Founders find success with signature exercise mat

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Millie Blumka (SSE ’16) and Taylor Borenstein (BSM ’16) hold patents for their signature STAKT gym products.

When Tulane alumnae Millie Blumka (SSE ’16) and Taylor Borenstein (BSM ’16) decided to quit their corporate jobs and launch their wellness brand, STAKT, they didn’t have extensive experience building a company. Instead, they let their friendship guide their approach to business.

“We work really, really well together,” says Blumka, who previously worked in sales. “We’re able to bounce ideas off each other and come up with solutions.”

“We trust each other wholeheartedly to do what’s best for the company,” adds Borenstein, who worked in financial services at Bloomberg. “And we always put our friendship first.”

Their belief in one another has paid off: Since founding STAKT in 2020, Blumka and Borenstein have sold over 250,000 adaptable two-in-one fitness mats, which double as a block to provide extra support during workouts. They've also expanded their offerings to include Pilates bands and balls, yoga towels, a protein drink shaker, tote bags, cleanser sprays, and adaptable weights that can flex between two, four and six pounds.

STAKT is quickly becoming a major player in the wellness world, but the company didn't start out that way. Blumka, originally from Dallas, and Borenstein, from Long Island, launched the company as a passion project during the COVID-19 pandemic when they realized they were both encountering the same problem with at-home fitness.

"Taylor and I were working out at home a lot more," Blumka says. "We would do online yoga classes, and we'd be rolling up our mats in the middle of class trying to get some extra padding. We realized there had to be a better way."

To solve the problem, they decided to create a new kind of exercise mat that would provide cushioning and the flexibility to move between yoga, Pilates, high intensity training and sculpt workouts. They hired a product designer to bring their idea to life, testing dozens of samples and eventually settling on a foldable six-paneled foam design that could lie flat, be folded for support, or transform into a 3-inch block.

They knew they were onto something when they used the mats for the first time.

"We knew that once people tried the mats, they would get it, too," Blumka says. "So we ordered 500 and stuffed them into our tiny New York City apartments. We would take the mats to fitness classes around the city and offer to supply them for events. Our goal was to get as many people as possible to try the product."

Their guerrilla marketing made the pastel-colored STAKT mats a fixture on the NYC fitness scene. They soon earned a place on Time Magazine's 2023 List of Best Inventions and a spot on Oprah's 2025 List of Favorite Things.

In addition to their friendship, Blumka and Borenstein attribute their success to the spirit of innovation they encountered at Tulane, where they met as undergrads living in Sharp Residence Hall.

“The B School did a great job encouraging entrepreneurship,” Borenstein says. “Two of my friends and I started our first small business while we were at Tulane. During Mardi Gras, we customized fanny packs for students to wear on the parade route.”

“From that experience, I learned that the most important thing in starting a business is to create a product people actually need. When you’re at a parade during Mardi Gras, you need to have a place to put your phone, wallet, and keys so you can raise your hands and catch throws. For a lot of people, fanny packs are an absolute necessity.”

Borenstein credits Professor Ashley Nelson’s business communications class with giving her skills she uses in the company’s day-to-day operations.

“Tulane has really functional business classes that are so relevant in both the startup and my corporate job,” she says. “I draw on those skills every day when writing emails or giving presentations.”

Presentation skills also came in handy when the pair made an appearance on NBC’s Shark Tank, a hit TV show that gives entrepreneurs the chance to pitch their ideas to a panel of investors.

“Taylor and I both grew up watching the show, so being on it was such a surreal experience,” Blumka says. “We had only been in business for about 6 months when we filmed the show, and it was great because we got so much exposure. We were in front of so many more people and the experience helped us grow as a company.”

As they continue to scale their company, Blumka and Borenstein say their lives are expanding in other ways. They’ve become new moms, and, as in business, are leaning on each other for support.

“As new moms, we understand what the other person is going through,” says Blumka. “If we need to take the day off to do something with the baby, then we can. It’s really helpful to have someone who understands.”

“At the end of the day, we’re best friends,” says Borenstein.

“We’re so lucky to have each other,” Blumka adds.