build scalable companies. With the book, Breedlove wanted to give women an entrepreneurial roadmap to success, combining practical guidance with her own journey with research-based information.

“When we first went into business, I had a lot of camaraderie,” she says. “I knew a lot of women starting and running small businesses. But as we began to scale and we crossed \$1 million, then \$5 million, then \$10 million and bigger, I began to feel very alone. The path to building scalable businesses with sustained value should be traveled by many, many more women.”

Her book, *All In*, was published February 7, 2017. Breedlove has also become an active angel investor through the Central Texas Angel Network, allowing her to stay active in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and encourage women to seek funding and become angel investors themselves.

“In my opinion, the number one obstacle is having the financial knowledge and skill to go about obtaining funding,” she says. “Without these valuable skills, obtaining funding is incredibly difficult. Many entrepreneurs want to skip this critical step, as it is really hard work. I encourage them to make the commitment to growing financial knowledge and skills to increase their odds of getting funding, as well as for lifelong business success.”

Finding a mentor is crucial for funding and growing a business.

“Those of us who are good at this are happy to help,” Breedlove says. “As a part of this journey, I have become an active speaker and mentor, and I am thoroughly enjoying paying it forward.”

As difficult and full of challenges as the journey can be, she asserts the rewards of entrepreneurship are great.

“I wouldn’t trade the journey for anything,” Breedlove says. “I know entrepreneurship has given far more to me than I could ever give in return. I can say today that I am an entrepreneur by calling, talent and passion and

that I have found who I am meant to be.”

Stephanie Breedlove’s Top Resources for Entrepreneurs

The E-Myth by Michael Gerber

“The value of business systems never goes out of style.”

When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi

“A wonderful example that we should do what we love until the end of our days.”

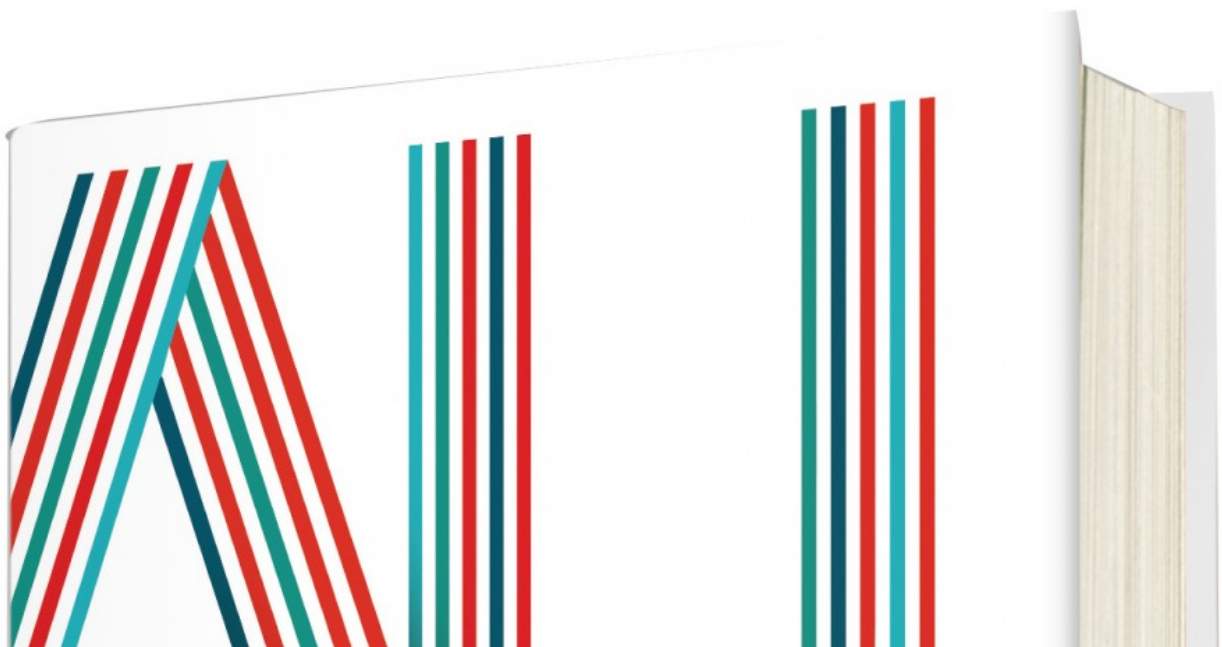
The National Association of Women Business Owners, nawbo.org

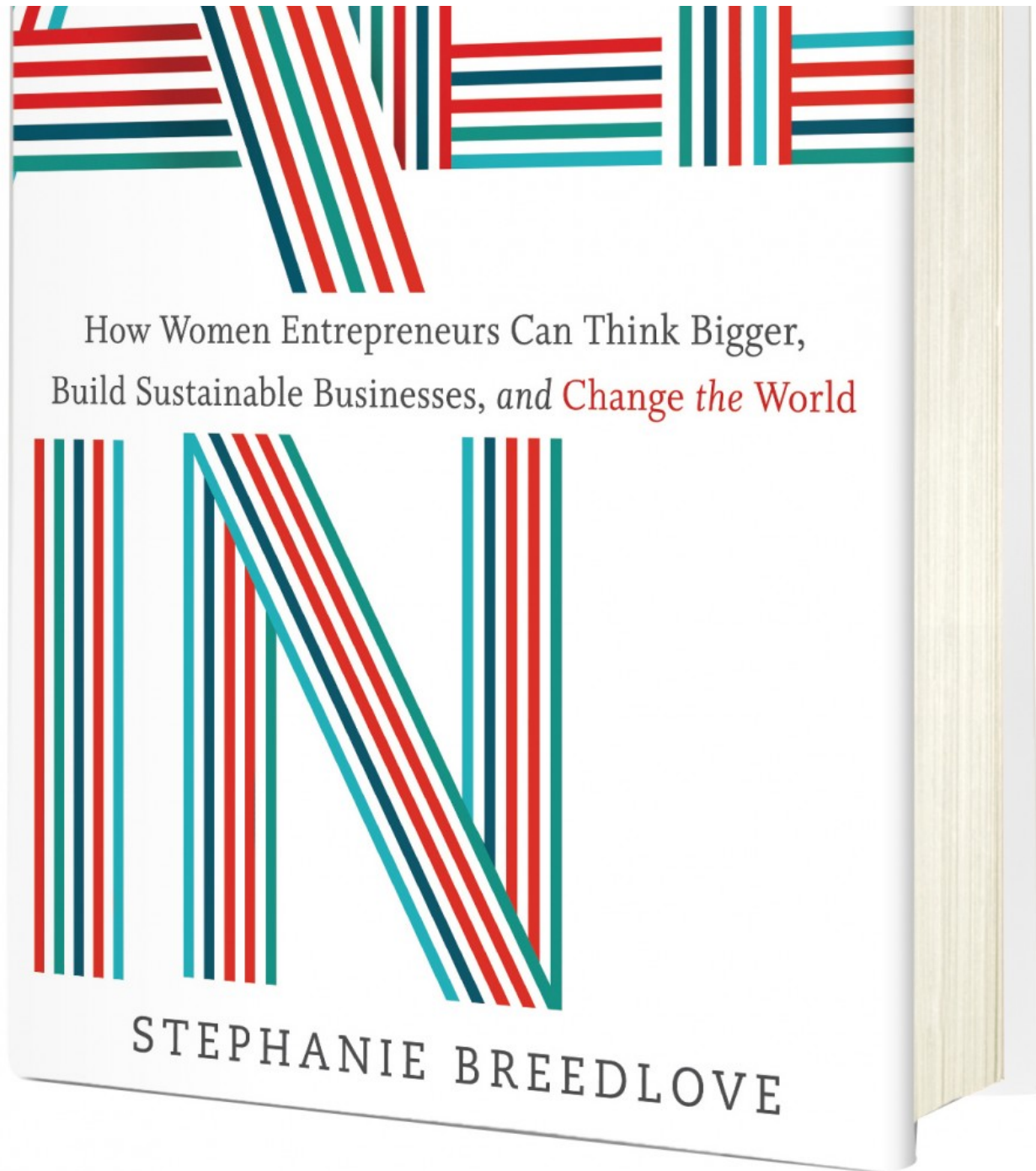
“Valuable umbrella trade organization with helpful resources.”

Kauffman Foundation, kauffman.org

“A true leader in the advancement of entrepreneurship. The depth of their tools is invaluable.”

Straight from the Source





**All In: How Women Entrepreneurs Can Think Bigger, Build Sustainable
Businesses, and Change the World**

by Stephanie Breedlove

Released Feb. 7, 2017

Available for \$24.95 at stephaniebreedlove.com

Stephanie Breedlove's Tips for Entrepreneurs

Focus on the Financials

“This sounds obvious, and yet almost 65 percent of business failures are due to financial mismanagement. Financial knowledge and focus is a key responsibility for every founder. You must look at your business with a skillful mindset and own it all. Focusing on growing the appropriate level of financial knowledge and skill may just be the difference between simply making it and grand-scale success.”

Always Grow Your Career

“When you focus on growing your career as a business owner, the ripple effect is exponential. Your team gains the opportunity to grow skill and expertise, and this translates into strong company growth, all because you are focused on growing your own skills. And when these accomplishments occur, you naturally think big, confidently overcome obstacles and easily go all in. When you grow, everything and everyone you lead grows along with you. It's a lifelong strategy for success.”

Failure is Fuel for Next

“Good entrepreneurs are always learning as they go. This means we do not possess all skill, experience or expertise to guarantee that our efforts will be successful. In short, failure now and then is a given. We are also not reckless risk takers but masterful mitigators of risk. Our hope is that the impact of our failures will be minimized if we take calculated risk. Failure is inevitable, and it is a valuable learning experience that builds the skill, experience and expertise for a far more successful ‘next,’ a next that cannot be experienced without failure first.”

Confidence is Key to Thinking Big

“Confidence is a trait that can be cultivated. It is also essential for thinking

big and building businesses of scale and sustained value. When you consciously put strategies to work that grow and strengthen confidence, you create the opportunity to go everywhere you and your business are capable of going.”

Categories:

[Features](#)

[People](#)

Tags:

[austin](#), [women](#), [savvy woman](#), [advice](#), [entrepreneur](#), [feature](#), [profile](#), [stephanie breedlove](#)