

Saucy by Nature



Monika Luczak was exhausted. She had just finished a long day at work—one of those days where she was the first person in the office and didn't leave until long after dinner. Working long hours wasn't unusual for someone in Monika's field. The year was 2011, and she had been working as a lawyer for several years. After the recession hit in 2008, many people began working more hours. Even if they weren't passionate about the job, they were grateful to have work that paid well. But Monika didn't quite understand how she had ended up working over 60 hours every week at a job she found boring.

"Being lawyer has never been a passion of mine," she explained. "Like many people I just picked a career I thought was going to be successful. Years later you're like, 'Wait a minute, why am I doing this? I'm not even happy.'"

Monika knew what her two real passions were: food and traveling. She was happiest when she could combine them, tasting new flavors in exotic locations. At a party in 2001, she had met Przemek Adolf, a kindred spirit who also loved food and travel. Both Monika and Przemek are Polish-American and had just finished college. A friendship blossomed, and they began to travel together. Monika's schedule allowed her to work intensely for weeks and then take weeks of vacation. They travelled to South America, the Caribbean and Asia. In every new place, Przemek and Monika were excited about the new flavors they tasted.

“It became about the food for me, really,” explained Monika. “That’s what made the experience, trying all the different foods, and then Przemek had a similar passion. We went to Southeast Asia with one-way tickets—it was about the food and the cultures and how local the ingredients are.” The two began trying to recreate the flavors they had tasted abroad once they returned home to New York.

In 2011, Przemek was living in London but moved back to New York City to start a business with Monika. The business they started, Saucy by Nature, made organic and tasty sauces to go on meats, vegetables and sandwiches. They started out small, and Monika found herself working even longer hours than she had as a lawyer. But she considered herself lucky to have a business partner.

“At a lot of companies, there’s just one person,” Monika explained. “Thankfully we have two people. It’s a lot of work, especially if you want to run it as an actual business and not just a hobby.”

There were so many things to consider: recipe development of the sauces, legal requirements for selling food, marketing, a website. It was overwhelming and exciting, all at the same time.

No one was available to guide the pair, so they had to figure it out for themselves. They made some mistakes at the beginning, such as creating too many sauces. “At one point we were making nine different sauces,” said Monika. It was too difficult to create so many different flavors, and they had to cut back to only producing four. But they had successes as well. A new farmers’ market opened in the Bronx, and instantly, buying from farmers became easier. Now they could purchase ingredients from farmers based in Hudson Valley, Long Island and New Jersey all in the same place. The prices were cheaper at the new farmers’ market because it was a wholesale market. At wholesale markets, farmers sell their goods for less money but in larger quantities. “There wasn’t anything like that in 2011,” said Monika. “Now you can go and get 10 cases of cilantro at wholesale prices. It makes all the difference.”

Both Monika and Przemek wanted to be sure they were sourcing their ingredients from local farmers. In their travels abroad, they had noticed that many cuisines were based off the produce and spices that were locally available.

“The local food movement here has become so intense and so exciting. There’s really become a pathway to work with farmers directly and impact the farm economics in this state,” said Monika. They try to work with organic farmers because they feel that organic foods are healthier for their customers and for the environment.

By 2013, Saucy by Nature had become a growing business. Monika and Przemek still sold their sauces at Smorgasburg, an outdoor food market in New York on the weekends. But they also had contracts to sell their sauces at West Elm and small grocery stores throughout New York City and Pennsylvania. Monika and Przemek wanted to help other food entrepreneurs and create a community. They founded Fare Trade NYC, an organization that connects small food businesses and helps them grow.

One of the main benefits of Fare Trade NYC was that it enabled new food business owners to speak with people who had faced the same problems. Monika explained: “Being able to speak with someone who’s been there and done that, and gone through the same processes is really priceless. You can’t get that anywhere else.”

Monika explained further that the food business is especially difficult because it needs a lot of investment at the beginning. “If you get a huge order, you have to invest in the jars, the labels, the boxes, renting a kitchen for 8-20 hours. Then when you deliver your order to a big store, they can take up to 60 days to pay you back. You’re constantly juggling finances.”

Another challenge of working in food is the change in what ingredients are available. “Working with seasonal ingredients has been especially challenging,” said Monika, “Especially during our first transition from summer to winter.” At a Fare Trade NYC meeting, Monika helped explain to a young woman starting a soup business the difficulty of working with seasonal ingredients and worked with her to create a plan for finding the right ingredients for her soups.

Monika works even more hours now than she did as a lawyer. But she's still happy she made a change in her career path. She explained that her job satisfaction is much higher now that she is doing something she loves. "It's just instant gratification in the sense that we're there all the time, we're the face of the company. It's amazing to have people try your food and love it. Then when they come back for your food every weekend—that feels amazing. That feels so good. Also knowing that we are working directly with farmers, we're feeding people great food with no preservatives, things that we really feel proud of. It's affirming."

One day Monika hopes that Saucy by Nature will be available across the country. But until then, she'll be at the food markets in Brooklyn every weekend, helping New Yorkers discover new flavors.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is Saucy by Nature?

- A a party in 2001 where Monika Luczak met Przemek Adolf
- B an organization that connects small food businesses and helps them grow
- C a business that makes sauces for meat, vegetables, and sandwiches
- D a farmers' market in New York City that sells cases of cilantro

2. What is the sequence of events in this passage?

- A Monika Luczak cofounds Saucy by Nature, works as a lawyer, and cofounds Fare Trade NYC.
- B Monika Luczak cofounds Fare Trade NYC, cofounds Saucy by Nature, and works as a lawyer.
- C Monika Luczak works as a lawyer, cofounds Fare Trade NYC, and cofounds Saucy by Nature.
- D Monika Luczak works as a lawyer, cofounds Saucy by Nature, and cofounds Fare Trade NYC.

3. Monika likes working with food more than she liked working as a lawyer.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A "Monika works even more hours now than she did as a lawyer. But she's still happy she made a change in her career path."
- B "In 2011, Przemek was living in London but moved back to New York City to start a business with Monika. The business they started, Saucy by Nature, made organic and tasty sauces to go on meats, vegetables and sandwiches."
- C "At a party in 2001, she had met Przemek Adolf, a kindred spirit who also loved food and travel. Both Monika and Przemek are Polish-American and had just finished college."
- D "At a Fare Trade NYC meeting, Monika helped explain to a young woman starting a soup business the difficulty of working with seasonal ingredients and worked with her to create a plan for finding the right ingredients for her soups."

4. How might Monika describe her work with food?

- A stressful and unsafe
- B impossible and discouraging
- C challenging but enjoyable
- D easy but boring

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A Monika Luczak’s passions and work
- B Przemek Adolf’s time in London
- C what a day in the life of a lawyer is like
- D the different sauces that Saucy by Nature sells

6. Read the following sentences: “Monika knew what her two real **passions** were: food and traveling. She was happiest when she could combine them, tasting new flavors in exotic locations.”

What does the word **passions** mean?

- A scary adventures
- B strong interests
- C big mistakes
- D funny stories

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Monika used to work as a lawyer; _____, she sells sauces.

- A currently
- B before
- C as an illustration
- D such as

8. What are Monika’s passions?

9. Why was Monika bored with her job as a lawyer?

10. Should people combine their work with their passions? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the passage.
