



[Rana Florida](#)

CEO, The Creative Class Group

Your Start-Up Life: The Business of Art

Your Start-Up Life is a business advice column by [Rana Florida](#), CEO of the [Creative Class Group](#). In addition to answering readers' questions she features [conversations](#) with successful entrepreneurs, creative thinkers and innovative leaders. Send your questions about work, life and play to rana@creativeclass.com

"Each day is itself a miracle... Try to make the moves that bring you love, respect and well-being." - Mera Rubell, Art Collector

Born in Russia to a family of Polish war refugees, Mera Rubell arrived in New York without a word of English when she was 12 years old. After receiving a BA in psychology from [Brooklyn College](#) and an MA in education from [Long Island University](#) she became a teacher for [Head Start](#). When she met her future husband Don, a medical student, the two quickly discovered that they shared two powerful passions -- for each other and for art. Together, they built not just a business empire (they own a number of boutique hotels in Miami Beach and Washington, D.C.) but one of the most important private contemporary art collections in the world. Housed in a former federal Drug Enforcement Agency facility, their 45,000 square foot museum and residence pioneered the movement of galleries, cafes, restaurants and artists' workspaces into the Wynwood neighborhood of Miami. [The Rubell Family collection](#) is just that, as their two children, [Jason](#) and [Jennifer](#) joined their parents in expanding the collection early on. The collection includes works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, Cindy Sherman, and Andy Warhol.

The Rubells were a powerful force in the redevelopment of South Beach and played a pivotal role in bringing [Art Basel](#) to Miami Beach, where it kicks off its 11th year with the [Vernissage](#) on Wednesday and the public opening on Thursday this week. I've gotten to know Mera and her family on a personal level and her energy and enthusiasm are infectious. I was delighted when she took a few minutes out of her frantic schedule to answer my questions about creativity, leadership, and of course, family.



Takashi Murakami's "DOB in the Strange Forest" / Courtesy of Rubell Family Collection

Q. How can creativity change your life?

A. What spice is to cooking, creativity is to my life. I see it as a daily mindset: How can I challenge myself to inject a surprise into the way I normally do or see things? We are all creatures of habit and even a mundane alteration to our lens can affect the way we see the world. For me this change of lens gives me a certain freedom and complexity to see the world in color and not just in black and white. Creativity leads to innovation, and I do believe that creativity and an open mind allow the world to move forward.

Q. What is your approach to collaborating with others?

A. I came to realize that in order to achieve my own ambitions I needed the talents of others to complement my own. The challenge is to find partners that you respect and also come to love. My fifty-year marriage is definitely the partnership that keeps giving.

Q. What lessons did you take away from your first job?

A. I learned a powerful lesson when I was sixteen and fired from my first volunteer job. When your attitude is wrong, even giving away your services for free is worthless.

Q. What type of leader are you?

A. I lead with a deep sense of respect for the unique qualities of the people that work for me. I always hope to match my high expectations from my employees with financial rewards and job security.

Q. How do you approach risk? What was the biggest risk you took in your business life?

A. I approach risk realizing that each day is itself a miracle. The risk is being alive. No winner wins all the time, and no loser loses all the time. I believe that you must keep your own scorecard -- it's too dangerous to let others do the judging. Try to make the moves that bring you love, respect and well-being.

Q. Did you set out to be an art collector?

A. When I met my husband Don fifty years ago, I was a Head Start teacher and he was a medical student. On my \$100 a week teacher's salary, we committed to a payment plan and to buy the art from the artists we met in the studio/storefronts on our daily walks through our neighborhood in NY. It became a way of life. The Collector title came much later in life when we realized that our small steps lead to a much longer life's journey. And then, opening a 40,000-square-foot museum in Miami, thirty years later, which was inspired by our children, brought the journey to a whole new place. The engagement of our grandchildren in our family's art mission is the task ahead.

Q. Do you make business decisions based on gut and intuition or research and data?

A. In our family, business decisions are always made through a 100 percent equal consensus. It's what you call a messy democracy. It makes for lots of gut, data and intuition decision-making. The equal vote each member has in our decision process makes for an inspiring and committed team.

Q. How do you handle failure?

A. Examining failure objectively can lead to many worthwhile lessons. I believe that success can only be achieved when we recognize failure as a spark for change -- only then can we hope to realize our life's ambitions.

Q. Any advice you'd give on working with family members?

A. Ask not what the family can do for you, but what you can do for your family. Then the rewards will surely flow!

Q. What's the best advice you ever got?

A. Believe in America.