

Word From the Wise

There's a lot to learn on the road to the top. Here, 5 highly successful entrepreneurs reveal what the journey has taught them.

By Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Dahlynn McKowen, John Gardner, Elizabeth Gardner, Tom Hill and Kyle Wilson

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Cold Stone Creamery and Monster.com

Lesson 1: We're All in This Together

Doug Ducey

CEO & Chairman, Cold Stone Creamery

Before I came to Cold Stone Creamery, I worked in sales and marketing for Procter & Gamble. It was the ideal place to learn the right way to do just about anything in business. But the emphasis seemed to be on personal achievement. Success was all about me making it happen. When I came to Cold Stone, some of that thinking had to change.

Cold Stone Creamery was founded [by] Don and Susan Sutherland in Tempe, Arizona. When I joined the company, my job was to grow the popular local ice cream store into a franchise. The first franchisees taught me more than I could ever convey.

By the time we had about 10 stores open, a man named Dan Farr came into our offices and boldly said, "I want to open up a Cold Stone Creamery in Alaska." I smiled and told him Alaska wasn't really a priority for us right now. Dan wouldn't take no for an answer, and by the end of our meeting, he had talked me into opening a store in Anchorage.

When Alaska became a success, we knew that Cold Stone Creamery could be a national phenomenon. Aside from being a great store owner, Dan and his unbridled belief in us opened our eyes to how big the world could really be.

In August 1999, our leadership team went on a strategic planning retreat. With just 74 stores open, we staked our claim that "The world will know Cold Stone Creamery as the 'Ultimate Ice Cream Experience' by having 1,000 profitable stores open by December 31, 2004."

As monumental as that vision was, equally important was a single line in our mission statement: The success of the franchisee and the ultimate happiness of the consumer will go hand-in-hand as our number-one priority.

After all, our success so far was hardly a solo act. From Don and Susan, who succeeded together, to the early franchisees like Dan Farr, we have been inspired by and have contributed to each other's success. Mutual success is the true success story at Cold Stone Creamery. Our success isn't about an individual, and it isn't just about a team. It's about putting the success of others before your own.

Lesson 2: Listen to Your Dreams

Jeff Taylor

Founder, Monster.com

You can change the world during a 30-minute shower. There's something about the hot water flowing over your head that makes what I call the "good part" and the "absent part" of your brain talk to each other. When you stand there with the soap in your hands, you begin to reinvent the soap. You think, I can put this clear soap together with this cream soap... I can make a better soap! Then you think, The shampoo doesn't have very good packaging. The next thing you know, you dream up a cool business idea. You turn off the shower and step one foot out onto the bathmat, then suddenly, you can't remember anything.

[In the shower], your mind, body and spirit are all moving into your subconscious, where you invent new things, solve problems and potentially create opportunities or big ideas. You have to pay attention to your subconscious. Learn to focus on your idea and maintain that idea long enough, so that when you get out of the shower, you're able to capture your idea on a nearby pad of paper.

I keep a pad of paper next to my bed, ready to catch my dreams and ideas. This leads me to a small, but important, life story.

In 1994, I had an ad agency that specialized in recruiting and retaining talent. Our success was built around the concept of creating "big ideas" for our clients. One day, a client said, "No more big ideas. I want a monster idea."

I actually had a dream about a monster idea, a bulletin board system for jobs. Paying attention to my subconscious, I woke up at 4:30 in the morning and wrote down much of the interface and the concepts that are still used at Monster today.

Monster.com is now in 25 countries and has become the largest and most popular job search and career management site on the internet. Listen to your subconscious, learn to capture its power, and maybe, just maybe, you'll be the one to come up with the world's next monster idea!

Jeff Taylor is now working on Eons, a web business targeted at the 50- to 100-plus age group.

1-800-Flowers, Cookie Lee and Wahoo's Fish Tacos

Lesson 3: It's About Relationships

Jim McCann

Founder, Chairman & CEO, 1-800-FLOWERS

I'm what you would call an "accidental entrepreneur." Not only did I not plan to be an entrepreneur, but I also don't think I knew what the word meant when I was a young man. My college degree is in psychology, [and I spent 14 years as a social worker] at St. John's Home for Boys in Queens, New York. Those 14 years were equal to my earning an MBA, and a lot more.

In my early days as a social worker, I was not good. I had to learn to stop treating [the boys] like a group. You can't build a relationship with a group; you build relationships with individuals.

Slowly, I began to grow as a professional. But there was one kid I couldn't reach—Norman, one of the tougher kids in the home.

One day, I was planting some tomato plants on one side of the group home, a hint of the florist to come. Norman came walking by and began to make fun of me. The same thing happened for several days in a row. I worked, and Norman stopped by to give me a hard time.

Slowly, the conversations began to change. We gradually moved from talking about how dumb I was for trying to make those tomatoes grow, to what we could do to make them grow.

Every day, Norman stopped by to help me with those tomato plants. We began to talk about sports, girls, school and whatever was going on in Norman's life. The topics weren't important, but the conversations sure were.

I had learned how to build a relationship. This lesson is one that I carry with me to this day at 1-800-FLOWERS. Establish a relationship first, then do business. Without the relationship, you have nothing.

Lesson 4: Stay True to Your Vision

Cookie Lee

Founder & President, Cookie Lee Inc.

My mother and father emigrated from China to America in 1948. Upon coming to America, my parents worked extremely hard. I remember waving goodbye to my mother every morning as she drove off to work, then I walked to school alone with a house key dangling on a chain around my neck. After school, I would come home to an empty house. When my mother finally came home, she had to clean and prepare dinner and didn't have time to help me with my homework or play with me. Looking back, I realize that this helped mold my independence and resourcefulness, because I had to figure out how to do things on my own. But at the time, I was resentful. I vowed that when I became a parent, I would do things differently.

[After getting my MBA], I went on to work as a marketing manager for major corporations. These jobs were very demanding, and I often wouldn't get home until midnight. Though I enjoyed the success, I really wanted a family, and I didn't see how I could have children when I was working so many hours.

In between my hectic schedule, I decided to take a jewelry beading class for fun. When I wore the jewelry, people asked where I got it. One day, I took a shoebox full of jewelry to work and began selling to colleagues during off hours. A woman asked if I would bring the jewelry to her home so some friends could see it, which I did, with great success! At the time, I didn't know there was such a thing as direct sales or party-planning businesses. I also didn't realize I had just given my first "home show."

Once I saw I could make money selling my jewelry, I decided to invest \$300 to buy materials and really make a go of the business. While still working [my corporate job], I sold jewelry for seven years and made over \$86,000 that seventh year! I quit my job [and] the summer after, I learned I was pregnant with our son. In 1992, our daughter was born.

I soon realized the only way I could continue to grow my business was to teach other women how to sell my jewelry, too. So in 1992, I started taking on consultants.

My business has since grown into a multimillion-dollar corporation--a direct result of my vision, the hard work of my amazing corporate staff and the dedication of 70,000 Cookie Lee Consultants throughout the U.S. Most important, I stayed true to my original purpose, which was to provide a different life for my children, one that I could be a part of every day.

Lesson 5: Find Your John Wayne

Wing Lam

Co-Founder, Wahoo's Fish Taco

In the 1970s, [my father] purchased a restaurant on Balboa Island in affluent Newport Beach, California. An event in 1972 triggered a boom in our family's business and changed our lives forever.

The publicist for John Wayne's wife was planning a birthday party for her own husband at our restaurant. She asked her client if John Wayne would make an appearance. As the press got wind that John Wayne would be dining at our restaurant, rumors spread that he was there for his *own* birthday! Soon, everyone associated my father's restaurant with John Wayne, and our restaurant became famous by association.

As our lives in Southern California progressed, my brothers and I grew to love the ocean and the beach lifestyle. Our father encouraged us to go to college, and I was the first in my family to get a job in corporate America. But my life was about rules and regulations. I was not happy.

With my brothers Bismark, Ed and Mingo, we decided to start our own restaurant with good-tasting, healthy fast food--grilled fish tacos. As with my father's business, we knew we needed celebrity backing. So we positioned the location of our first restaurant in pursuit of our very own John Wayne--the surf industry! We knew we needed to be embraced by them, but we couldn't ask. In the surf world, you don't show up at the beach and expect to surf without being invited in.

We were working hard and not making much money. One day, Mike, my brother's former boss from Newport Surf and Sport, asked me why we didn't have uniforms. Before I knew it, he gave me Billabong T-shirts, hats and shorts in every Day-Glo color you could imagine. A week later, a friend from Quiksilver asked why we were wearing all Billabong clothes. Can you guess what happened next? More surfwear companies followed. Then came the decorations, paintings, posters and stickers. The John Wayne ball was officially rolling.

The local paper contacted me to advertise on their special insert profiling surfers. I called Mike and asked him if I could use the Billabong logo on the ad. He agreed, and Wahoo's Fish Taco became the "official restaurant of Billabong." Before long, Quiksilver, O'Neill and others were onboard. Suddenly, we were the official restaurant of seven surf companies. It was John Wayne to the max!

After the ad came out, the surf companies brought their top riders into the store. For two weeks, I had "John Waynes" walking around the restaurant. I'd hear kids saying things like, "Oh my God! There's a world champion!" For the first time, I knew we would be a success. The following year, Wahoo's exploded in popularity!

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