

# When Brands Consume

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*Neda Daneshzadeh has built a career on her passion for consumer brands. As the co-founder of one of the only investment firms founded solely by women, she and her team at [Prelude Growth Partners](#) are laser-focused on founders of brands with a ‘new modern consumer’ in mind, one who she says is unmistakably driving the sector’s growth.*

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**“The new modern consumer is a conscious consumer. She seeks authenticity in her brands, so we look for passionate, purpose-driven founders who have built their brands authentically.”**

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**—Neda Daneshzadeh, Co-Founder and Managing Partner, Prelude Growth Partners**

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**Jessica Pliska:**

In thinking about your early, formative experiences, where should we start your story?

**Neda Daneshzadeh:** When I was seven years old, we had to leave my birth country, Iran. My parents left with me, my sister, and just a couple of suitcases, first to London and then to the U.S. They left everything else behind, including their entire family. I think I quickly came to understand at that early age what it was to sacrifice, as my parents had, and to develop grit.

**Pliska:** What do you remember from when you arrived?

**Daneshzadeh:** I vividly remember sitting in the classroom on the first day at my new school, and I didn't speak a word of English. I remember being surrounded by other children but feeling like I couldn't communicate or personally connect to anyone. I had to go to all of these extra classes after school to learn English and it took me close to a year before I felt like a regular kid in school. I remember a year later, on my eighth birthday, feeling happy and surrounded by friends and family.

**Pliska:** As you grew up from there, what was pivotal in shaping your life and career?

**Daneshzadeh:** In college, I heard through a friend that Morgan Stanley was coming to campus looking to fill one single, coveted, very competitive spot. I knew how low my odds were of getting the job. I didn't know what a balance sheet was. I didn't know what a cash flow statement was. But in the interview, I personally connected with my interviewer. He, too, had come to this country from somewhere else at a young age, so we had a shared background and experience. He was able to see past the fact that I didn't have the content expertise to see that I was qualified, nonetheless, and I got the job. It was the first time I realized the importance and the power of making connections and building relationships.

**Pliska:** This is so relevant to conversations we're having in the workplace now about how to assess talent more inclusively. Your interviewer saw you had the raw skills, but the unique asset you brought to the interview was your lived experience and he saw the value of that.

**Daneshzadeh:** Yes. And it's something I'll never forget. It was truly a defining moment for me.

**Pliska:** What happened from there?

**Daneshzadeh:** I met Alicia Sontag at business school and we connected immediately around a shared passion for consumer brands. After that, I went down the investing path in consumer and she went down the consumer operating path. We remained close while following parallel career paths, both centered around our passion for the consumer. We built a 20-year relationship, and finally came together four years ago with a shared vision to build a modern growth equity firm investing in high-growth consumer brands. And Prelude Growth Partners was born.

**Pliska:** When I interview people about finding career purpose and passion, it's so often comes down to 'superpower' – the thing you can't see or touch that allows you to be effortlessly visionary, intuitive, and instinctual about something that others aren't.

**Daneshzadeh:** Yes, I think what Alicia and I share is a deep, inherent understanding of the modern consumer, and the intuition and judgment about what makes a brand become a 'capital B' brand. To be a good investor, you need to look at the data, but when you couple it with our experience, our judgment, and our creativity, I think that's what allows us to make the truly great investment decisions, and now we make those with the new modern consumer in mind.

**Pliska:** Who's the 'new modern consumer?'

**Daneshzadeh:** She's a conscious consumer, who's seeking authenticity and transparency in her brands, whether in terms of ingredients or business practices or authentic founder stories. It's anyone who aligns their values with the brands they consume, whether it be in beauty and personal care or food and beverage or health and wellness—for example, in the

case of our portfolio, Sol de Janeiro, a personal care brand that promotes joy, body positivity, and inclusivity, or Banza, which creates healthy and delicious comfort foods so you don't have to choose between a good meal and a nutritious one, and whose products are made with chickpeas, one of the most environmentally sustainable forms of protein. So we look for passionate, purpose-driven founders who have built their brands authentically.

**Pliska:** To what else do you attribute your success as a firm?

**Daneshzadeh:** For one, we take a very tight, concentrated approach, investing in a highly curated portfolio. We partner with very few brands each year because of our conviction in those brands and so we can ensure we're able to dedicate the time and resources to them. For another, we bring both the investing and operational experience in consumer brands. And, perhaps most distinctly, our diversity gives us a unique point of view. We're one of the few investment firms founded solely by women. Our brand portfolio naturally reflects this: Over 80% of our brands have at least one female founder and over half have at least one minority founder.

**Pliska:** That's impressive, considering the percentage of funding overall that goes to women is a staggering 2% and to women of color, less than 1%. What needs to happen for the venture capital sector to do better?

**Daneshzadeh:** We need more check-writers who are women. We need more women to start their own firms. We need to expose more women earlier in their careers to what it means to be an investor. I think organizations like Girls Who Invest have done remarkable work. We need more women-led networks and organizations that support women, like PEWIN. The potential is so exciting to me. I personally take every opportunity I can to provide advice, experience, encouragement and, importantly, bold thinking to other women who are considering starting their own firms.

**Pliska:** Well, your experience certainly attests to the fact that it can be a dream career.

**Daneshzadeh:** Yes. It absolutely does.

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