

Wen Zhang of INNW Institute

Speaker1: [00:00:04] This is the Investor Connect podcast program. I'm Haa Martin. I'm the host of the show in which we interview Angel Investors, venture capital, family offices, private equity, and many other investors for early stage and growth companies. I hope you enjoy this episode. Investor Connect is a 501 C three nonprofit dedicated to the education of investors and startups for fund raising. Please consider donating \$100 to the program to help others in their investor and entrepreneur journey. You can find the donate button on the Investor Connect org website. Hello, this is Paul Martin with Investor Connect Day. We're here with Wen Zhang Fundraising and startup advisor, pitch expert, professional speaker, founder and CEO of INNW Institute and host of the If Not Now Wen podcast. The institute helps first time founders to season executives, polished their pitch, developed a strategy and execute a vision Wen. Thank you for joining us.

Speaker2: [00:01:00] Of course. Thank you for having me.

Speaker1: [00:01:02] Great. So where are you calling from today?

Speaker2: [00:01:05] Austin, Texas.

Speaker1: [00:01:07] Great. Me too as well. And glad to be here with you. So let's just get right into it. Tell us about your background. How did you get to where you are today?

Speaker2: [00:01:15] Yeah, about my background. First of all, my name is wen. actually means rainbow in the sunshine in Chinese. I am born raised in China in a south east part of the country, in a mountain. And where I grew up, it's on the mountain. So therefore it is no internet, it's no cars, and there's no way out. And as little as I remember, I just always drew in about one day seeing the world to be on the mountain. And my journey really became by one day, visit a library. I found a cassette machine. If some of your viewers would not know how much cassette was. And that's how I decided that moment to teach myself English, using the cassette taped to to venture the world in the far west one day. And as you can imagine, I did not just fail one time. I just failed to time. Not just do it. Not for not five, not sex six, not seven, definitely not eight. The nine major failures in four years. When everybody think I'm crazy, I'm out of my mind. I

came to America 11 years ago to start my quote unquote American dream. And from there, long story short, I first had my master's degree in advertising marketing from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, which is the Midwest. And then from there, I spent about five years in the Chicago area doing startups. I first called my first venture for two years and then jumping another startup venture for another few years. So it's actually a bunch of fun. All the hustling, all the assignments in startup world, but an end of the year five, I thought, you know what I promised myself when I left the mountain? I'm going to go see the world now as a startup I want to even bigger world.

And that's how I left Chicago. I'm a ten my MBA from Duke University in the next two years, and that's how I met with Austin, Texas, after that. And then I was part of a Dell technology company and managed their 400 sales teams in North America, focused on about \$320 million yearly portfolio, focused on go to market strategy marketing. All the amazing aspect about learning how business run in a global level, which is just so exciting, so thrilling and it's all well and amazing and truly is a great company, amazing culture and really great people. But another three years I thought, This is a great job. I'm just living, someone else lives. And that was a moment when pandemic hit and it gave me a moment to just like, take a moment, take a step back, think about what I really wanted to do. And the moment I personally think about who am I when I thought about whether is when I was stuck in a mountain and dreaming about the world outside the mountain, or when I was in Chicago hustling my own startup ventures. I think in my heart and my soul, I'm always an entrepreneur who are always dreaming about a different solution. I wanted to be different. And meantime, I also think of my skill set. My experience is it's all around sales, marketing, strategy and storytelling, business development. And that's how I combine my my strengths along with my passion together. And that's why I do what I do today with I and the Institute. We help entrepreneurs raising capital so pitching so it's nature. We help startups tell story to get yes. What is yes for investors or yes from customers. So that is how I get here.

Speaker1: [00:04:42] Great. Well, tell us more about starting a business in this area. What do you see as the opportunity?

Speaker2: [00:04:50] Well, opportunities are endless. When I think about opportunity is all about who do you want to serve and what problem your solving. And for me, when I think about what my own journey is, I just encounter so many incredible, talented technical founders.

He actually could be developer, could be scientists, could be engineer, could be all those amazing creators in their nature. And they are fantastic doers. But I just found that the challenge here is they have a hard time to articulate who they are and why they do what they do. In other words, shifting from a doer to entrepreneur with a sole purpose to inspire the audience is a different type of path. There's different level of like requirement that the founder needed developed. And that's where I see the opportunity. That's where I see how can I better serve? Sure. In my gift sharing what I'm passionate about, supporting those dreamers, helping them make their dream, may their venture come true.

Speaker1: [00:05:48] So what's the challenge in starting a business like this one?

Speaker2: [00:05:53] Challenges that see of course they are meant for me specifically as a challenging because when I think about starting my my my journey as you can tell I'm a very passionate girl. I'm someone who are I do I say I say what I do and everything I do. I thought about it for a long time and I'm that's just how I how I live. So when I started business in the same time, my husband also starts business two days before I started mine, which is. In saying you think about that for a second. By the way, my husband is engineer in nature, so he's someone who always planned everything, so thoughtful, so schedule. And two days before I always start, mind you, come home and tell me, you know what? Guess what? I'm cutting. Tamala, I'm so on business. I said, sure, right on. I'm here to support you. So I won't say the biggest challenging at a time was not only navigating this business part, but also navigating the relationship with a partner and also had a venture. And that was it's a fun it's interesting journey, to say the least. So that was one of the biggest challenging on my own experience, in addition to navigating the entrepreneurship journey, but also supporting a spouse, a partner who are on the same, same path.

Speaker1: [00:07:14] And so what are the differences between your company and your competitors?

Speaker2: [00:07:20] That's a great question. How first of all, one thing I would say high praise about is we know most of the clients are through referrals or introductions internally. So in other words, we take our commitment very seriously. You know, we don't just say yes or every founder's know. I tell folks that I only work with the founders I truly see. I call the founder Mark

Effort. I see founders will come in four years of experiencing exactly what he or she do. They are fantastic, good at their craft and here just, you know, putting cherry on the top and make sure you're helping them articulate their story in a compelling way. So in that way, it's not only they want to work with us, we also want to work with them as a yes, yes, both ways. And that commitment is really important for me. And, you know, that integrity and that that that speaks about, you know, the level of what we deliver. So the past six months, we collectively raised about \$10 million see capital, which we take high price about. And I think to answer your question directly, I think the one thing that differentiates us from the rest is really how we take our client relationship very, very seriously. We don't think this is just an engagement. We see this as I tell people, what is here for the wing. And I don't we unless you win and I know you don't unless you invest your win, unless your customer wins. And we are here to win wing, wing all together. That's quite a bigger pie for everybody to win along the process. And that's how we set apart from the rest.

Speaker1: [00:08:52] And so what advice would you give to someone that's entering this space? What do you tell them to do before they join.

Speaker2: [00:08:58] About starting their own business?

Speaker1: [00:09:00] Yes.

Speaker2: [00:09:01] Oh, great. Well, I would think it's really important for her to think about what do you really want her to do? I think, you know, we all talk about passion in a very philosophical way. But, you know, entrepreneurship journey is definitely not easy. And having that passion, having that that commitment, that determination truly are a huge, huge, important factor of being successful. So if I would say one factor to think about is really what you wanted to do. And this is really a you have that right motivation. Think about why you do what you do. I think having a why is so important. And for me, I share my story a little bit earlier about why, how I come on this journey. And for me, my wife is very clear today. You know, we have this mission. We want to make a million page come through in our lifetime. Essentially, we want to make a made dream come true in our lifetime because we see each and every founder is dreaming on their own and they are here to share their gift, share their passion with their software, with their develop. We know what everything they are developing to the world and

therefore, you know, we are very connected to our mission and our why. And that's one of the key factors that help us have come this far. Something if anybody who are also thinking about starting a business and whatever endeavor you are thinking about, really think hard about what is your why and do you really passion about this and is this really who you want it to be?

Speaker1: [00:10:30] Great. So what online information source do you find most helpful in your work? What do you find useful to help you in what you do?

Speaker2: [00:10:38] While for me, I talk to people and I tell myself, you know, I see there are three types of talent in the world. They are three timing to quickly. I mentioned it first time it's called I call it someone I was visionary who had this incredible talent to see things from nothing to something and have this incredible mind about making things happen. Have tons of idea, have tons of vision. That is one type of person has second hand talents. I call it people. People and they are someone like myself with love, connecting with people. Sales conversation strategies come easy for people like us. And the third person I call operational geniuses that person thinking spreadsheet thinking process. If I said, Oh, let's build a spaceship, you're going to say, great one. They are three steps to get there next year, and that person is thinking things in a structured way. So you know anything about any successful business and a successful endeavor, it required a three triangle. Have someone set the vision, somebody break it into pieces, how to get there, and then the person share the idea with the world. And because I'm my gift, my nature, I am who are thrive with a conversation with people. So therefore I think one of the biggest piece that really set me apart is I talk to people, I know what is happening in the world, in industry and you know, because what I do is specifically how people help businesses do storytelling. So understanding people understand story is really critical for me. If I can really pay like one or two things in terms of like online learning, I do. I watch a lot of movies, I analyze and I figured out why it's a good story. I also love to read on my spare time. I love to know how do we make such a quote unquote boring story, make it exceptional? How do you make people I call it a hook or how do you hook? How do you attain people intention, attention in a long time? So I love the craft of the storytelling. And today, you know, I love to marry that with a storytelling piece, with a business inside put together I think is a perfect pitch. So I hope that. Answer your question.

Speaker1: [00:12:45] Sure. Well, you see a lot of businesses out there, new business models, technologies and markets. If you could start a business tomorrow, what would that business be?

Speaker2: [00:12:54] Well, we are actually launching an accelerator in the next three months. We are really excited. We're going to we are we want to build in the country one of the first and the best accelerator to focus on sales and marketing, etc.. We're going to help. We're going to work with the founders, what our technical founders being through the program, helping them be even better at the way, how they pitch the way, how they tell story to get yes for an investment perspective as well as a sales perspective. So we actually that is in motion in next three months. We also launch in a final next six months to support in the back end. But yeah, that's something that we are currently doing. But if you want me to come with a new idea, I can also give you something else, if that is.

Speaker1: [00:13:38] Well, I think that's a great one as well. I think there's a lot of opportunity there for it. Sounds like you have a great start on it, so congratulations with that. But you're also a podcaster and we have many podcasters who are listening today. What tips would you give those podcasters out there based on your experience?

Speaker2: [00:13:55] Podcaster. Well, I think first of all, podcast sounds really fun and I know how you know this, but it's actually a lot of work. So if you do think about you want to start a podcast, you want to think about being a podcast yourself, you want to think about I want to go back to my previous answer. Think about your why, why you do, why you wanted to do that. What is something that truly inspired you? And for me, I say that because for me, I do my podcast because it's really inspiring me to get to know the entrepreneurship stories. I can understand the story behind listening and not just all the glimmers, all the amazing, all the rainbow and sunshine, but also behind that thing, all the downs, all the everything in between. And I found for me when I tell the story, when I hear people tell their authentic story, it just connect and unite all of us. And I think within the presence of story, there's no division within our human beings, whether gender, race, whatever your name is. So that's why I love I love doing my podcast. I love the other longform format which, you know, you all have a thing about. It's a long form, your short one mile an hour time and we tap into people's story. And it's then not only why, what are your choices, they may, but why they made those choices. And those are important for me. And I would advise anyone who wants to start your own podcast. Think about

really why you want to start a podcast, and with that why you think about the format, what that might look like short form, long form and it's long been person making all different dynamic. And also don't forget, there's an entire production go above that, right? You also think about the engineering, the editing, the the posting, the show, know all the fun things. So if you do want to start a podcast, take a moment to think about the whole process and see if that still really align with your goal and your intention.

Speaker1: [00:15:44] Well, great. Thank you for that advice. And in the last minutes that we have here, what else should we cover that we haven't?

Speaker2: [00:15:50] Well, there's so much we have to cover. I do want to mention I also do an improv on the side as well. I perform in the downtown theater in Austin, Texas. I love theater. I love the art of telling the story, as you can tell. I love the collaboration. And yeah, I like away on a stage. That's what I do for fun. Yeah. That's all about me.

Speaker1: [00:16:16] That's great. Improv is a lot of fun and certainly create gets the creative juices flowing, so it sounds like you're having a lot of fun with it. I do. I think life is all about having fun, isn't it? We are all finding our gift, our. Our things that we hold dear in our heart. And we are having fun along the journey. And that's all life is about. To my opinion.

Speaker1: [00:16:39] It's great. So how best for listeners to get back in touch with you?

Speaker2: [00:16:43] Yeah. So fall off by me on landing my website, my my email address. I'm pretty easy to find.

Speaker1: [00:16:51] Great. We'll put that in the show notes. We want to thank you for joining us today and hope to have you back for a follow up soon.

Speaker2: [00:16:57] Of course. Thank you so much for having me.

Speaker1: [00:17:04] Investor Connect helps investors interested in startup funding. In this podcast series Experience, investors share their experience and advice. You can learn more at Investor Connect dot org. Hall Tim Martin is the director of Investor Connect, which is a 501

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