

## Using Wellness to Give Back to the Community feat. Ammy Lowney

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**Tommy:** Welcome back to another episode of “Northeastern Next.” On today's episode we have Ammy Lowney, the founder of Juicy Greens. We'll discuss the transition from teacher to entrepreneur, her favorite professors from Northeastern, and what it means to be a Women Who Empower Innovator Awards winner. Let's get into it.

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**Tommy:** Alright, hi Amy. Welcome to the “Northeastern Next” podcast. How are you today?

**Ammy:** Hey, thank you for having me here.

**Tommy:** Yeah! So, where are you located right now? I know you got a couple locations which we'll get into across the Boston area. So, are you in one right now? I kind of see the glass behind you.

**Ammy:** No, I am not in one right now.

**Tommy:** Okay, gotcha. Well, thanks again for joining the podcast. And just to kind of tee us off, I would love to hear just a little bit of background on not only yourself, but on what your Northeastern experience was like, if you don't mind telling us about it.

**Ammy:** Yeah, so again, thank you for having me here. My name is Amy Lowney. I'm a 2005 alumni, graduated from Northeastern, a political science major with a minor in communications and Latin American studies. I came to Boston specifically to come to Northeastern. One of the things that caught my attention about Northeastern was their co-op program.

And during that time, the co-op program was the number one interdisciplinary program in the country. So that was one of my buy-in to coming to Boston. Being at Northeastern, I was able to learn so much about Boston through my co-ops.

I worked at the City Hall, worked for PRAFA, Puerto Rican government in Boston. I worked along other student organizations and the Latino student organization to do events for other Latino students on campus. So, it was a pretty good experience. One of the best decisions I've made in my life was to come to Boston because of Northeastern.

**Tommy:** Oh, that's awesome. Yeah, I love hearing that. And especially hearing and just knowing how great the co-op program actually is. I didn't realize that at the time, it was the number one interdisciplinary program. That's really interesting. And at the same time, I can understand the draw, not only because Boston's a great city, but it's just a great school within a great city. So, kind of can't lose.

So, I kind of alluded to it earlier, you are the owner and operator, correct, of Juicy Greens, which has three locations across the Boston area. And for those who don't know, it's a wellness center and juice bar. Is that fair to say?

**Ammy:** It's a wellness, it's a juice bar, healthy cafe.

**Tommy:** Gotcha. Okay, cool. Now, before you decided to open up Juicy Greens, you know, I'd love to know what were you doing prior to that?

**Ammy:** Well, I'm actually a schoolteacher. That's like my real job.

**Tommy:** Oh, okay, cool.

**Ammy:** I'm a schoolteacher. Actually, this is where I am right now. I'm at the school where I currently teach.

**Tommy:** Okay.

**Ammy:** So, I started... So right prior to opening Juicy Greens, I had been teaching for Boston Public Schools. I had been teaching this amazing curriculum, civics curriculum. You know, remember, I went to, I got my bachelor's in political science, then I got my master's from UMass to design curriculums and to teach. And so that job, the opportunity to teach civics, it was kind of like the perfect, you know, involves like political and community organizing, which is like the perfect combination for me.

And I was teaching the civics curriculum where students learn how the government worked at the local, state and federal level half of the year. The other half of the year students are, you know, they do a work—kind of like a co-op—where I help students partner with a local nonprofit organization that works in the community. And then we figure out or we brainstorm different topics, different social issues that are affecting the community.

And I did that for a couple of years, and I loved it. And in my last year teaching that curriculum, one of my students chose the topic of food. And prior to that, I had no interest in having my own business, never thought of myself as an entrepreneur, I thought I was going to retire as a teacher.

And it kind of really opened up my eyes to a different cause. And mind you, I have always been, I'm a very driven person. And I am not driven by money, but mostly by issues, by making an impact and making a difference, which is what has led me to every career and every job in my experience.

And students basically taught me about the impact of healthy foods in their communities. And we learned about... they did amazing research about food deserts in Boston and the effects of not eating healthy food in their bodies. And I was, my mind was kind of blown. And I just had this little thing inside of me, like, I want to do something about it. Like, what can I do? What can I do that doesn't cost me money or doesn't, it's not going to come out of my pocket.

So, I was like that with like a few months where I was like, I want to do something. And it was just like this little silent voice that would tell me like, you got to do something about it. Like, you got to...you have to start up something, you got to start a business, you got to do something, something.

And then I talked to my husband, and I was like, “Hey, you know, I have this idea of, you know, open up opening a juice bar.” And he had always been, he's a doctor. So, he always had this idea of having like a health, like a place where you could eat healthy, at least for us, you know, like a fast place where we know a place where I can go in real quick and get like a healthy smoothie. Not a smoothie full of sugar, but something where I can go and get something and get food, delicious food.

And for me, it was mostly like, I'm a Latina, and I'm an immigrant. I came here when I was 15 years old to the United States. So, the flavors that I grew up with are very like sazón, like cumin, like garlic, achiote, cilantro, onion. So, my food needs to have a lot of flavors and a lot of the juice bars in Boston didn't have that flavor that I grew up with.

So, I was like, I need to do something that I would want to go there to eat all the time. And that's when I was like, “Okay, I am going to the side, I'm gonna open up a juice bar, and I'm going to design a menu that is going to be plant-based. The majority is going...Actually at that time, when I first opened it, I didn't know I wanted to have it vegan. And so, we were like, “Oh, we're going to have chicken.” And then it was so hard. Then, the more research me and my husband did about the menu we realize the way to go is vegan. We are not vegans ourselves. We're not vegans but the majority of our meals come from plants.

But we know that is the future. And when I think as a businesswoman, what I always think about in any business that I have, is like would this business be here in 10 years from now?

**Tommy:** Right

**Ammy:** So, that is like my mentality now. How can I protect my business so my business can be here in 10 years from now, 20 years from now. And the answer based on all the research that's out there is plant-based. Plant-based is the future. So, we decided not to bring chicken, and we decided to just have a vegan restaurant. In year two, because we had a lot of customers that asked for eggs and like real cheese, we decided to bring in feta cheese and eggs just for those customers that wanted to more animal protein.

We use organic eggs, and our dairy comes from a local farm in New Hampshire and from Maine.

**Tommy:** Wow, that's really, that's a cool story. That's really interesting. It sounds like you took so many different aspects of your life and who you are and used it as inspiration to really just kind of fuel this business. And that's really incredible. And I really like to like my next question, I want to talk about expansion. And it sounds like you did that internally, especially with like

what you were talking about with going vegan and doing the research on how the future is plant-based, which I agree with, by the way.

And I think what I really want to know is clearly Juicy Greens, there's a lot of success there because your original location that was in Jamaica Plains, right?

**Ammy:** Yes, that's our first location. 2017.

**Tommy:** 2017. And that was six, seven years ago at this point, and you've expanded to Hub Hall attached to the garden. And then the last location is in Somerville. That's in Assembly Row, correct?

**Ammy:** Yep. Yeah. Well, we have one more location that we're opening April 1. And that is our Summer Street. 125. We're in the financial district, baby!

**Tommy:** Oh, wow! Good for you!

**Ammy:** Yeah. And then so that's our grand opening there. It's for May 1. And then we're opening our first kind of like franchisee. She was one of our previous...she's actually one of our employees who we are given the opportunity to partner up and open up her own Juicy Greens right in Mansfield, like in the southern part of Boston.

**Tommy:** Wow. Okay. So, you are really, really expanding then. That's awesome! And you're getting into the whole franchising aspect of everything. So, what's that process been like? In under a decade, you're expanding like crazy, you're franchising out locations. How have you been able to, I guess, handle that, you know, a booming business on top of a full-time teaching career?

**Ammy:** So, you know, first of all, I mean, we're very blessed. And I thank God for giving me this opportunity to not only have the business but believe in myself that I could build this type of business. And the day I realized we had something really good going on was in the middle of the pandemic, where we were still opening, where a lot of our competitors were closed, and we were still going.

And I saw the potential because of my team and my staff and how they believed in me. And that's when I was like, hey, like the key to this business, everybody talks about expansion, growth in venture, like raising capital, but the key to this business is people. And I've studied how to teach people how to facilitate, right, how to create communities. So, I started using what I've known, right, as a teacher and to take care of myself.

**Tommy:** Yeah.

**Ammy:** To take care of their learning. Take care of the well-being. And that has been the key for us to grow into potentially five locations where one of our own staff is opening her own business. And for me, once we knew we had something good going on in the middle of the pandemic where everybody was failing, Juicy Greens was thriving. And I was like, "there's

something here.” There must be something here because the news is saying restaurants are closing. You know, people are in, but people keep coming through our doors to get healthy food because they want to stay healthy. They want to boost their immunity.

And I was hustling hard, you know, like I grew up as a hardworking, you know, from a hardworking father. And then my whole family has been into, you know, the really hardworking people. And all I had to do was just work hard. Like I just had to do what I've been, you know, what my family have been doing. Like where in my academics, like career, I just use my brain. Like I work hard with people using my brain where in the restaurant industry, you gotta get, you get dirty, you gotta roll up your sleeves, get to wash those dishes, mop the floor, you know, cut onions, like wash the bathrooms, like, it's like hard work.

And all I know what I learned is like, I needed to learn how to motivate my team, how to get them to do the things that I need them to do by empowering them, like they're part of mission. And that's how we've been able to, to grow into, you know, hopefully five locations and maybe a few more in the future.

**Tommy:** That would be crazy. That would be awesome. It sounds like you are on an upward trajectory. And what you just mentioned, one word that really jumped to me that you just used was empower. And I love that word. And just to kind of pivot a little bit, to go back to Northeastern, I see that last year, you were a Women Who Empower Innovator Award winner. So, I want to know what, that must have been a great feeling. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but what was that like? And just how did that affect your business venture?

**Ammy:** Yeah, you know, it's amazing to be able to, you know, like, I don't do this work. And most of the entrepreneurs, we don't do this work to get recognized. We do this work because we're creative people. We're people who see a problem, we want to find a solution. And that's really what drives us into this entrepreneurship world where there's a lot of ups and downs, but, you know, that's our personality. We thrive in that type of environment.

So, by receiving, you know, having people acknowledge, the work you do is always kind of like the, what's it called? The cherry of the cake? The icing? What's the saying?

**Tommy:** Oh, the cherry on top.

**Ammy:** The cherry on top.

**Tommy:** Yeah.

**Ammy:** And people recognize and see your labor, your hard work and the work of your team.

So, for me it felt good to go back and to be around so many amazing women, by the way, that also received this award. And just being able to be in the room where things are happening, you know—I don't know if you saw the Alexander Hamilton play where he says the room when it's happening, the room...

**Tommy:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Ammy:** That's how I've been feeling this year when I get invited to all these amazing events by the president of Northeastern, you know, recognizes me like, "I know who you are." And I'm like, "Oh, that's cool." That is that is pretty impressive. And, you know, being able to like knock on doors and ask for opportunities for all the Latinos or the Latinas women that look like me from being...Whenever I go into these amazing events at Northeastern, I always think to myself as a student there. Where, you know, like all the sacrifices that I had to do, and my family had to do, for me to go to Northeastern and for many times I was so ready to give up. Like, "Oh, this is not for me, I can barely speak English." You know, writing essays is really hard for me. But I had an amazing professor Dukakis. Is Professor Dukakis still there?

**Tommy:** Dukakis?

**Ammy:** Dukakis.

**Tommy:** I mean, like *the* Dukakis?

**Ammy:** Professor Dukakis.

**Tommy:** I don't know. I'll have to check like...

**Ammy:** The Duke!

**Tommy:** Like Governor Dukakis?

**Ammy:** Yeah, yeah. He was one of my professors, one of the best teachers I've had, who was really, you know, he was like, "Don't thrive for..." --because I was like, I need to get A's, I need to get B's, A's and B's. And he was like, "It's not thriving for that letter grade. It's to make sure you understand the content and that you are, you know, making impact with the information. You're learning about government; you go out there and you make a difference." And I don't know, like for some, like I just being able to have like a former governor, someone who almost became President of the United States, that person kind of mentor you. Like for me, that was like a key moment for me to stay at Northeastern.

**Tommy:** I can't even imagine that must have been an incredible experience. That's so cool. Wow. So, it sounds like things are going great. You're on an upward trajectory, as I had mentioned earlier. But you know, of course, since this is "Northeastern Next", I have to ask you, Ammy, what is next? What are your next big goals?

**Ammy:** Okay, so finally leaving teaching. I gave my resignation this year. And I am moving on from I know, for a fact, I do not want to retire as a teacher. I want to retire as an entrepreneur, as someone who's opening the doors for other women, other Latino women to, you know, to come to the U.S. to open up their business.

So, what's next is I am working a lot on my personal brand and in different things that I or the knowledge that I have, I know how I got here and being able to share it with other women. I also personally, when I talk about personal goals, I'm very different from professional goals. But professional goals are my career, right? It's my job. It's what's going to bring money to my house to pay my bills. But my personal goals, I think that I want to do for myself. Things that are going to take me to a different level of self-confidence in the things that I'm doing. Some goals that I have, like personally, that have nothing to do whether or not I make a living on them. And one of those goals is to write a book, be an author, and doing more of things that I've been doing like public speaking, which I've had a couple of really nice public speaking engagements in the past two years.

And I love being able to come up with a theme, come up with a lecture, come up with a message and then bring it out there to the public and see it and see and use my teaching skills too...It's not just that, you know, everybody can speak. Everybody can motivate you. Everybody can go up on stage. But how do you interact with your audience in the way that they are...you're facilitating a topic where they're learning, right?

**Tommy:** Right.

**Ammy:** So, when you say what's next, I am investing 100% of my time, which is why I'm leaving teaching so that I can focus on those personal goals and professionally, Juicy Greens as the founder of the co-founder of Juicy Greens, I am going to continue opening new stores. My goal is 100 stores.

**Tommy:** I think that's a great goal. And honestly, it sounds pretty achievable to me. So, congratulations on that. That's awesome! And thank you again for joining. I really appreciate it. And I hope you have a great rest of your day. Thank you.

**Ammy:** Awesome! Thank you. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

**Music:** Enters

**Tommy:** Thanks for listening to this week's episode of "Northeastern Next." Are you or do you know a Northeastern alum with a great story to tell? If so, email us at [alumni@northeastern.edu](mailto:alumni@northeastern.edu) to be featured on a future episode of the pod. I hope you enjoyed the episode, and I'll see you the week after next.

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