

## **Chapter: 27**

**Title: Believe**

**By: Anthony J. Stagliano, Jr.**

### **Quote**

*The credit belongs to those who are actually in the arena, who strive valiantly; who know the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spend themselves in a worthy cause; who at the best, know the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst, if they fail, fail while daring greatly, so that their place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat - Theodore Roosevelt*

Although space is limited for my chapter, I think it is very important to take every opportunity to thank those who have helped you along the way. Thus, I will take this opportunity to thank a few people. My mother provided unwavering support and taught me to have strong convictions. My father lead by example as a young entrepreneur himself and showing me how to have compassion for others. My brothers Frank and Adam for instilling the requisite toughness needed in life. My wife, Holly whose love and support have been instrumental to my success. Finally, my former partners and still great friends, Rob Horner, Craig Shoemaker and Ken Gehlhaus for all their contributions to the company and my life.

It is my belief that life experiences and decisions that one makes along the way create an entrepreneur. It takes parents who nurture you, brothers that encourage you, a coach that mentors you, a friend that believes in you and a wife who stands by you. I had the great fortune to have all of these in my life. However, even with help along the way it means nothing if you don't believe in yourself.

While there are many decisions that I made to get me to this point in my career, in this chapter I will describe five key decisions that paved the way for me becoming an entrepreneur.

The first decision occurred when I was only thirteen years old - I decided to sign up for my junior high wrestling team. This may have been the most influential decision in my journey to becoming an entrepreneur. Wrestling gave me an opportunity to excel in a sport despite being one of the smallest in my class. I loved that although you were part of a team you had the chance to compete on a one-on-one basis. In wrestling you don't have the luxury of blaming others for your failures – you either win or lose on your own. I believe this aspect of the sport provided me a great lesson for many circumstances that would arise in the future. As a business owner, it is incumbent upon you to take full responsibility for your decisions. Wrestling also taught me how to deal with failure and adversity both of which most entrepreneurs face at some time in their careers.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Dan Gable, the greatest wrestler of our generation. Gable rarely lost in his career, but he said it was the losses that drove him to be better, not the wins! Wrestling also taught me the meaning of dedication, desire, and discipline - mostly from not being able to eat Thanksgiving dinner! It also showed me the need to set and try to attain my goals. So the seemingly innocent decision to join the wrestling team gave me a tremendous foundation for my future.

The next key decision was when I decided to pursue a master's degree as opposed to taking a job following graduation from college. I chose a different path from all my friends and bypassed the chance for my first job *and* paycheck. Over the next two years I earned an MBA, while at the same time continuing to be involved with wrestling as an assistant coach. The coaching position helped pay for most of the costs of graduate school. It should be noted that there are many opportunities for graduate assistant positions in athletics or academics, which can pay much of the costs of a secondary degree.

While some say it is better to have practical experience before pursuing a master's degree, I also think you need to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. The lesson here is that while money is important, there are other choices that can lead to a better foundation for the future. By achieving an MBA, it not only enhanced my resume, but also provided me additional education that would help me later on as a business owner.

Once I received my MBA, I was faced with another key decision. What job opportunities should I pursue – do I go back to my hometown of Philadelphia? Or do I take a position at a small, unknown computer software company in Harrisburg paying much less than I could have earned in Philadelphia? Again, I chose the less glamorous path by opting for the position in Harrisburg. Although I would have no family or friends surrounding me, I thought the opportunity was the right one. I did receive advice from my brother Adam who advised me “don't chase the money, chase the career and the money will follow.” It's funny many years later one of the wrestlers I coached would call me for advice on which job to pursue, one that he really liked, but paid less or the one that paid more money. Yes, you guessed it, I gave him the same advice my brother had given me. A few years later he called me to let me know he had made the right decision.

The choice I made to go to Harrisburg paid off! I had a great marketing manager who taught me a tremendous amount and I was able to advance rapidly in the company. My manager subsequently left and asked me to go with him, but I stayed with the company and was named marketing manager at the age of twenty-six. The lesson here is that I chose the harder, different path because again I thought it would be better in the long run.

The next big decision was when I was asked to become managing partner of a new start-up company. As the theme continues, I chose the different road. Here I was, armed with a Bachelors degree in business, an MBA and a title of Marketing Manager, yet I took a position at a start-up company. The position would pay fifty percent of my current compensation – but I was also granted shares in the company and thus my first chance at being an entrepreneur. A quote that I believe rings true – “Go out on a limb because that's where the fruit is.” I think thus far in my journey to becoming an

entrepreneur I certainly was spending most of my time on the limb – and still do to this day!

The final decision that I leave you with is when I truly became a full-fledged entrepreneur. This occurred when I got the opportunity to become the majority shareholder of my company. While it might seem redundant, the point I hope is being made – I did not take the easy or safe path. To be a true entrepreneur, the path most likely will not be easy and will involve some risk. When faced with the challenge of obtaining the necessary financing to buy-out the majority shareholder, I accessed all the money that I had saved and borrowed every dime possible including from family and credit cards. In fact, I had to ask my father to take out a second mortgage on his house to back the deal! Again, this is where you don't do it alone. If my father did not have the faith and confidence in me, I would not be writing this chapter.

So as the story goes, I was successful in obtaining the necessary funds and became the majority shareholder. Through the years, I have made it a point of offering executives the ability to purchase shares in my company to allow them to participate in the entrepreneurial experience. An entrepreneur should never be scared to have others share in their success. By doing so, you have a better chance of surrounding yourself with the best talent. I have an excellent Executive Team supporting me, all of which own a small piece of the company. This includes my Vice President, Mark Engleman, who at this phase of my journey has been as influential in my success as all those previously mentioned and I owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

As an entrepreneur, the biggest reward is not what I am able to earn, it is the relative freedom that I enjoy. This freedom gives me the ability to spend not necessarily more time with my family, but quality time with them and enjoy some of the great things life has to offer. I live by a few other adages – “Add life to my years, not years to my life” and “work hard, play hard!” I also feel very good about having the ability to give back a little to society – through the freedom to volunteer my time to coach as well as give to charitable organizations. It is also a good feeling of accomplishment to know I am responsible for the salaries and benefits of my employees who in turn can have a better life themselves.

Your journey to becoming an entrepreneur may take a much different path, but I believe if you work hard, believe in yourself, and take the road less traveled, you will achieve your goals and fulfill your dreams.

I'll conclude my chapter by ending where I started with wrestling. In high school, our coach Bob Lorence would give out a T-shirt at the start of every season. The T-shirt simply read BELIEVE. That shirt meant so much to each wrestler who was fortunate enough to get one. He would tell us "it is not enough to hope to win, think you're going to win or want to win – you must *believe* you will win!" And I would say to any potential entrepreneur that you too need to first believe to make your dreams come true.

### **Nugget of Wisdom**

*What does not kill you only makes you stronger – Friedrich Nietzsche*

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