Renee Periat grew up in the small town of Pescadero, California, and left right after high school to move to San Luis Obispo in pursuit of more opportunities to find herself. She worked for many years before attending Cal Poly and earning her degree in Environmental Management/Hydrology. After graduation, she looked for work but was unable to find anything in her field that called to her more than the job she already had. Renee felt she had more ambition and more to offer than what working for someone else would bring; she just knew she would have a more promising future if she went into business for herself.

Renee knew that when she was passionate about a project she was unstoppable, and one of her strongest passions came from something that she had discovered about herself. Renee found her own personal identity by dressing in a completely gender-neutral way. In considering this as a business opportunity, she knew that people rally behind brands, and Renee discovered that there were no brands that fit the gender-neutral niche. This was a perfect opportunity for her. When she started researching how to start a business, all she found was lots of “big picture” information, but nothing that gave her real structure, or showed her how to put it all together and prioritize all of the small pieces. Renee decided she needed someone to help her make sense of it all.

MSCS consultant Lorna Whiteaker helped her see more clearly what steps she needed to take. One of her first tasks was to complete a business plan. Having to write a business plan and work all the numbers allowed Renee to better identify what her financial risks were and how much risk was reasonable. It also brought up questions she had never thought to ask. As a result of completing her business plan and reevaluating the production process, Renee ended up turning her original manufacturing idea around 180 degrees. She thinks it is a common misconception that entrepreneurs can get by without a business plan, because now she knows it just isn’t true.

Renee’s business, Androgynous Fox, now has over 6,000 loyal followers on Instagram and an online presence that is expanding every day. Her line of gender-neutral clothing and accessories has been very well received by her niche market. One of the things that she didn’t take into consideration when she started was that there was going to be an emotional component. People have reached out to her to say that her clothing and the community she has built has given them a “sense of belonging.” While she is all about building community, she was also surprised at how emotionally gratifying it was when it actually happened.

The time Renee spent with her MCSC counselor was so valuable that she says she only wishes she had started sooner. While she knows she must hold herself accountable as a business owner, having someone else help her set deadlines and hold her accountable for the specific action steps made all the difference.

Renee now has a day job that she loves, so her new challenges include balancing a full-time job while continuing to build a business that supports a niche community. When asked what advice she would give to another entrepreneur just starting out, she says, “Understand the process and manage the risks. Do not risk more financially than you can handle to lose, and seek out support from a resource organization like MCSC. And, there comes a time when you just have to go for it!”