

Chapter 8

Learning from Those Who Do: A Case Study of Duperon Corporation

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ABSTRACT

This case study represents one of a series of personal interviews with entrepreneurs in Ghana and the United States. In particular, this chapter details the journey of American entrepreneur Terry Duperon, who started Duperon Corporation, a Michigan-based screening technologies company. In this chapter, the authors describe the motivating factors, operationalization, challenges, and successes of starting a business as experienced by Mr. Duperon. They also describe the unique challenges of family relationships and firm performance within the context of a family firm. Finally, in the spirit of learning from those who do, the authors discuss the mental attributes deemed critical for a successful business venture according to a practicing entrepreneur. The study, which takes a narrative approach, contributes to existing literature on both entrepreneurs and family business.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes a narrative approach in its focus on understanding entrepreneurs. Not only are the breadth and scope of entrepreneurial ventures vast, but researchers also clamor for consensus on the mental and emotional attributes of this population (Brockhaus, 1982). The employment of a narrative analysis (Dawson and Hjorth, 2012; Gartner, 2007) is undertaken here to better illuminate facets of complex issues in a personable and relatable way (i.e., the telling of one's story), extending the reader's understanding of diverse and interwoven subject matter by familiarizing

them with the involved individuals, their motivations, and how they respond to various—often simultaneous—stimuli.

In the sections to follow, we attempt to incorporate one man's story into the wealth of entrepreneurial research and strike a balance between (1) presenting a unifying perspective to how successful entrepreneurs see themselves and the world around them and (2) highlighting the uniqueness of individual entrepreneurs—the traits, so inherently their own, that shape who they are and what they do that makes them successful. Specifically, this chapter focuses on better understanding the attitude and mental and emo-

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tional workings of Terry Duperon, Chairman of the Board of Duperon Cooperation, a successful entrepreneur in Saginaw, Michigan, U.S.

It is the goal of this chapter to impart a better understanding of what it means to be an entrepreneur, and in doing so, contribute to the existing literature that seeks to both define and profile this driving force of economic activity (Begley and Boyd, 1987; Low and MacMillan, 1988; and Kent, Sexton, Vesper, 1982; Naldi et al., 2007). The discussion to follow invites all readers—regardless of age, education, or economic condition—to consider the value and potential of untapped creativity, especially that which resides within them.

This chapter is structured as follows: this section continues with the introduction of Terry Duperon and Duperon Corporation, the subjects of focus for this case study. The second section provides an overview of Terry's journey from childhood to practicing entrepreneur. The third section provides a discussion of the mental attributes Terry deems necessary for a successful business venture. The fourth section is dedicated to the practice of teaching entrepreneurship, as Terry has (and continues to) experience it. The fifth section provides an overview of firm performance and some discussion of the role of family in Duperon Corporation; the final section concludes.

Background and Company Profile

Located in Saginaw, Michigan, Duperon Corporation specializes in screens and screening technology, large scale (preliminary) separation of solids and liquids. The private business was established in 1985 by Terry Duperon, now Chairman of the Board. Terry's partner, daughter Tammy Bernier, is currently the President and CEO of the firm.

The company is a leader in screening technologies, and Terry holds a number of patents. Terry and the firm's research and development team continue to move the company forward, motivated by simple, reliable designs that work well and last. Terry's mantra is *two parts: one part too many*.

Terry laughs, "My favorite design is the anchor. One part—throw it in the water and it works."

The company currently has 54 employees. The Saginaw location is home to marketing, management, research and development, as well as manufacturing. The business has been growing at roughly 25 percent annually over the past 10 years and currently yields revenues of \$20 million. Their products are sold nationally and internationally. To continue their level of growth, Terry acknowledges money will have to be invested in research and design, and the company will likely develop a larger international presence.

The story of the Duperon Corporation is rooted in a prior entrepreneurial endeavor of Terry's. From 1976-1985, Terry ran a sub control pump business with 27 partners. Literature documents the role of previous work experience on entrepreneurial ventures (Brockhaus, 1982). While this role certainly varies across individuals—for example, discontent with a job may propel an individual into entrepreneurship, while another individual may purposefully seek out positions to acquire the skills and experiences deemed necessary to successfully launch and navigate an entrepreneurial venture (the scenarios abound)—researchers recognize the element of previous work experience as an important element of the entrepreneurial process.

Regarding Terry and the case of the sub-control pump business, the endeavor struggled as the partners found it hard to agree, and eventually the business closed. Terry went out on his own, focusing first on pumps and screens; he later decided to focus just on screens. He developed a screen product that would clean itself, and his focus further narrowed to screens that would keep self-cleaning pumps from plugging up. He started Duperon Corporation without any money, designing and developing products in his garage and an upstairs bedroom.

Terry's niche in the market is one with a small but particular focus, and what he offers to the market is unique. His products, his company, his success all come from a dream. Entrepreneurs

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