

# How This Teen Entrepreneur Created a Million-Dollar Candy Empire

Alina Morse is a typical 14-year-old girl in a lot of ways. She goes to high school, likes to dance, and lives with her parents.

Did we mention she also runs her own international candy empire? Oh. Well, she does.

The story begins with a trip to the bank when Morse was seven. She asked if she could have a sucker, but Dad discouraged her, explaining that candy was bad for her teeth. She went home empty-handed that day, but something tugged at her mind. *Candy tastes so good. Why does it have to be bad for your teeth?*

Just like that, the idea for the [Zollipop](#), a sugarless lollipop, was born.

## A Healthy Lollipop?

Instead of using [simple sugars](#) to make her candy, Morse's Zollipops are made with xylitol (pronounced zy-li-tol), a natural sweetener. It took months of research, testing, and YouTube-watching to develop the candy base, but once she finally did, Morse had the hippest lollipop in the world – a sugar-free, dairy-free, gluten-free treat that still tastes good and actually *cleans* your teeth. Using \$3,500 of her own money (which she had [saved from birthdays and holiday gifts](#)) and a manufacturing investment from her father, Morse built a company and sold 70,000 Zollipops in her first year. Things only grew from there.

Today the Zollipop is the third best-selling lollipop on

Amazon, outselling classic brands like Dum Dums, Charms Blow Pops, and Tootsie Pops. They are sold in roughly [25,000](#) major retailers in America, including Whole Foods, Walgreens, Walmart, and Kroger.

Things have, you could say, worked out. Annual candy sales, which now include Zolli taffy and gumdrops, totaled \$6 million in 2018. Morse has seven employees and is a millionaire and famous. She was featured on the cover of *Entrepreneur Magazine*, making her [the youngest](#) entrepreneur to ever grace the cover, and she was even invited to the White House (twice!) by former First Lady Michelle Obama.

At age 14, Morse has already achieved “the American Dream.” This invites an important question: how did it happen?

## The Inspiration Behind Morse and Zollipops

In August, *Inside Edition* ran a wonderful feature on this teenage entrepreneur. From the clip, it’s not difficult to see that Morse is bright, engaging, and driven – all keys to success. It’s also clear that her parents had a lot to do with her achievements. (I imagine this is the case in nearly every child prodigy story). Morse’s mother and father appear to be loving, nurturing parents who helped guide their daughter’s habits, values, and thinking.

At one point, Morse tells *Inside Edition* that she’s “always kind of had this entrepreneurial mindset.” This may be true, but it’s important to ask *why* she always had such a mindset. Evidence suggests it was no accident.

Most parents, I think it’s safe to say, do not buy their five-year-olds financial success literature. Well, Tom Morse did. When his daughter was five, he gave her the book *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*. The book apparently made an impression.

“I looked at that, and I said I could create a company, but I could create it with a mission,” Morse explained. “I could help people through business.”

For those unfamiliar with the work, *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* explains “what the rich teach their kids about money that the poor and middle class do not.” Written by business gurus Robert Kiyosaki and Sharon Lechter, it’s one of the [top-selling personal finance books](#) of all time. It’s the book your rich, successful uncle bought you that you never actually opened. (You read [I Hope They Serve Beer In H\\*ll](#) instead.\*)

*Rich Dad, Poor Dad* isn’t one of those books that preaches frugality and hard work – though those are important qualities. It teaches entrepreneurial *thinking*. It shows how to build your own business, one that creates value by solving problems, and how to build passive income by recognizing opportunities others don’t see (or don’t act on).

## The Lesson

No one is saying Morse isn’t responsible for her success. She is. It’s quite possible she would have been a teenage millionaire if she hadn’t read *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*.

The lesson is that successful entrepreneurs create value through vision and empathy. They see how the world can be better, and they put resources – blood, sweat, capital, and time – into creating it. But it all starts with empathy, explains BuildDirect CEO Jeff Booth.

“The highest expression of empathy,” [writes](#) Booth, is “addressing customer needs before they’re even aware of them.”

Empathy – the ability to understand and share the feelings of others – is essential to entrepreneurs because it allows them to see opportunities others do not. Basic economics teaches that this an essential component of wealth creation.

"The driving forces in the market process are the producer-entrepreneurs who see profit opportunities arising from potential improvements in market activities," [wrote](#) Thomas C. Taylor in his classic text *An Introduction to Austrian Economics*.

*While other market participants are more or less passive, unaware of or perhaps uninterested in profit-related opportunities, entrepreneur-producers search out and exploit profit potentials.*

Prior to Zollipops, it was no secret that candy is bad for children's teeth. What it took was a child's empathy to recognize it was a problem for multitudes of children (and their parents, who have to pay their dental bills).

Unlike so many children who imagined how wonderful it would be to eat candy that tasted good *and* was good for your teeth, Alina Morse actually did something about it. In the process, she made millions of children (and dentists) happier and herself millions of dollars.

That's the power and beauty of entrepreneurship.

*\*The author would like to note that when he says "you," he means himself.*

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