

S. NICHOLAS PAPANICOLAOU
YOUNG PROFESSIONAL OF THE MONTH
JUNE 2013



Philo4Thought Mentoring community is pleased to be launching its first “Young Professional of the Month” Feature Article! Preliminary criteria for YPM candidates is that they are actively engaged in an entrepreneurial initiative or have made a successful career for themselves. Candidates are typically of Hellenic origin, based in New York, and part of a humanitarian or environmentally-conscious field. The goal of the monthly features is to inspire young professionals by providing positive and successful role models who have achieved success in areas our readers ultimately hope to pursue. The most important qualifications? Spirit, perseverance, and – most importantly – the compassionate heart that enables them to share their knowledge and experience.

This month, I had the pleasure to meet with S. Nicholas Papanicolaou, Founder of Ya Mastiha Liqueur (<http://YaMastiha.com>) at Amali Restaurant (<http://amalinyc.com/>) in NYC, where we discussed his personal and professional journey to this moment in his life and career.

THE JOURNEY & “AHA” MOMENT: A Harvard graduate with six years of experience in investment banking – specializing in international shipping for a good portion of that time – and an MBA from Columbia Business School, Nick’s attributes the pursuit of his current entrepreneurial career to a specific “YAha moment” (as he calls it). He had invited 28 of his friends to Greece to join in the celebration of his 30th birthday. Though only two people in that group were of Greek descent, Nick was impressed with the manner in which they all enjoyed and embraced the Greek culture and lifestyle. He loved the fact that the shared positive experience was not exclusive to one age, gender or ethnic community.

The opportunity to share one of the local delicacies – Mastiha liqueur – with his friends on this festive occasion, inspired Nick to develop a product that supports Greek industry and appeals to the general public in its essence and flavor.

The decision to shift career paths from investment banking to an entrepreneurial endeavor was based on several factors: The desire to have a more balanced approach to life as well as the determination to accomplish something meaningful as an individual, outside the scope of a fixed

corporate agenda. “Being Greek is part of who I am. I’m proud of my heritage and want to share it with others.”

Nick admits that, with long hours of networking followed by the time required to complete business transactions, it is still a challenge to balance work and family life. “Since networking is a significant part of my business, it can take up anywhere from 10% to 50% of my time on any given day/week.” Dedicated to offering his family and friends *quality time*, he maintains an awareness that hosting a function at which they are present does not count as “family time,” though it is a wonderful show of solidarity and support! “It’s important to make time for family and loved ones.”

PHILOSOPHY: The key to Nick’s overall philosophy in life and in business is to maintain balance. “Everything is good in moderation, even moderation.” Nick smiles and explains that even our propensity to seek balance must at times be challenged or balanced.

From Nick’s entrepreneurial perspective, there is a level of personal fulfillment that comes from building your own product. “In a larger corporate institution, it’s sometimes difficult to see and understand the specific contribution you’re making. Being an entrepreneur enables you to see and understand your contribution to the community.”

Nick’s sense of identity – both Hellenic and American – plays a major role in his general outlook on life. “I’m very Greek in the sense that I’m very independent, wanting to do things on my own for personal fulfillment.... I also feel that it’s important to remember and embrace your roots while staying open to the possibilities of other people and cultures.”

MENTORS: When asked about which mentors influenced his career path the most, Nick explains: “Until my recent start-up, I haven’t had official mentors. Now I have assembled a Board of Advisors, all of whom have been very instrumental in helping me launch Ya Mastiha. Several other people have been influential figures throughout my life: both of my grandfathers, for their ethics; many ‘value investors,’ for their business acumen and their ability to understand and streamline a situation; and various alcoholic beverage entrepreneurs who took the innovative risks to revitalize an industry that was asleep for way too long.”

It is clear, to anyone who encounters this young professional, that family and community are a big part of his life. Nick and his family are wonderfully close, and it shows! “I think there’s no question that I’ve been inspired and supported by my immediate and extended family. My relatives in Greece are happy to spread the word about my new Greek product; in the US, my entire family has been incredibly supportive. My mother has always offered me unconditional support; my father has always inspired me to be successful on my own. Both my sisters lift my spirits and support my many events. My girlfriend has been the most amazing sounding board I could have asked for.”

CHALLENGES: Every career path has its challenges! The conversation touched upon the challenges of being an entrepreneur within the New York Hellenic community. “Some groups are too close-minded and question my motives. They get upset about the use of a regional product that does not ‘belong’ to me since I’m not from Chios. It’s hard to understand why we can’t just all support each other.”

So how does one work past such social obstacles to educate others and achieve one's goals? Nick, who has a naturally energetic and outgoing disposition, seems to handle it with ease, and maintains, "It is important to seek out other young, modern-thinking people with a global compassion, positive energy, and a common interest in achieving synergy for the greater good." This is one of the many reasons that *Ya Mastiha* is marketed towards a general public rather than an exclusive one. "Mastiha brings people together, to relax and bond. The quality, wholesomeness, and sexiness of Greek culture is something that appeals to a general American audience, not just Greek Americans..."

DOWN-TIME: Outside of work, Nick enjoys a broad range of hobbies and activities. He loves soccer and tennis. He is just starting to learn golf, with occasional attempts at rock climbing and hot yoga. "I'm also learning Greek to become fluent as I only speak conversationally now. Recently, I took Greek dancing classes too. And I love to experience new cultures and cuisines in probably the best city in the world to do that." Agreed!

Although Nick's work does not currently allow for excessive dedication to volunteer services, he does participate in several philanthropic endeavors, which include *Project Hope For Greece* (<http://www.greekamerica.org/projects/project-hope-for-greece/>) and the donation of 1% of the profits from *Ya Mastiha* sales to Chios, the region in Greece where *Mastiha* is produced. Nick also contributes to local church events hosted by the Archdiocesan Cathedral of the Holy Trinity (<http://www.thecathedralnyc.org/>).

Nick is, in fact, co-hosting the upcoming Cathedral Summer Soiree scheduled for June 23rd (<http://www.thecathedralnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/SoireeFinal.pdf>).

While Nick's focus this year is on Chios, in part due to the devastating fires of last summer that destroyed an estimated 25%-50% of the trees, he wants to support multiple Greek and Greek-American causes.

WORDS OF WISDOM: Everyone has a skill or experience that proves to be their greatest asset in life. For Nick, it is the ability to find balance. "Focusing 100% on work is just not a healthy lifestyle. Likewise, a life without work and commitments is also not a healthy lifestyle. Even within the different aspects of your life, it is important to be balanced. As an example, in my work life, I want to make sure that I balance the 'sexier' sides of the business with the more mundane but necessary sides."

Nick shares five mottos with today's young professionals:

- (1) Balance begets balance.
- (2) Everything is good in moderation, even moderation.
- (3) Be personable, passionate and ethical.
- (4) Be prepared for your worst- and best-case scenarios, but understand that people's reactions are usually an over-reaction to the public sentiment of their time.
- (5) Fail forward, fail fast, fail better.

When asked if there was any specific moment or situation in his career that he might have handled differently, Nick explains, "Interestingly, one of the bigger mistakes in my life was to spend so long in investment banking. My learning curve was steep, but then perhaps flattened out a bit. I certainly was not gaining self-confidence since there was no freedom to learn

independently and make mistakes on my own. As you might suspect, this was also the time I was least balanced in life. I focused too much on my work and perhaps ignored other very important parts of my life, like self-improvement and spending time with friends and family. In retrospect, I know I learned a lot in banking and made great contacts etc., but being in an entrepreneurial position at an earlier age might have proven more beneficial.”

MENTORING: Nick is happy to be a mentor to members of the New York-based Hellenic Community. Thanks, Nick!

CONTACT: Please email us at philo4thought@yahoo.com to submit a mentoring inquiry. Alternatively, the company’s email and website information is:

E-Mail: Info@YaMastiha.com.

Twitter: [@YaMastiha](https://twitter.com/YaMastiha), [#YaMas](https://twitter.com/YaMas).

Facebook: www.facebook.com/YaMastiha

READERSHIP: While the targeted readership is the young Hellenic professional of New York, we are very pleased that readership has shifted beyond that scope due to online exposure! Young professionals of all origins are welcome to contribute comments and questions!

