

I'd like to thank...

Rissa

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Last week [we announced](#) we would be honored at [The International School of Hospitality's](#) (TISOH) 10th Anniversary Gala and receive a Distinguished Graduate award. This week, we had the opportunity to attend the gala, receive the award and now...it's time for our Thank You speech! And fair warning: there is no Oscar music to cut me off during this written speech so curl up for prepare for a trip down memory lane.



In 2009, Tara, Traci and I met for the first time. We walked into TISOH to attend our first day of the Wedding Certification and Design course and just happened to sit together. Each of us had completed our university degrees, started jobs and ended up as students again for varying reasons. The things that brought us to TISOH may seem random and unrelated, but I tend to think the universe brought us together serendipitously. Traci had just arrived in Vegas. Case, her boyfriend at the time and now her husband, was starting a new job in town and she made the move from Kansas to Las Vegas with him. Tara was busy working at Tommy Bahama's & MGM Grand Garden Arena but

looking for something that felt like a better fit. I had been working on opening the Fontainebleau Hotel on The Strip before it went bankrupt and closed (hello, recession!). Our first day meeting one another consisted of introductions, smiles and some anticipation from each of us thinking, “what are we getting into?”

As the TISOH course progressed we spent more and more time together doing homework, interning with companies around town and getting to know each other. Class ended at 9:00 pm and we often found ourselves enjoying salsa and margaritas at the Mexican restaurant next to school. Our conversations started with the usual complaints about homework, stress over exams and questions about our projects. As we began interning with venues, wedding planners in Las Vegas and vendors in town our conversations turned to feedback on our experiences. We strongly felt that Las Vegas needed a new take on weddings. Something fresh and inspiring.

One day, the topic was raised of starting our own company. We had each planned on working for wedding planners or opening our own business *eventually* but we weren't crazy enough to think we would start one right away (just kidding, apparently, we were that crazy). It took a few months but the idea of starting a business really began to take shape. While working with Donnell, Tim & Marcus at TISOH we decided to launch the first ever Student Chapter of the [National Association of Catering & Events](#) (NACE). Each of us served on the Executive Board of the Student Chapter and were swept up in the networking, association and participation with this group of professionals that have now become our peers.

Tara, Traci and I spent the next year actively networking and building relationships in NACE while simultaneously working on building our brand. We took a leap of faith in 2010 and launched [Scheme Events](#). Over the past 5 years, it has been the connections, relationships and support from our TISOH team that gave us the oomph to take an idea and turn it into a reality. That reality now is 5 years strong and more than we dreamed. Here's a little insider fact: while forming our business and outlining goals, we decided during our 5th year in business we would make the move out of a home based business and get a real studio. Well, that didn't happen in year 5. It happened in year 1. And now that year 5 is here we are expanding and moving into a larger studio space. Cheers to dreaming big!

We are beyond grateful to TISOH for the experiences and opportunities they provided. There have been hundreds of graduates from TISOH. And many of them have started their own businesses and many of them have landed major jobs with major companies. But our Scheme story is something that I believe is particularly special. And it is one of the reasons the gala was so meaningful to us. Starting school on that first day I had no idea that Tara and Traci would become my friends, my business partners and my family. I never could have imagined the hardships, crazy hours and struggle it takes to own a business. Quite often, people comment to us that it must be difficult to own a business with three women. Truth be told, I don't think any of us as individuals could hold a candle to the torch we create as a team. Our successes and our challenges are felt as a group. Each of us have incredibly different personalities, but through the years we've found the best ways to highlight each of our strengths. We wouldn't be here without the other two girls at our side. As our 5 year anniversary approaches we have some exciting things in the works and will reflect on what happened in years 2-5, but today we want to thank TISOH for getting us started. We couldn't have done it without the professors, the faculty, the Las Vegas NACE Board of Directors and all those that encouraged and supported us. Here's to you Tim, Marcus, Donnell, Jenny, Kathy, Lisa-Lynn, Michelle, Jennifer, Wendy, Ricky, Cheryl, Annie, Michael, Gabi, Brit and Rebecca!