

GLOBAL

STUDENT

**ENTREPRENEUR
AWARDS**



ACTON FOUNDATION
for Entrepreneurial Excellence

Top 25 Hero Essays

Table of Contents by Author

4	....Fan Bi
5	....Sean Maney
8	....Kieran O'Neill
10	....Christian Levis
11	....Allan Grant
13	....Clark Buckner
14	....Deborah Leigh Wylde
15	....Norm De Decker
17	....Jim Gregory
18	....Daniel Mackenzie
19	....Jacklyn Omorodion
20	....Jonathan Mac Neil
21	....Joseph Opper
23	....Mark Becker
24	....Masha Mutic
25	....Ryan Sapp
26	....Julie Tran
27	....Caroline Mailloux
28	....Bertrand Gervais
30	....Andy Camp
31	....Alexander Moazed
32	....William Finkhman
33	....Alexandra Morton
34	....Samuel Johns
36	....J. Shelby Burford

Fan Bi

On the journey to deeply connect with an entrepreneurial hero, certain connotations of “world-changer,” “paradigm shifter” and “famed innovator” are evoked. Going through my LinkedIn contacts, business cards and the memory bank, the burning question of “Is this person really of hero status?” kept me short of reaching out to anyone. Of course, all good stories have happy endings and in the spirit of entrepreneurship – not just fame, money and influence – I came across my hero. His name is Jing Wei. His is a story of fighting horrendous adversity since birth, enduring a childhood of poverty, making a daring escape to a new world and finding opportunity at last.



Jing grew up in an extremely conservative China as the youngest brother of two sisters— all three siblings were born out of adultery. They lived with their mother, blind from a chemical factory accident, in the project homes of urban Shanghai. Without an established university system, Jing attended technical college where he studied electrical engineering. In 1985, he met his wife, Yu Qun Xi, and later had a son. Jing and his family move back into the projects with Jing’s mother in a single room. As he felt this was unacceptable for his new family, he saw the Open Door Policy from the new Chinese government as an opportunity for a better life. Jing scraped together the money for a single flight out to Sydney, Australia, on a student visa. In 1988, he left the technical college, and worked wherever he could, from chocolate factory to garbage collector. He sent back everything he saved to his family in Shanghai. As his visa was nearing expiration, one of the biggest tragedies in Chinese history turned out to be the luckiest day in Jing’s life. With the Tiananmen Square Massacre of 8 June 1989, the Australian government granted all those on student visas refugee status.

Over time, Yu and their son immigrated to Sydney, and Jing started work in fresh fruit and vegetable produce stand. In 1995 with his family still living in poverty and sharing bedrooms with other families, Jing decided to risk it all and branch out in the fresh produce business for himself, buying a small business with a small piece of real estate in a farmer’s market. From sheer commitment to a quality product and valued customer service, Jing Fruit and Veg began to dominate the market. He was innovative with everything from the physical positioning of his stand, to bringing in large lights to increase the luster of his produce. He included his family in the business, as Jing managed the supply, while Yu directed sales and their son spent most of his young life at the market. As his customer base grew, he took on larger debt and expanded the business into wider fresh produce products. Over 14 years, Jing grew from one small corner of the market, to dominating the entire market with 27 stands and more than a dozen employees.

Through a steep learning curve, Jing Fruit and Veg’s asset value rapidly appreciated with the booming property prices. He expanded to his native Shanghai market in 2004 to further diversify his business portfolio. It gives Jing a great deal of pleasure to look back on the most humble of beginnings to risk all, fight for values of financial and political freedoms. He reached the destination he has today with love for his family and a determination to succeed.

Sean Maney

I have dealt with many business owners over the years as I currently own six companies myself (Spa Siam, Hairmax Software, SiBoom, Maysiware, Innercharge and 3L), but I have yet to meet Frank Etsey's equal. Frank is not a member of the Entrepreneurs' Organization, but yet he epitomized the many principles that the EO members embrace.

Frank Estey is the true definition of the word entrepreneur. Frank started Marshalls while in his twenties with two other business partners. Through the years, he took this startup company and transformed it into a hugely successful corporation. Frank stayed on as CEO after Marshalls was sold to TJX and later took on other ventures, namely Lords and Lady's Salon. Frank invested in, and helped run this company during difficult times, and nurtured it so it was issuing distribution checks again.

Sadly, he passed away a few months ago from an inoperable brain tumor. I was fortunate enough to speak to many amazing and successful people in his life, and I would like to share some of their thoughts about him, as a boss and as an entrepreneur. Here's what Tori, one of Frank's employees from Lords and Lady's Salon, had to say about him:

"Frank was the only person I have ever looked up to in my life. He was not only a mentor for me in the work environment but became a surrogate grandfather. He always took everyone into account that worked for us no matter what their levels were within the salon. He was also never afraid to challenge you, and he was the first to give praise where and when needed. Frank worked with his heart on his sleeve. He was a sensitive man but private, as well. Every day, we see people at the mall that worked with him in his Marshall years and they have nothing but positive remarks. He touched many people and he was a very fair man, open to a changing society. Most of all he was constant and dependable."

Frank empowered his employees to work harder by showing everybody that he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. And when his employees did the same, he made sure to thank them. Frank appreciated the little details in life, whether they came in the form of a spreadsheet or a turkey sandwich; and he never lost sight of the people that put those things together. Frank also became a mentor to many, including myself, with his uncanny knack for taking the complicated and simplifying it to a point that anybody could understand. He was always willing to take the time to explain whatever you needed to know, as long as you were willing to listen. Here is a quote from one of his business partner's daughters who later went on to work with Frank:

"Working with Frank was a learning experience. I learned more from him than any business class could ever teach me. His work ethic was unparalleled. He worked through brain cancer, never considering stopping. He worked up until the week he died, reviewing financials and traveling to various salons. Working in the salon business was the perfect match for Frank. He loved women and women loved him! He had a charm and charisma that really attracted people to him. I always found it amusing when a young stylist would comment that Frank reminded her of Hugh Hefner. He was a shrewd business man but he had a huge heart.

He would say that family came first and that should always be your focus. Frank was always the first person I would go to when I had a huge decision to make, whether it was in business or in my personal life. I learned so much from Frank about life, and miss him every day.

You are probably becoming aware of the way everyone portrayed Frank.

He touched so many lives - directly and indirectly. These people think of him now months after his passing and will tell stories about Frank to their grandkids, forty years from now. This is the true meaning of an entrepreneur - a person who is successful in his own right, and also makes those around him more successful."

This quote is from his business partner at the successful urban clothing company Karmaloop:

“Frank has been a huge influence on me personally and on my business. Frank taught me and my staff pretty much all we know about retail. Not only was he a master at understanding how to manage inventory and run businesses, he was a good friend and mentor to me. Frank had an amazing temperament; cool, calm, and level-headed in all situations.

Frank always let me and others know how much he believed in them. He also was willing to lead with his chin and put his money where his mouth was, investing in my company, Karmaloop when the chances for success were anything but certain. Frank always put human relationships first ahead of business and encouraged everyone to find a balance between work and life (something I think he learned from his wife Evelyn, who he spoke about often).

He had a great sense of humor and loved to give you some good natured ribbing. He was always respectful but he was tough and could make the hard decisions and he taught me how to face some of the hard decisions that are part of business. He stressed the importance of making crisp choices based on fact and that the need to terminate employees should always be done in a professional manner.

Without Frank I am not sure where my business would be today. I know I would be a different person and would not have been able to achieve the success that I have had to date in both work and in my personal life.”

Angela, from Lords and Lady’s was quoted as saying, “I don’t have to think very hard when asked what Frank Estey meant to me! Frank was not your typical business man, he was much more...he was a loving husband, father and to me he was my mentor and my friend.

“Frank was honest, loyal and always willing to listen. He was always teaching and understanding. Frank was patient and kind. His thoughtfulness will never be forgotten! I can remember a time that my husband had just started a new job and wasn’t eligible for health insurance for six months, my son was very sick with asthma as an infant and Frank knew this, as he would always make it a point to ask how my family was. Knowing that I had no insurance and that my son was sick, Frank immediately stepped up and helped my family out with insurance.

I will never forget his generosity. There are so many things that I could tell you about Frank, but the list would be much too long. As I said in the beginning, Frank was not your typical businessman. Don’t get me wrong, he was a very successful businessman, but he never forgot the people who worked for him and I will never forget him.

You will be forever in my heart and I am so glad that I had the opportunity to have you in my life. Thank you for teaching all of us not to forget the important things in life... people.”

Being an entrepreneur means finding a balance and terminating employees that are disturbing that balance. As an entrepreneur, this is difficult to do as you feel that it is your failure. Frank disliked letting any employee go, but always made sure to do it in a fair way.

Frank wouldn’t gossip or speak badly about people, if he had an issue with you, he would deal with you directly. Frank was a fair and passionate man who could organize a business’s financials better than anyone. His business acumen and his heart could not be surpassed.

Frank was also always a step ahead of everyone else when it came to doing business as can be seen from his quote to the Globe in 1977.

“We came up with our own concept of discounting quality brand name merchandise, including clothing for the entire family, shoes, and domestics,” he told the Globe in 1977. “The customer has become more oriented to shopping for value. While still label-conscious, there is no longer

Dedication to a particular store because people are so mobile now.”

Being an entrepreneur is a gift that comes with many responsibilities and if you do it right you can touch more people than most could ever dream of. This of course comes with monumental challenges, as you need to insure that you are there for your family and friends, as well as your company and its employees. Frank was able to do all of this, and then some... and for that we will be forever grateful.

I will leave you with a couple of words from his family and hopefully a better understanding of what it means to be a true hero entrepreneur.

He was mentor to me for life and for business later on, and he was always there when I needed him,” his son said. “He was a pillar of strength.”

“That strength didn’t waver, Mr. Estey’s wife said, even when he was diagnosed with cancer.

“They only gave him 5 1/2 months to live, and he lived 19 months,” she said. “He never complained or tried to cut back on his activities, and he worked until his last week. Two days before he died, he found some mistakes on some business documents that a partner showed him. He was an unbelievably strong guy. I just can’t describe his strength and dignity.”

Kieran O'Neill

The hero who I interviewed was Errol Damelin, a serial entrepreneur who has been making waves recently in the London, England, business community.

He set up his first business, Supply Chain Connect, in the late 1990s to provide a hosted procurement platform. His background in corporate finance hadn't given him the operational experience he desired so he joined an Israeli steel company in a business development role. At this company he noticed that their supply chain processes were very basic. They had SAP, but this still left much to be desired. For example, people in Paris, France, didn't know what was happening in Turkey, and this was causing some serious problems downstream. At the same time, the Internet boom was in full swing and online marketplaces were developing in many different industries. It struck Errol as being obvious – a Web-based procurement platform that operated between different supply chains would save companies like his significant amounts of time and money. With this insight and a burning desire to make it on his own he ventured forth into a new world of entrepreneurship.

Despite visions of glamour and grandeur, success was far more elusive than he originally thought it would be. Among the many challenges he faced were the fatally long sales cycles – often 12-18 months – by which point the original person who was responsible for the potential order had moved on and they were dealing with an entirely new person. Also, the customers' strategy changed often, making the purchase unnecessary. These long sales cycles lead to serious cash flow headaches and a lot of challenges in scaling the company. After a long struggle, it was clear the procurement platform just wasn't going to take off to any meaningful degree; fortunately, however, one small area of the business kept piquing customers' interests whenever discussed. This was the concept of supply chain visibility; being able to see stock levels for your partners and customers and initiate orders for more stock whenever they reached certain levels. This worked between many different companies so entire stock levels could be maintained 'just in time.' By focusing on this area, they were finally able to get orders coming in and were able to start rapidly growing the business. After a few more years of growth and success, the company was eventually acquired in a trade sale to ChemConnect in 2005.

After a short break, Errol got immediately back to work on dreaming up his next big business. This time he had a few clear criteria: (1) No long sales cycles, which basically ruled out enterprise software; and (2) It had to be a highly scalable business which could reach multi-million pound turnover in a short space of time. He spent one year researching myriad ideas in the consumer Internet space and finally one caught his eye: consumer finance on the Internet.

The concept of 'pay day loans' have been around for centuries. However, using the Internet provided the opportunity to provide a significantly more compelling user experience for consumers. There was little innovation in this space, and people had a general distrust for big banks and their treatment of small-time individual customers. Errol's idea was to use a set of technological breakthroughs to provide instant, short-term loans to consumers. There were a number of different minefields to walk through here: complex systems, regulation, payment processing, risk management, etc. However, after working through these issues, he launched Wonga.com. You can go use it and check it out now!

The business took off immediately. Clearly there was a consumer need for these small-value, instant loans (and when I say instant, I really mean it – you can get a loan to your back in minutes, not days!) In order to fuel growth, he's since raised more than £24 million (more than US\$39 million) investment from a combination of VC equity and debt and the business continues to explode. He wants to take the business forward to become a global player, using innovation and an obsessive customer-focused as his key competitive advantages as others try and imitate his success.

After hearing his inspiring story, I was curious to ask him a few questions about the hardest time, the most satisfying part of the job and advice he'd give to other aspiring entrepreneurs. He said the hardest thing was learning to be patient: He was always in such a rush, and trying to build an enterprise software company just simply takes time. The best part of the job is the thrill of engaging directly with real customers through Wonga, and how he's solving a real need people have. Lastly, the more important lesson he'd pass on to budding entrepreneurs is to be expected from taking on the finance industry: pick a large, profitable market (in his words "fat and happy") with big ("lazy") existing players where you can enter, innovate and disrupt. Stay focused on the customer, and the profits will follow.

Christian Levis

On 26 August 2009, I had the pleasure of speaking with Andrea Azdril, CEO of Startech Global, and a stunning example of entrepreneurship. Growing up in southern California, Andrea realized the value of business early on, turning a childhood passion for riding into a lucrative business, buying and training horses to be sold at a higher price. Though she would receive more formal training down the line (having an MBA from UCLA can't hurt), it is this simple childhood story that I feel demonstrates a key trait responsible for Andrea's success— the ability to separate idea from opportunity.

In business this can be tricky; often we are drawn toward projects that might appeal to our interests or passions, yet still might be a better opportunity for someone else. Andrea tells the story of a business she started while in graduate school that developed a self-tuning guitar. Leveraging her prior instrument experience as a former employee at Seymour Duncan, a company that manufactures guitar pickups, the business seemed like a logical fit but as the project progressed there were issues with the implementation. Whether or not to sell directly to the player or to the guitar manufacturer was a tough question, and in both instances, appropriate means of distribution didn't seem to exist. Though the idea of a self-tuning guitar seemed like it would lead to a profitable business, in developing the product it became clear that someone else would better serve the opportunity. A larger player in the guitar business would be better equipped to market and manufacture this technology and weather the potentially slow adoption process that comes with pioneering a new product.

Though the project was eventually shut down (Gibson, one of the largest guitar makers in the world, eventually picked up the idea), it was a valuable experience. While “you don't want to crash and burn,” Andrea warns, “you need to be comfortable with failure— as long you've planned and tried everything you could.” Entrepreneurship is certainly a risk but it is a calculated one. Identifying the right situation for your set of skills is essential. In helping to found Startech, Andrea was able to use the experience she had gained not only from her own business ventures, but also from consulting and fundraising to take distant-seeming connection and leverage that opportunity into something big.

Looking to the future, Andrea helped to rework Startech's initial model, using Chinese engineers to do high-end physical R&D, to its current hybrid approach— using teams in both the US and China to develop custom software. Through positioning around a booming Chinese economy at its launch in 2006 and a need to better streamline the communication and quality control levels, this company was more than just an idea; it was an opportunity for Andrea and her team.

An outstanding businesswoman and exemplary citizen, Andrea volunteers her skills to the Accelerator program as its global chair. She has worked not only for her own success but the success of others, helping more than 400 other entrepreneurs to build their business and create thousands of jobs in the process. It is this level of drive to give back and make a difference that when combined with her overall success makes Andrea a hero in eyes. There no doubt to me that she is worthy of the title. I hope you agree.

Allan Grant

When e-mailing Peter H. Thomas to invite him for an interview, I presented the entrepreneur, author, philanthropist, (and my “virtual mentor” – a mentor I consult in my imagination) with two options: a 30-minute phone interview or a virtual interview with the image of him as he exists in my mind, an image shaped by his life-long achievements expressed in his writings, his speeches and our brief personal encounters at Global Student Entrepreneur Awards. Having never been interviewed virtually and valuing a wide range of personal experiences, Mr. Thomas chose the virtual interview. While at first I was intimidated by the challenge of accurately representing Peter Thomas, the answers to my questions started to flow freely and confidently. A conversation and interview far longer than 30-minutes ensued.



Why did you become an entrepreneur?

After five years in my first professional job, First Investors Corporation of Edmonton, for the first time in my life I was faced with a situation I did not like and could not control. Despite the enormous value I was creating for the company, my attempt to purchase an ownership stake was shot down before I could even present my case. My resolution was to never be enslaved by someone else’s plan, and to create my own. I realized that while I was a great salesman, I would never be happy playing the role of a good employee. Armed with the quote, “the view only changes for the lead dog,” I committed myself to leading the pack.

How do you define success?

Success is the attainment of a predetermined goal. It’s not about the money. For me the goal was to live a balanced life filled with the widest possible range of personal and business experiences; trying as many things as I could, so long as they aligned with my values.

What made you successful?

Discipline, creativity, unyielding commitment, a positive attitude, clearly defined values, attainable goals, salesmanship and my many mentors all played a critical role. Some of my greatest successes in business can also be attributed to appropriate timing— knowing from both research and gut when to take a leap into the window of opportunity, and when to move on.

What advice would you share with entrepreneurs that are just starting their businesses?

Entrepreneurs create value by identifying the right opportunity, finding the people capable of exploiting this opportunity, motivating these people and delegating both authority and responsibility to this team. Once the opportunity is clear, complete dedication and a vivid, justifiable faith in your success are required. When it comes down to tactics, my formula for success is AMC + G (that RUMBA) + H: Attitude, Motivation and Commitment focused on Goals that are Realistic, Understandable, Meaningful, Believable and Achievable, enabled by physical and emotional Health.

What mistakes should entrepreneurs look out for?

One of the greatest threats to an entrepreneur, especially once they have had a taste of success, can be described as the King Arthur Syndrome— believing that one is invincible, and can never make a mistake. Life has a way of humbling those that fall prey to this fallacy. Stay humble, surround yourself with people whose opinion you respect that will question your ideas, listen to your mentors and advisors, but ultimately make your own decision; go with your gut.

What does it mean to navigate by your values?

Life constantly presents you with choice. No choice is inherently right or wrong, but rather it is the alignment of a particular choice with your individual values that makes it the right or wrong choice for you. Identify and prioritize your values, and the choices will follow.

Clark Buckner

Taking a vision and bringing it into reality captivates me. However, being an incoming freshman at a college in a far away city at a place where I know few has its challenges. Hungry to succeed but unsure where and what to pursue can be overwhelming for any freshman, including myself.

Fortunately, Andy Tabar, a recent graduate from Belmont University, was in my shoes four years ago. Andy came to Belmont with few resources. However, what set him apart was his willingness to work.

Starting college well is an important point conveyed by universities all over the country. I

want to get the most out of these next four years; reaching out to a role model like Andy makes sense because he excelled in the classroom, balanced a healthy social life and spent an average of 30 hours per week developing an extremely successful business (www.bizooki.com).

“The output of your experience is largely based on your input, how you approach it and use it,” Andy advises. The more I put into my college years, the more I will get out of them. Now is the time to start on the right foot. In these few short days as a freshman in college, I’ve been introduced to many new opportunities and people. I’ve noticed how the potential here is extraordinary, yet fragile if not cultivated. Everywhere I look there are new faces. Andy has told me the importance of “networking with a purpose.”

Along with that, I also have learned from how Belmont taught Andy to become conscious, realistic and calculative about his goals by creating roadmaps to achieve them. I also observe how each year Andy works smarter because it reflects on his character, revenue, vendor relationships, marketing and overall approach to his business.

“Start now, think bigger, execute practically and don’t lose sight of the end goal.” Andy also encourages me to find my passion. He’s described the power of asking people for help when I need it and being specific about what I need and what will result. He then finished powerfully, “Then do it.”

I’ll apply Andy’s advice to my own story and my own journey as I go through the same college Andy left his mark on. Andy is a hero for his character, vision, integrity, drive and aspirations as a successful entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship is the start of my college career.

This is the beginning of bringing my vision of entrepreneurship into reality.



Deborah Leigh Wylde

Darren Strachan, president of Acorn Waste Systems Inc., began his entrepreneurial journey with little capital and even less support. At age 36, Mr. Strachan had been working steadily as a shift manager for a busy processing plant in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. With a mortgage to pay and a family with two kids, Mr. Strachan was barely making ends meet. At this point, he decided he was tired of being limited by restrictions imposed from outside sources. Mr. Strachan had not graduated from high school— he was forced to drop out in ninth grade due to problems at home. During his time with the processing plant he took momentum from his managerial position to pursue his General Equivalency Diploma (GED). He had always encouraged his staff to pursue avenues what would be beneficial to their lives and decided to apply the same philosophy to his own future.

In 2004, Mr. Strachan took the plunge, recognizing a need for servicing in the townhouse/condominium industry. In this quickly booming business, which was spurred on by the overwhelming demand for urban, affordable housing, there was no pre-existing system to handle problematic situations for waste disposal and property maintenance. Mr. Strachan bought his first truck for \$1,800 and proceeded to fix the problems that were called in to him from property management companies. He quickly gained a reputation for being reliable, quick, efficient and affordable. The quality of his work is evinced by the steady growth of his company. Since his humble beginnings in 2004, Mr. Strachan's business has grown from a one-man show with one truck to an incorporated company with separate branches for Waste Systems and Property Services, a few more trucks, as well as a staff of five to 10 people, depending on seasonal demands.

Mr. Strachan believes in honest work ethics, which translates directly to his clients both in his demeanor and his quality of work. His future plans for expansion include working in neighboring areas, such as Kitchener, Milton and Hamilton. He is also eager to explore the increasing demand for environmental solutions to waste and recycling issues.

Norm De Decker

There are many local business owners and entrepreneurs in my area, many of which are great people and worthy asking for advice. One thought was to ask my grandfather about the history of his own business career. While asking I learned about a side of him I never knew about. I decided to interview my own grandfather about the endeavors as an entrepreneur and the reasons for starting his own company 50 years ago.



As I walked into my grandfather's library, we started our conversation like usual. We started talking about how my grandpa was the inspiration to start my own company, and I asked what he did and why he started his own company in 1954. In 1949, my grandpa graduated from Michigan State University with his engineering degree. While starting right out of college working as an engineer for a local company, working long hours and being bossed around, he worked for three years at a few different places. While meeting his future partner at one of the firms, they both thought they could start an engineering firm better than any company. He and his partner started the company in the basement of a house and started the dream.

In 1954 when Vern Spalding and Frank De Decker set out to start Spalding De Decker and Associates, they finalized their dream of becoming their own bosses. Starting out small, they struggled for the first years, but after receiving a few small jobs they made their big break. At a local meeting the township was looking for a new township engineer; Spalding De Decker signed with them to be their township engineer. This meant they would be able to check every job that took place in the township. The end of 1956 was the busiest year yet. But it was also a bad financial year— the developers had gone bankrupt and were unable to pay their bills. The next 10 years went fairly well and they were able to hire their first employee. Still not growing into a huge corporation, they were still a success and able to stay afloat.

After about 15 years of being in business, they were able to grow a lot and the 1970s were the busiest and most prosperous years. They hired many employees and finally built a state-of-the-art facility: a two-story, 4,000 sq. ft building able to house employees and many crews to go out into the field. While the decade was the best, it was fast to slow down during the early 1980s. During the first few years of the 1980s there were many layoffs and bills were hard to pay.

Another big break soon came fast after the hard times. Chrysler Automotive Company announced in 1985 that they would be building a new headquarters and Tech center, and Spalding De Decker was announced to be the head Survey Layout Company. They were hired to do the entire layout of the building. This project took nearly 14 years to complete. These years were the best years in history of the company. In 1991, Frank De Decker decided that after nearly 40 years of work he wanted to retire and enjoy the next few years of his life. But he soon found himself back in the office After getting a call from the owner of the Bridge company they asked to hire Spalding De Decker to do a new truck exit project. After this project in 1994, it was the end of his career and owner at Spalding De Decker Associates.

At the end of this project, he gave the company to the current employees of the company. Now Spalding De Decker is a corporation which is 100% employee owned and your share of the company grows with the efforts and time put into it. Was rated one of the top companies to work for in Michigan and is recognized all around the country.

During the interview, Frank De Decker told me that being an entrepreneur means always having to work harder

and harder. Owning a business means not getting a break, and with more employees means working even harder. During the interview, I also asked what I should live by when in running my own company. He stated, “never lie, steal or cheat.”

Doing this will enable a client base to grow, as opposed to staying the same or shrinking. He also said that patience is the key for a successful business. Nothing will come unless you work for it. My grandfather Frank also made sure I remembered to worry about others before myself. My grandfather also was the father to nine kids, all of which worked at Spalding De Decker with internships. Frank De Decker always showed his own kids what it was like to work, so he hired each one through an interview process. There are currently three of them that are working there. He says all nine of his kids have college degrees and successful careers. To know this man as a grandfather is one thing, but to have met him as a business owner is the best thing I have learned in my life. Interviewing my grandfather helped me learn the real business side of him, something that I never knew about before. I was able to learn a lot of new advice and it helped me learn what challenges will have to be in the future. I will take what I have learned from him, and still continue to learn more and help make my own company or even another company as great as his.

Spalding De Decker is now one of the largest engineering and surveying firm in the state of Michigan, and has projects in New Mexico, Ohio, Indiana, Florida, Alabama and in Canada. Some of the clients they have now are worldwide companies, such as Thyssen-Krupp Steel Inc., General Motors Inc., Ford Motor Company, Mid-West Steel, Beaumont Hospitals, Ambassador Bridge, Blue Water Bridge, Michigan Department of Transportation, as well as many local cities, townships, counties and many other companies around the area.

Jim Gregory

In Chicago, a city renowned for its triumphs and ability to rise above adversities, is a small and remarkable consulting firm called H Enterprises LLC. H Walker is its founder and CEO. Mr. Walker, who is known as “H” to his many friends and supporters, is an executive coach and human capital management specialist. He is a master of building solid business relationships based on creating value through authenticity, transparency and integrity. My first meeting with H Walker was in Bandera Restaurant on the heart of Michigan Ave. It became obvious that I was not sitting across from an average man when I overheard that he had his own button on the register. I would have never known about that button if it was left to H Walker to disseminate information like that about himself. He is more likely to be seen getting to know new wait staff and establishing relationships. The first lesson I learned from H is that business is not about making tons of money, it's about establishing good relationships. H not only runs his business by that philosophy, but it also permeates his life philosophy.

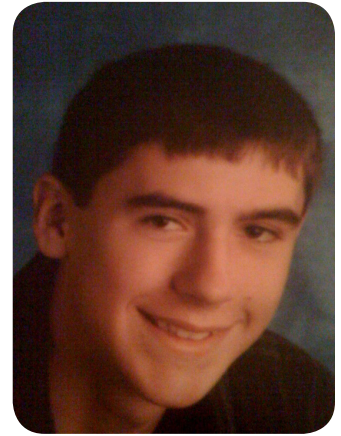
H Walker began his entrepreneurial journey as a bat boy when he was 14 years old, making just US\$14-20 per game. Today he is an executive coach for billionaires and corporate executives from around the world. During our meeting, we were interrupted by a phone call from McDonald's human resources director, the company he is currently working with to shape its future in diversity management. H Walker is the paradigm of success, but what is most remarkable is what he has overcome. When asked what his greatest accomplishments have been as an entrepreneur, his answer is that he has triumphed over being an openly gay, black man with no college education. H Walker has overcome great odds, stereotypes and barriers through understanding that there is more value in developing good relationships than “winning.” He encourages others to espouse the same, as well as continually releasing the right to be right – one of his own greatest challenges.

If you are a friend of H Walker, he has likely re-calibrated some aspect of your life. H views the world as purpose-filled and therefore if you have entered his life, he truly cares for your existence and success. It is evident in his words and deeds. H has taught me the value in understanding personality types, particularly with using the Myers-Briggs personality types as a foundation. His philosophy is that once you understand people better, you can understand difficult conversations better and how, where and why they occur. It has certainly made my life much easier to understand. His advice to young entrepreneurs, advice that I've followed, is to find people with opposing views and surround yourself with them. This is counter-intuitive for many personality types, but he believes you don't grow otherwise. He urges anyone starting their own venture to love the results of your work, not what you are doing. You may not like what you are doing and the work you have to do to get what you want done, but if at the end of it all you are happy with what you've done, that's what you should be doing.

H Walker's given back to his community in so many ways that go without recognition. I'd like to take this opportunity to speak for him in recognition of the authenticity, transparency and integrity countless people have managed and recovered from failure with the advice he has given. Success to H Walker is attaining freedom, or the ability to make choices regarding privilege and opportunity for oneself. This is exactly the driving forces that made him want to become an entrepreneur. H Walker is an unsung hero who deserves recognition for his story and continued dedication to excellence, not only for himself but for those who would dare to dream.

Daniel Mackenzie

According to the guidelines for this essay, I must pick an “entrepreneurial hero” and conduct an interview with him. The person who I have chosen is an interesting character. He originally started his business when he was 15 years old and it is still in operation. He lends a helping hand with community events and sits on a youth committee board. He participates in activities with the local school and maintains a high academic average. This man is a student, a scholar, an entrepreneur and a friend to many. I am this man. This may be an unorthodox approach to this essay contest however; it brings new life to the topic. I am going on 17 years old and have been running a Web design business, called D-M Design, for more than a year.



I began contemplating the idea of running my own business in seventh grade. I learned the basics of Web design from one of my teachers, such that I could design faculty Web sites. I began to gain more knowledge in this area and conduct research as to how a business was started in Canada. Being age 14 at the time, I was not ready to take on such a heavy responsibility. Then one day at my local high school, I discovered an advertisement for the “Summer Company” program. This government-funded project allows young entrepreneurs to gain a foothold in the business world and to develop their ideas.

I submitted an application to Summer Company the next year. The business teachers from my high school aided me in constructing a solid business plan and financial estimates for this application. I was accepted into the program and began set-up in May 2008. I was under strict guidelines to complete weekly activities, have bi-weekly interviews and run advertising campaigns for my business. My entire summer was consumed by running the business. My age immediately inhibited my ability to gain customers. Prospective clients automatically assumed that I was too young to develop anything professional, or that they could exploit me to get a cheaper cost. Nevertheless, I was able to complete the program.

I decided to continue running my business and I have acquired several clients throughout this year. I have been able to develop a name for myself in the local community. I have attended several events with administrators and government officials of Centre Wellington. I am acquainted with our mayor and sit on the CW Connections board with her. I was also nominated for Youth Entrepreneur of the Year, but I was too young to attain it.

I love the thrill of self-accomplishment when I develop a Web site that impresses my clients. I love volunteering in my community and meeting new people. My first year in business has taught me many life lessons and the experience is invaluable. I would not consider myself as a “hero” by any means, but “entrepreneur” seems like a fitting term.

Jacklyn Omorodion

If one were to look up the word “entrepreneur,” an entry stating that an entrepreneur is a person who has organized and managed a business from its very beginning would likely be found. In reality, an entrepreneur is much more than what the brief definition above leads one to believe. An entrepreneur is a person who is driven and determined, who never loses sight of their dreams, who remains an everlasting learner and understands that they are part of a bigger picture. By interviewing Mr. Samuel Iyere, an entrepreneur, this became apparent.

As an entrepreneur, one must be driven, determined and have a dream; with the above three, anything is possible. While talking to Mr. Samuel Iyere, it became clear that working for himself and beginning his own business were things he had always longed for but something he realized would not just appear. With this dream, he realized that he must be the one to put in the effort to turn it into actuality; he needed to be the one to make the most of his opportunities. As he said, “Though I have always had the dream, having the opportunity is what has allowed me to do it.” Mr. Iyere correctly emphasized that an entrepreneur cannot be lazy in any way, but rather a dreamer who is driven and determined.

In order to truly flourish and prosper as an entrepreneur, one must accept their mistakes as well as challenges and learn from them rather than give up. Mr. Iyere stated that he believed his greatest hardship in achieving success was accepting the amount of hours necessary to fulfill his dream. When faced with this issue he decided he needed to find the proper balance. Where many people would go wrong by choosing to focus on either family or business and in turn allowing the other fail, he understood that he would have to make them work together in order to truly attain his goals. When asked what his greatest error was, Mr. Samuel Iyere felt that “not thoroughly researching a business location” was the worst mistake he made, but also said that by making this mistake early on he was able to take it into consideration later on throughout his career. His present success as an entrepreneur displays that understanding one must learn from their mistakes and challenges, and make the best of it, is necessary to truly triumph.

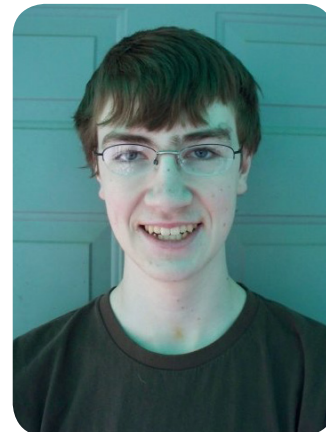
With the great amount of hard work and effort required of an entrepreneur, there are many rewards received in return. Though rewards are usually thought of as material things, Mr. Iyere understood that when one owns a business, one works with many people and to prevail, all people that are a part of the organization must enjoy the benefits. As he explained, “By knowing that some of the people I have hired are the breadwinners of their family and as such are responsible for the day to day well-being of the people of my community, I am able to give back to the entire community.” This shows that despite the many triumphs experienced along the way, such as the incredible feeling of opening a new store, one must understand that as an entrepreneur there are many rewards only truly gratifying when everybody can benefit.

Now, it is clearer that there are certain qualities required of an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur can be correctly defined as one who is driven and determined, who never loses sight of their dreams, who remains an everlasting learner and understands they are part of a bigger picture. Mr. Iyere feels that all future entrepreneurs “need to be prepared to do hard work and know that you cannot take no as an answer but instead, literally take ‘no’ to mean next opportunity; you cannot take your sights off your goal.” With this, people of the future may truly embody the definition of an entrepreneur.

Jonathan Mac Neil

Why is Tom, local owner of Mac's Convenience, an entrepreneurial hero?

I enter the place — not too far from my home in the south end of Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada. He ushers me into the back room. Noticing his snappy and polished demeanour, I got straight to the point. First was the subject of his background, and how he got into the retail business. Tom explained that he first got a business degree, and then dove straight into the industry. “For me, it was all about location,” he said, and clarified that he wanted to run a business in Cape Breton because of the people. Noting the proud gleam in his eye, I asked if there was any history here, being a mom and pop shop. “Twenty-five years of it, actually,” he reminisced.



I inquired if during that time there were any connections made to the community. “Most of the customers who do their shopping here are those in the community. I know many who do come in. We also sometimes donate to local charities. In fact not too long ago, we had donated funds to help a local athlete attend a tennis tournament.”

Afterwards, we had really got into the meat of the discussion. When I asked him the tough questions of if he made any large mistakes, if he had any significant triumphs, if he had taken any big risks, he denied it all. He said that most of the mistakes he made were when the business was getting underway. “Sure, starting out was difficult. Basically, I was given a set of keys to the place and that was it. But I got through it.”

When I asked if there was anything that he wished that he had known then that he does now, he replied, “If anything, new entrepreneurs should do their homework on what they're getting into before leaping into this. One learns as one goes.” The starkness of his answers was refreshing, as he was quite direct.

What struck me was that this was a very level-headed man, a man that knows his business and gives back to his community through this outlet. This is a man that through perseverance and dedication was able to make something out of nothing. This is man that represents the vitality and vigour of what makes Cape Breton stand out from the rest of the world. This is a man who has devotion and understanding to both his business and the source of it. When you walk into Mac's Convenience, you feel at home.

Even though Tom doesn't consider himself to be a hero, I do. “Sales have doubled since the grand opening,” he remarked. I then address the large, chain convenience stores near-by and how they fit into the equation. “If you want to give people in Ottawa or Montreal your money for the same product, that's all well and good. But here, you are supporting Cape Breton business.”

Why is Tom a hero? It is because he is a Cape Bretoner who has succeeded where others have failed- all the while giving back to the place he had become a part of not by choice, but by heritage. “In the end, it is really all about the people.” Tom embodies the qualities of hero- courage to not let emotion control oneself, bravery in the cutthroat marketplace of competition from afar and excellence in upholding fair and just practices in maintaining an establishment of this nature. It was after the interview that I realized that Tom needs nothing of this nature said about him, because people are as they act. You can ask any of his loyal patrons, and they will say all of the aforementioned and more. In short, it is Tom's connection to the community that makes him a hero, and I'm sure the people in the south end of Sydney wouldn't have it any other way.

Joseph Oppen

On 1 August 2009, I met with Adam Ross, owner and manager of Rossco's Tree Service & Contracting Ltd. Overall the interview went well and was very informative concerning the "dos and don'ts" of running and operating a tree removal business. I chose this person because he had a house, a business and a happy marriage with two children, all before he turned 26. I wanted to explore why and how he has been able to do it all.

Adam Ross dropped out of school in tenth grade and then decided to follow the teaching of his father who always told him, "Don't work for anyone else if you don't have to." From an early age, Adam always saw himself as a future business owner but he knew he lacked the fundamental skills to go forth and pursue his desires. After he dropped out, his family further instilled a strong work ethic into him by not allowing him to become a "lazy dropout bum." Adam's father, a business man/arborist, put him to work right away. When I spoke to Adam, he told me that it was this time that he learned the practical skills of cutting down trees. During these early years, Mr. Ross also learned how to interact with customers, how to separate personal problems from work and keeping your focus on the eventual goal.

Adam discussed with me that it was his goal and father's influence that primarily gave him a running shot at his own business. Adam further expressed to me certain unpleasant experiences he had with his early teachers and past bosses. These unpleasant experiences of working for others spitefully fueled his drive to follow through with his childhood dreams. "I was never a great student, but I wasn't dumb. I was just interested in other things aside from books, but no one except my dad could see that."

As a fledgling business, Rossco's Tree Service & Contracting Ltd. did more than \$150,000 worth of gross business and works in more than a 50 percent gross profit margin in its first year of business. How did he do it?

Adam worked in northern Alberta, Canada, on the oil rigs for many years and saved some money in hopes of one day building some equity. During this time he intensified his work ethic in manual labor. However at age 23, Adam's younger sibling made him aware of a few neighbors that needed some trees removed from their property, but could not avoid being put on a lengthy waiting lists from multiple companies. Adam went over to his neighbors with his truck and decided he could do tree removal service for much less than any of the perspective companies. That single job made him \$500 in an afternoon. It was then that Adam decided that he should "do what [he] knows."

It was this slogan that Adam now lives by, "Do what you know." Adam did his homework and researched the market. He got in touch of people that knew the business and made sure he built the business "all legit, no short cuts." If there were legal matters to take care of, he got a lawyer; if there were accounting matters, he got an accountant. He did his homework and boldly went forward while remaining true to doing what he knows. He furthered his training by going to a technical school in British Columbia and took a three-year trade course to become a journeyman arborist. From his formal training, Mr. Ross was able to do jobs that few are trained for and thereby able to secure a niche market. Mr. Ross would often say "Why waste your time doing a piss poor job? Go big or get the **** out."

Adam appears to follow this self motto in all aspects of his life. During the winter months the business goes through a slow period and Adam's usual 70-hour work week turns into 12-hour work week and thereby enables Adam and his staff to pursue competitive snowboarding and extreme snowmobiling.

Throughout the interview, the only thing that made me think this man could not be successful business owner

was his gruff exterior. Standing about 5 feet 6 inches, 200 pounds, with a raspy voice, he speaks with boldness and authority however repeatedly he told me that his customer`s happiness is number one in his books. “We do a job all the way.” Adam prides himself on his unrelenting commitment, determination and perseverance toward his goals. Right from the day he turned 10 years old, Adam admits that a goal is the secret to achieving success.

When asked about any further goals, Adam for the first time became shy and told me that he wanted to expand his business. When asked why he was becoming quiet, he responded “I don’t want to seem that I`m some big shot. I just want to do what I love.”

Is Adam Ross of Rossco’s Tree Service & Contracting Ltd. a true entrepreneur? I most certainly say yes. He has faced failure, trials and has “pushed through as hard as it took, [despite] the crap that tells you to give up.” Adam Ross has dreamt, worked and pursued a dream that he has had since we was a small boy and in turn created a business that is secure and successful despite limited schooling and resources. Adam Ross is a true entrepreneur.

Mark Becker

“What does being an entrepreneur mean to you?” I asked Heath. “I mean, what do you get out of it that other people might not see or realize?” Heath Bradley is the owner of Emergency Restoration Experts, a company based in Arizona, USA that services commercial and residential properties affected by service water, mold and fire-damage. Heath responded, “It’s really about taking my destiny into my own hands and making a huge difference at the same time.” But as with any entrepreneur, the path to success for Heath Bradley wasn’t easy. “The triumphs and failures— it’s a journey,” he says.



Success can be defined in various ways according to different people, especially in this generation when the economy isn’t necessarily thriving. For Bradley, success isn’t solely about financial status or measuring dollars. Success in Bradley’s vocabulary means facing challenges head on and conquering them. But before someone will even meet success, there are many encounters with failure, as well. “It’s important to believe in yourself and know that you can do it. A lot of people fall short when they quit believing in themselves,” says Bradley. Heath went on to share the motto, “Only the paranoid survive,” relating to the fact despite how good you are (or think you are), there is a strong possibility that you will fall. Knowing this will tell yourself not to get comfortable with failing, and that you will need to get help along the way. “You don’t need to have the answer to everything,” says Bradley, “you just need to know where to get it.”

Facing challenges requires some uplifting motivation and inspiration. Bradley claims that his personal and family goals help him get to where he wants to go as an entrepreneur. “I ask myself what it is that I want to accomplish, and whether or not I have set my goals big enough. If I don’t do either of those, I typically don’t find a lot of self-motivation,” says Bradley. “Knowing the answers to both of those questions helps me get out there and get it done.” Overcoming stress brought on by these challenges? “I like to laugh a lot, act like a kid and play video games,” says Bradley.

Getting it done is certainly something Bradley is capable of. His company, Emergency Restoration Experts, has offices in both Phoenix and Tucson, and was named on the 2007 “50 Small Businesses to Watch” by the Arizona Small Business Association. While those may be impressive remarks, Bradley and his company are also known for giving back to the community. Last year, Emergency Restoration Experts held their seventh annual charity golf tournament to benefit kids burned by fire. They also hold fiesta parties and poker tournaments to further benefit other charities throughout the year. The company’s slogan “Call a pro, call a friend” has a significant meaning towards lending an extra hand to customers as well. Bradley mentions, “It’s a feeling of despair when you open the front door of your severely damaged home or business. We not only put the building back together physically, but guide help them through the process so that they’re not alone.” By keeping the customer’s best interest in mind, it’s no mystery how Emergency Restoration Experts has truly restored people’s lives and businesses.

It takes some remarkable qualities and good perseverance to become a successful business owner, such as Heath Bradley. Building your company up the ladder of success requires more than just the personality of an ordinary-Joe. Bradley claims that his ability to attract people to work for him and bring on other high-caliber associates creates for a great culture in the workplace. As a matter of fact, Bradley’s most important self-proclaimed success point in his career thus far has been being able to create a safe, fun place to work for his company. Referring to happy employees, “That’s how a business makes profit,” he says. And although Bradley most likely demonstrates many other positive self-characteristics, it’s clear that his entrepreneurial spirit and warm-hearted background has allowed him to create a company that generates success. Bradley has told us

that listening to family goals, contributing back to the community and caring for customers are just a few key ingredients in his entrepreneurial journey.

Masha Mutic

Peter Stanimirovic is a 38 year-old male who has started working on his own five years ago. He has always been interested in technology and has had a knack for putting things together. He left home at a very young age and his previous jobs included everything from low-end physical labor to cushy jobs with high wages. He took an opportunity when new plasma and LCD technology was becoming popular to learn more about it. He worked part time for Future Shop and acquired product knowledge that allowed him to become an expert on the subject. Many customers recognized him and recommended his expertise to their friends in purchasing those new futuristic TVs. He subsequently reacted quickly and developed a technology that allowed for the TVs to be mounted to walls with no cords showing. He currently owns a business that installs and coordinates many technological extensions under one system while promoting crystal clear picture and sound.



According to Peter, the best thing about being an entrepreneur is being your own boss. The worst thing about being an entrepreneur is not having anyone to turn to when things aren't going so well. Nobody can help you figure out what to do and no one can advise you of the right decision, but having the freedom to be creative, to learn from own mistakes and to form your own business practices makes this hard role one worth pursuing. Peter says he would never be able to learn as much as he did about the mechanical and electrical knowledge he has previously acquired unless he started his own business. He knew he had talent and understood more about technology than most people and therefore had acquired an education that allowed him to expand his knowledge. While he was able to apply some of what he had learned through experiences in different companies, he was not truly happy or satisfied with the lack of freedom and creativity in these positions. His greatest success was the first anniversary of his company. While Peter still continuous to work harder than anyone else I know, he also allows himself to take a step back and enjoy what this hard work has given him.

The biggest mistake Peter says he made was waiting this long to apply his talent and ambition to owning his own business. He worked for great companies and even though he was never truly happy, he made very good wages and was secure in his job. It was hard to take a step away from that security and take a risk, but he also knew that he had to apply himself to something he truly loved and felt inspired by. Peter now works just as hard and has even brought on assistants to help him manage the large number of calls that come through every day 24 hours a day.

As a young man, Peter did not grow up around a lot of money and his success was motivated by financial security in the past, but now being able to apply himself and feel satisfied is what he considers his greatest triumph. Peter has had many struggles during his journey but has risen above it and is currently going on his first vacation in five years. When asked if it was worth it, he says, "The biggest mistake people make is trying to make easy money in this country full of opportunity, however there is no such thing, nothing can come out of nothing. Hard work and a real commitment are what bring results. After five years, I get to do what I want and enjoy a full month off with my family, so yes, I say it is definitely worth it. But make no mistake: it doesn't happen overnight."

Ryan Sapp

The other day, I was fortunate enough to speak with a true entrepreneur. This individual was a student entrepreneur who was able to come from the bottom to the top in one of the hardest industries in the world, the restaurant industry. His name is Dan Heuertz, and is truly hero to all young entrepreneurs. He is now one of the most well known and respected individuals in his industry. Dan even received the “Restaurateur of the Year” award. His story is remarkable and unique. However, I found his beginnings to be not to different from student entrepreneurs like me.



He started his professional life by opening a bar at age 19 while still in college. He went into the business as a simple college student and came out with a doctorate degree on how business should be run. It was not easy for him. Dan’s bar almost went bankrupt the first year he ran it. In his interview he told me he was broke and almost had to flee. Luckily for him, he did not and stuck to his core values. Dan started focusing on the customer, and in a short time was able to go from no profit to more than \$350,000. From then on, Dan has focused on the fundamentals of a restaurant. He believes them to be capital, concept and experience. Dan stated, “The restaurant business is often very difficult, but if you stick to the fundamentals you will be successful.”

Dan has taken these fundamentals and has transformed the restaurant business many times over. One example of this can be seen in his ingenious approach to the business. He created two separate groups: a restaurant group and a real estate group. These separate groups complemented each other and helped grow each other quickly. These companies also had another profound consequence. They revitalized the community. Dan made a striking comment about this: “I truly believe the more you put in the community the more you get back.” If one were to look at the projects he has done, one can see this quite easily. He has helped to bring hundreds of jobs to communities, and has revitalized many micro-economies. Dan is a great example of what great entrepreneurship and stewardship can bring to the world. It can change the lives of hundreds of individuals and make the world a better place.

Julie Tran

My mother, Leeann Tran, has been my role model for entrepreneurship from the time I was able to comprehend her career. Together with her husband, Ming Tran, the two exemplify the risks and ventures associated with organizing and maintaining a business. The interview conducted with my mother not only furthered the understanding of my parents' real estate business, but also outlined her truly heroic intentions springing from determination and dedication.

When the communist Khmer Rouge regime overtook the city of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, business-owning entrepreneurs, the educated and the wealthy were readily executed in what is now known as the Cambodian Killing Fields. More than an estimated one-third (2 million individuals) of the total population perished in the genocide of 1975-1979, with the remaining civilians forced to evacuate city life and work in agrarian labor camps, separated from immediate family members. Leeann Tran's family owned a successful business operating a shop in the midst of Phnom Penh prior to the evacuations. Only after avoiding execution due to bribery, Mrs. Tran, her parents and her many siblings were forcibly separated for four years after attending different concentration camps. Sponsorship brought the family slowly to Canada "empty-handed" after the war, and Mrs. Tran was ready to start building a brighter foundation for her future children. As with other refugees lacking in education, skills and knowledge of the language, Mrs. Tran faced the challenges of being immersed in a new culture while struggling to make ends meet.

Soon after settling, Mrs. Tran made the entrepreneurial risk of investing in a variety of apartment complexes, in hopes that the new business would grow and provide her young family with a more economically reliable way of life. This was due to her years of working low-paying jobs and keen saving. Seeing the status of many Chinese-Canadians in societal context within the 1980s, Leeann Tran viewed her business venture as a method of taking advantage of the liberties Canada was known for, while being independent and in control of her investment decisions.

Caroline Mailloux

The EO Web site's homepage mentions, "Entrepreneurs are linked with the common traits of sincerity, curiosity and drive." It is precisely for these winning characteristics that I chose to interview Mister Pier-Luc Simard, general director of his own company in the music and production industry, called Midnight Entertainment & Productions. Today, I gladly introduce you to his dual world: working hard to provide for his family and working overtime to successfully position his company in the nightlife business of Quebec, Canada, always aiming for novelty and excellence.

I met this young dynamic man four years ago when he hadn't even finished high school. Already, he had a dream that made his eyes twinkle to create and develop his own company in the music industry, more precisely in the organization of special events in the nightlife. His passion for music was never to leave him.

He entered collegial studies in Management & Accounting, but quit months later to leave the northern village of Port-Cartier and move in with his girlfriend in the city of Trois-Rivieres. Mr. Simard, at only age 17, decided to take this opportunity and soon became involved in the world of Disk Jockeys of Trois-Rivieres and Montreal.

After working a day job in a supermarket and a night job as the most popular DJ in the gay community of the city, he decided against the advices of his then fiancée, to not go back to school. This decision was hard to take for his fiancée, but she decided to encourage him and help him through the obstacles to come.

Shortly after this, Simard went on with his dream and created Midnight Entertainment & Productions in 2007 with his fiancée as an associate. The young and determined leader was delighted as he engaged himself in this great adventure and in his first management challenge.

The company has been doing well for the past two years. The duo, which supported multiple partnerships with different local individuals, have finally succeeded in surrounding themselves as to created a strong, focused and visionary team. Teamwork is often hard and the need for a common vision is basic.

Pier-Luc Simard is my entrepreneurial hero, simply because he has had the nerve to brilliantly fight his friends and family in order to make his dream come true. Every day, he is motivated in going further and doing better. He is always improving his skills and encouraging other to do the same. More importantly, he never shows signs of discouragement while facing refusals and is always looking ahead, without forgetting his past. Also, being a shy person, he has had to learn to make himself be heard. I must admit I really look up to him for this particular achievement.

Nowadays, the D.G. is taking care of his 1 year-old son, working a full-time day job and is still dedicated to establish his company in the business, service by service, successful event after another. Midnight Entertainment & Productions is a leading company in the area, the first to offer such specialized and diversified services in the area. "Make it right!" is the company's slogan and shows how important it is for them to offer unforgettable experiences for participants and perfect professional relations with clients.

Simard's young and active team is minded for success and excellence. Let's wish every one of them a most sincere good luck in French!

Bertrand Gervais

Summary- Patricia Hudak is an up and coming entrepreneur with a fantastic business. Launched in 2007, Real World 101 offers “real world” education and teaches young graduates what they were not taught in college— practical life education for young adults when they graduate. I chose to interview Patricia because giving back to her community is built into her business and she passed on many lucrative opportunities to do what she is passionate about. Her story is an inspiring one for young entrepreneurs.

Below are excerpts from the call.

What’s the best thing about being an entrepreneur?

“Freedom. I’ve worked for Fortune 500 companies and one thing that was missing was the opportunity to regulate your own progress. Entrepreneurship gives me the option for extreme growth personally and professionally. “

When did it “click” for you that you should go into entrepreneurship?

“In high school. Interned for Merrill Lynch and eventually worked for them in college. My parents shrieked when I passed up a high paying position to work with them. I racked up enormous debt as a graduate of NYU Stern School of Business so everyone thought I was committing career suicide. Here is why I did what I did.

“In school, your potential is always determined by external factors such as your GPA and your SAT scores and we are brought up in a culture where other people, managers, teachers essentially “dictate” the ceiling to our success. As an entrepreneur, my ability to be a millionaire or “dollar menuaire” rests squarely on my shoulders. I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

How did you determine if entrepreneurship was for you?

“Work with startups. During college, I reached out to Michael Simmons and Sheena Lindahl, the founders of the Extreme Entrepreneurship tour, and offered to intern for free. I was inspired by his book and wanted to learn. I highly recommend reading his book, The Student Success Manifesto.

“In college, I was part of an entrepreneur exchange group that successfully lobbied to start a café on campus. We profited \$3,000 in our first semester and won club of the year. The adrenaline rush was amazing! Get involved in organizations like GSEA or look to intern for startups to see if entrepreneurship culture is for you.”

What has been the greatest challenge in achieving success?

“The greatest challenge in achieving success has overcoming my own personal fears. I had to raise the belief in my own success to raise my potential.”

How did you do that?

“By finding mentors. I also reached out to experts in my field to get feedback on the work I was doing. That was a huge confidence boost. Surround yourself with mentors that push you and challenge you to achieve that goal. I also recommend getting into ‘positive affirmations.’ Pick up the book Psycho-cybernetics by Maxwell Maltz.”

What’s the worst mistake you’ve ever made in entrepreneurship or in life?

“I tried to do everything by myself. You have to study and learn to build systems or you will never grow. The number one concept entrepreneurs need to understand is leverage. Leverage your time. I learned the hard way that hiring others to do the same work, buys me the time I need to work on the business.”

How do you give back to your community?

“I sell care packages which contain ‘life-after-college’ educational tools for twenty-somethings. One of the most crippling circumstances is to be buried in student loan debt after college. So for each care package sold I donate a portion of the proceeds to set up scholarships to pay off student loan debts. I also believe that everything going on in the economy is the sum of our individual choices. I believe by giving practical real world advice on money management, finding an apartment, choosing a lifestyle and more I can empower and save my generation from another economic collapse.”

What advice would you give to a young entrepreneur starting out?

“Begin. Don’t expect everything to be perfect when you start. I’ve been through several versions of my Web site, several versions my products and have tested them vigorously. Learn from me to make sure you have your funding in place and know your true costs for operating your business. Be conservative in your projection because there are no guarantees in business. Always know your breakeven point.”

Andy Camp

A hero is classically defined as someone of “distinguished courage or ability, admired for his brave deeds and noble qualities.” I strongly doubt, however, that individuals such as Superman, Batman or even Peter Pan, could fulfill the same daring accomplishments of entrepreneurial success as David Galbenski. Although his middle name is not “chutzpah,” it might as well be. David exemplifies the innovative, daring and unique qualities that all entrepreneurs aspire to attain while maintaining an optimistic and energetic presence. Since I met David, he has taught me that entrepreneurship is not a profession; it is a lifestyle. If it isn’t treated as such, the entrepreneurial path will be exponentially more difficult, if not impossible.

At eight years old, when David’s parents opened a restaurant/bar, he contributed to their entrepreneurial venture by picking up change around the jukebox. His parents’ entrepreneurial passion was the beginning foundation for his love for business. While furthering his studies at The University of Michigan’s business school, he bought and sold t-shirts on campus, even claiming a “survivor” themed shirt before ‘reality’ television adopted the title. Never slowing down, David went on to graduate cum laude from Wayne State University Law School in 1993. His past clearly shows some building blocks for success, but without the motivation and determination that David brings to the table, none of his successes would have been possible.

Every time I have had the opportunity to speak with David, he has been happy to take time out of his busy work day and listen to some ideas and help me in any way that he can. It is the constant drive to become a better person and create more successes that not only makes David a successful entrepreneur, but also a very inspiring person to talk to.

Looking back on his successes, David stated “integration [of your work life and personal life] is crucial.” There is a constant balance that needs to be maintained between your personal objectives and your professional objectives. He compared it to a see-saw, in which you will always have ups and downs both at work and at home, but as a life entrepreneur you need to make the best of the worst in a constant effort to achieve balance. Working for a law firm for around 4 months, David went on to co-found his company, Lumen Legal. Lumen Legal is now a two-time Inc. 500 company and David has earned numerous awards including the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

David confirmed that there will always be people who doubt your idea, such as the group of lawyers who would tell him that he’s crazy for starting Lumen Legal. This is why he says it is very important to find a peer group to share your ideas with in a constructive environment. Having the opportunity to be around like-minded entrepreneurs with the same motivation and aspirations as you, as I did when I met David and other Entrepreneurs’ Organization members at a dinner, is a life changing experience I will never forget. As soon as Lumen Legal crossed the US\$1 million threshold in 1999, David pursued the Entrepreneurs’ Organization, eventually becoming the Forum Chair, Membership Chair, President of the EO Detroit chapter and finally Global Chairman of the Entrepreneurs’ Organization.

David ended our conversation as his wife and kids were awaiting their family night out, showing once again his attention to creating success in every facet of his life. Entrepreneurship in its finest form is being challenged across the world, with impressive organizations buckling under the pressure of poor financial situations. David Galbenski has not only created a sustainable and successful company and lifestyle, he has constantly inspired many others, including myself, to strive to one day do the same.

Alexander Moazed

Clark Waterfall has been an entrepreneur his entire life, even during his childhood when he developed a drink concession monopoly at a local tennis club. Today, however, Clark is not only a successful entrepreneur, but also an entrepreneur whose business plays an instrumental role in helping other businesses succeed. Clark co-founded BSG Team Ventures 12 years ago, and now specializes in building executive teams and boards for technology and life science companies.



Clark always had an inherent entrepreneurship “bug” while growing up. Initially following the career path to be a musician, Clark received two degrees in five years from Tufts University and the New England Conservatory of Music. Then after transitioning to the corporate world in a few different fields, Clark decided to leave the executive search firm he worked at and start up his own.

Leveraging their personal assets, Clark and his co-founders started BSG Team Ventures in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. Clark enjoys helping new clients and forming relationships with them. He understands what his clients need and has to find the people which will be the right fit for the company. Every situation is different and BSG Team Ventures separates itself from the competition by identifying with their clients to deliver the best solution.

Clark’s business success is clear. After starting with one firm in Boston, BSG Team Ventures has expanded to London, England; New York, New York, USA; and Silicon Valley, California, USA. However, this success has not slowed down Clark one bit. The next area of expansion is Asia which plays an ever increasing role in sourcing world class talent for his clients.

Clark and BSG have encountered hurdles along the way and, like all successful entrepreneurs, they adapted and persevered. Specifically, they experienced a “perfect storm” in 2001. There had just been a tech bubble, there was an economic bust, and then the 9/11 tragedy occurred. By adapting their business model and creating additional pricing models to appeal to customers, BSG Team Ventures made it through and also learned a great deal from the experience. Clark used this dire circumstance to his advantage by learning to further diversify their clients, provide flexible cost structures, and put more emphasis on senior positions over junior positions.

Clark is also able to channel his energy and concerns into positive drive and determination. He harnesses the potentially worrisome responsibility of having employees relying upon him into the drive to succeed. He is also motivated by his intellectual curiosity. Every day he learns new things when dealing with his clients and sourcing the best talent in the world in search of the perfect match. He also takes pride in being able to make an impact. By succeeding in his business, he helps other businesses succeed, as well.

In one of the worst economic periods in the past 80 years, Clark has positioned his firm properly after learning from 2001. Now, he is looking on the horizon and expanding into Asia, while others are selling assets and repositioning. BSG Team Ventures thoroughly understands their clients and provides a global approach differentiating themselves from the competition. Clark’s “hero story” is not only that of himself and BSG, but also of all of his client companies which have prospered as a result of his hard work.

William Finkhman

In the enormous, yet very small community of entrepreneurs, a hero is defined in many different ways: Perhaps as the local baker who baked for “The Man” just long enough to save up and open up his own bakery, or the savvy Harvard MBA student who goes to the markets to raise millions of dollars of venture funds to start that hot new dot com. All entrepreneurs are heroes in their own right. However, an entrepreneurial hero to me is someone that mimics my own envisioned path— starting during college, working hard in the trenches and slowly growing through the years. My entrepreneurial hero is Brian Scudamore, founder and CEO of 1-800-GOT-JUNK?. In 1989, Brian started a local junk hauling service in Vancouver, Canada, as a university student. Over the next nine years, the business continued to grow and was no longer an insignificant summer job, but rather a fully fledged business with substantial revenues. In 1998, only after proving the concept worked locally and had hit revenues more than \$1 million, Brian developed his vision to expand into 30 metropolitan markets within the next five years. Over a 20 year history of entrepreneurship, Brian and his company would grow to become a \$100 million business, franchise internationally and even land an interview with Oprah.

Although, growing to \$100 million in revenues is a feat few companies actually achieve, the path was not easy and was certainly filled with mistakes and learning. Brian explains that his biggest mistake over the years was not choosing the right people, both as employees and franchise partners. In times of growth and expansion, not being picky or careful enough led to the wrong people being on the team. In fact, Brian recalls how in 1994 he fired his entire crew of 11 people in one day and started fresh after realizing how one “bad apple” had spoiled the rest. Today, he knows better and does not settle for “good enough” when it comes to people but rather continues looking until the best person is chosen. Brian mentions that he would not have done things differently in retrospect, as these were all important lessons that had to happen in the evolution and growth of 1-800-GOT-JUNK?.

Over the last 20 years as the company has grown, Brian’s role has evolved, as well. During the first few years, Brian could be found riding on trucks, hauling junk and working in the “trenches” alongside his employees. As the company prepared to franchise, Brian became more involved in developing processes, creating a clear vision and working on other things franchise partners would need to be successful in this business. Today, with several hundred franchise partners operating 1-800-GOT-JUNK? internationally, Brian has hired a president to oversee the business operations of his company. He is more focused on continuously developing the vision, public relations and taking advantage of other creative opportunities.

Like most other entrepreneurs, Brian is feeling the effects of the current downturn in the economy. Although revenues are down and times have been difficult, Brian sees the good out of all this. This grueling economy has taught him many lessons. Brian is now paying more attention to areas that were neglected before and being very careful with items that directly affect the bottom line.

Brian advises other entrepreneurs to have a clear vision. This includes seeing what the company and culture look and feel like in the future. In addition, he recommends the book, eMyth, and attributes much of his development to this book.

It is without a doubt that Brian Scudamore through the history of 1-800-GOT-JUNK? is a hero in the world of entrepreneurship. It is mind boggling to think about the thousands of companies that do not make it through a year in business. Even less make it through the next five years of business, and an even smaller group make it 20 years down the line and are able to reach revenues in the millions. For these reasons, Brian Scudamore is a hero of mine!

Alexandra Morton

What made you decide to become an entrepreneur?

“I decided to become an entrepreneur because I was fascinated with the way money worked as a young person. I saw entrepreneurship as an outlet to becoming financially independent and I saw it as a way to be more flexible with my money.”

What part did mentorship play in becoming an entrepreneur?

“Mentorship played a large role. In life when you decide what you want to do and who you want to become, the right people are put in place in your life. Did that mean that opportunities fell into my lap? Of course not! But, I did get into contact with some people with an immense amount of knowledge who had similar ambitions when they were my age who were successful. I can honestly say that without mentors that I would not be where I am today. They have gotten me through some tight spots and provided answers to questions that only a seasoned entrepreneur would have known.”

What was your greatest challenge as an entrepreneur?

“My greatest challenge for me was sticking to an idea and following through. I always wanted to become a successful entrepreneur but, I had to learn how to chase the purpose and not the money. As an individual you chose what you devote your time to. I had spent a lot of time chasing ideas, and the promises of a pay check as an exit strategy and always found myself running full force and drained. It took me a lot of soul searching and self reflection to understand this cycle in my life.”

After finding this out, what did you do?

“I decided to get back to the basics of what I actually love doing, what I wanted to do, what my strengths and weaknesses were and I began writing. That’s how I started Diversity Edge Magazine.”

How do you define your current success with this company?

“I define my current successes based on my goal accomplishments. As a business leader I realize that I set the tone for my company. So every year we go over the books; the board and I sit and evaluate our progress and map out where we are going. And right now even with shifts with the economy we are still up 20 percent in sales revenue in comparison to this time last year.”

Do you have any regrets in starting your own business?

“[Laughs] Alexandra, in life sometime we do things that may make us feel uncomfortable. But, I live my life without regret. I look back at my failures and file them into the ‘Learning Experience Section’ of my life’s file cabinet.”

How did you stay motivated even in the midst of adversity?

“Growing up you are born into several different circumstances. But, it’s not always what you are given but, what you do with what you have. Do you follow me? If I had a nickel for every time I wanted to quit and give up on my dreams I would be far richer than I am now. I’ve come to realize as a man of faith that when things start to look like they’re the worst that things and going get brighter. So keeping your head up is considerably far more motivating than moping. You get more things done, and time doesn’t get wasted. Don’t ever lose focus of your dreams and always tweak your plan especially during tough times.”

Samuel Johns

The dictionary's meaning of a hero is "In mythology and legend, a man, often of divine ancestry, who is endowed with great courage and strength, celebrated for his bold exploits, and favoured by the gods."

The inspiration: Donna Burgess a mother at age 18, a survivor of a serious car accident, a qualified chef, a founder of five businesses, leading business women in her community, an academic high achiever, an inspirational mentor, a caring sister, a mother of two beautiful kids and loving wife. All of these things are part of her day-to-day challenges.

In 1998, Donna was involved in a serious car accident. This gave her the vision to become an entrepreneur three years after her first venture was formed, Friends on the Hill, in 2001. This proved to be a challenging experience because she was in business with friends and lost money after selling the business two years later. Still striving for the entrepreneurial dream and providing for two kids, two days after selling Friends on the Hill, Donna took the plunge again. But this time, she had the valuable lessons learnt from the first venture. The dream would take it's next step.



The Entrepreneur: With a deadline of four months and an empty space, the challenge was to have a fully operational restaurant open for business. Two full-time staff and seven part-time staff along with a lot of hard work, the doors were open on time. Now employing 10 full-time employees and 15 part-time employees, the Reel Cafe in its sixth year is a thriving business. However, Donna defines the key driving force behind the success comes from the passion and drive from her employees. She encourages them to extend themselves and grow as human's not just employees.

The entrepreneur is always growing and on the hunt for a new opportunity and Donna is no different. She started Ample to compliment the Reel Cafe in providing premium organic and imported deli products. After three years, another challenging decision was made to close the business and lease the property, proving to be a valuable decision in turning a cash draining venture into a positive return.

Community Leader: President of the Belgrave Traders Association, Volunteer at Vision Australia along with providing \$12,000 a year in sponsorship programs for the local community. Donna shows a great compassion for the growth of her community and of individuals playing an active role in developing community projects.

The student: Challenging yet so rewarding! A student in entrepreneurship at RMIT, Donna will complete her degree with a high academic achievement in 2009. Engaging with other students providing advice from her entrepreneurial experience is enjoyable; however, the "most exciting thing is learning and engaging with young minds as they are the future."

The Sister: With a brother slightly off -track and no support network around him, Donna, the person she is, took him under her wing to help him to go from struggling student with a learning disability and no drive, to a successful Webs ite and graphic designer for a high-profile record label. She provided a loving home, driving him an hour to college four days a week for two years, providing him all the opportunities to become the best person he could and achieve his personal goals. This is one of the proudest things in Donna's life and it is fitting that both Donna and her brother will graduate at in the same ceremony at RMIT in December 2009.

The mother: "Oh you do all that and run a household, too?" I asked in amazement. "Yes," Donna replies,

“however, the most challenging thing is achieving life balance.” Being an entrepreneur has caused Donna to feel she neglects her children in some respect not with material things, but with the most important thing of all, time which cannot be replaced. Realising this, Donna has come to the understanding that the reason for being on Earth now is to provide the best opportunities for her two kids: Edward, age 17; and Josephine, age 14.

What Donna means to me: A hero is defined in some respects a legend of the past; however, Donna epitomizes the meaning of a hero. A hero shows courage and strength through challenges. Donna more importantly while showing courage and strength empowers others to become heroes in their own right by providing them the inspiration to show courage and strength. This is not celebrated for bold exploits, yet it is seen as a normal task for the many who know her.

Not favoured by the gods; however, loved and enjoyed by the people on whose lives Donna has had an impact, Donna is the whisper of wisdom in my ears, giving me the courage, strength and inspiration to become the person I want to be. If one can become as humble, loving, driven, passionate and inspiring as Donna, then one has the power to achieve great things and have a great impact on this world. That is why she is my entrepreneurial hero.

Donna’s final word: “I see myself as an entrepreneur who has the fortune to be able to nurture the potential in the people around me as well as in the community. This is the why I get up in the morning and will continue to be the driving force behind my vision as a business owner or employee.”

J. Shelby Burford

Dale Carnegie once said, “Develop success from failures. Discouragement and failure are two of the surest stepping stones to success.” For Greg Wedel, this was realized after a rocky restaurant investment during college dissolved his entire savings. Without hesitation, Wedel brushed himself off and began searching for his next investment, vowing to learn from his loss and move forward with even greater zeal.

As Wedel explains, some people enjoy novels and literature, some live to create, and some are passionate about history or science, but what really makes his heart tick is finding a new way to make a profit. Realizing his passion at an early age, Wedel began investing in real estate and automobiles in his high school years, continuing his industriousness into college while working toward a degree in accounting.

Today a Certified Public Accountant, Wedel invests in companies, buildings and other ventures in which he sees potential. He says that one of the greatest perks of working for oneself is freedom, a freedom that for him, did not come without diligent work and a sharp mind for business.

The United States is a country full of entrepreneurs. We have no shortage of brilliant minds or innovative spirits. Greg Wedel likely has many counterparts, driven individuals who recognize opportunity and strive to grasp it. What sets him apart from the multitude of successful American businessmen is that which cannot be recognized on paper; for his character is what makes him a person to admire. Meeting Mr. Wedel, one feels as though they are talking with a longtime friend. His manner is warm and welcoming; his interest in others is apparent.

Greg Wedel is a man with a great heart. His success has provided him with the power to help others, an opportunity he has accepted repeatedly. While many successful businesspeople are quick to spend their earnings on showy possessions, Wedel believes strongly in living below one’s means. With this philosophy, he is able to invest more, earn more and give more.

A glowing picture of the power of entrepreneurship, Greg Wedel is a shining example of the possibility of achieving true success in the midst of hurdles, breaking through brick walls and making a difference in a world, all without expecting a shred of recognition. Now that is an example worth following.