



## chapter 1

# THE UNCONVENTIONAL BEGINNINGS OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

My dad backed our red pickup truck beneath the second-story window of my dormitory bedroom. My schoolmates in the next dorm room initiated a grand send-off by blasting Frank Sinatra's "That's Life" out their windows as we threw green garbage bags filled with clothes, cassettes, and books into the back of the truck below. I received this rousing tribute partly in acknowledgment of my proud Italian-American heritage, but mostly because I had just been kicked out of prep school a mere two months before graduation. My father drove me home in silence. When we reached the driveway of our house, he said simply, "Sammy, sometimes you're a tough kid to love."

I was so disappointed in myself at that moment. Yes, I was disappointed because I had let my father, my biggest supporter in the world, down to a cosmic degree. But I was mostly disappointed in myself because I had just lost the connection to the place where I had learned who I was and who I wanted to be—the place where, I would later realize, I decided to be an entrepreneur. For better or worse, I had figured out who I was and who I wanted to be while I was attending Northfield Mt. Hermon School (NMH)—the high school started by the world-renowned evangelist D. L. Moody—the school I never graduated from.

Not that I didn't deserve to be kicked out. The administrators there finally sealed my fate under the blurry and all-encompassing "Accumulation of Offenses" section of the student handbook. I can recount a number of said offenses accumulated in my three-plus years there, and I think

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I should recount them again now. Looking back, I believe these offenses were indicative of the entrepreneurial fire I had burning within me.

I came right out of the gate with a willingness to embrace risk. I set the record for the earliest point in the school year when a student was placed on disciplinary probation. I had grown up in the town next to the school, and I wanted to show my two best friends the beauty of my new school as well as the beauty of the girls at my new school.

We snuck out my parents' station wagon in the middle of the night and headed to campus, just three sophisticated 16-year-olds, smoking cigars and listening to Journey. We approached the school in a covert fashion that we thought would surely allow us to elude campus security. Instead of using the road, we drove up the football field, through the quad, and straight into a motion-detecting light. Not into the shaft of light, mind you, but into the pole that was holding the light itself. It detected our motion. We were greeted by a dorm parent who soon invited campus security to the party, and the rest was history.

My next year marked the second phase of my delinquent entrepreneurial development in which I exhibited ambition and an ability to organize coworkers toward a common objective. Our objective at this juncture was not getting kicked out.

In my junior year, I was not permitted to attend the prom. So another junior classmate and I designed a foolproof plan. We would act as chaperones for a bunch of senior friends who would be attending the prom. We decided to do this in style: A Winnebago was rented, beers were procured, bow ties were straightened. We headed off to the prom but never reached our destination, as much beer drinking, pool hopping, and roof surfing ensued. Though going down the highway at 60 miles per hour sitting Indian style on top of a Winnebago seemed like a good idea at the time, I can now see that it probably was not. The local authorities felt similarly, and we received a two-cruiser escort back to campus.

"You're not going to get out of this one." I believe those were the actual words used by the teacher whom the authorities handed us over to. We were all separated into different rooms so as not to be able to corroborate each other's stories as we awaited our morning tribunal. The Winnebago was locked safely on campus, nearly overflowing with the various and sundry contraband. But this is where it turns into a story of uncommon valor and the creation of a united front committed to reaching a shared goal: beating

*the man*. Walkie-talkies were employed, as were bicycles and door-opening coat hangers. We even used the sheets-tied-together-to-rappel-out-the-window motif celebrated in nearly every prison-break movie.

The following morning we were called to meet outside the Winnebago. There was a short, self-congratulatory speech by the teacher that mostly revolved around our foolishness for actually thinking we could get away with it. The door swung open and revealed . . . nothing but a very clean and contraband-free recreation vehicle. We were set free for lack of evidence. In the middle of the night we had successfully executed Project-Break-Back-In-and-Throw-It-All-Out. We had even made sure there was a vase of fresh-cut flowers on the dining table in the camper.

By senior year my entrepreneurial spirit knew no bounds. After the Winnebago incident, the powers that be decided to keep an eye on me. They said I could come back but only on the grounds that I live on campus in a dormitory. They didn't realize that my friends had formed a juvenile-delinquent all-star team by signing up to live in the same dorm. We had diverse talents but shared a common love of partying and rule breaking. This would be the setting of my first endeavor into the beer business. I would visit my parents on the weekends, borrow the car, and cruise liquor stores for sympathetic western Massachusetts libertarian hippies willing to buy me beer as I waited in the shadows. I would return to school with an inordinately heavy hockey bag and parcel out the booty. There would always be an extra six-pack in it for me—the businessman. This proceeded throughout the year without a hitch. Yes, our beer-addled behavior sometimes raised suspicion—like when a faculty member opened the door to the recreation room only to find us playing two-on-two Ping-Pong wearing nothing but tube socks and ski goggles. But my luck couldn't last, and I tempted fate. The businessman got caught and was put out of business.

## YOUR CALLING: FINDING YOUR PASSION

There are a number of reasons why my time at Northfield Mt. Hermon was so crucial to my development as a creative person. The most important is that it was the place where I met and began to date my future wife, Mariah. At that time, aside from reading and writing, being with Mariah was one of the few things I was good at. I actually met Mariah's mom, Rachel,

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first. She was friends with my favorite teacher, Bill Batty, and was at his house visiting his family for the weekend. Some friends and I were there that evening hanging out with Bill and his son John, who was a classmate of ours. Mariah's mom made brownies for us that I was sure were the best I had ever tasted. She told me her daughter had just started her first term at NMH, and I told her that if her daughter could cook anything like her mom I was going to marry her someday. Within a couple of months I was dating Mariah, and we've been together ever since.

We began dating when we were all of 16 years old, so we've pretty much grown up together. Our personalities evolved to complement one another's strengths and weaknesses. We attended different colleges in different parts of the country, spent separate semesters abroad in Australia, and still worked hard to see each other every chance we got. So much time and distance apart is not easy on a relationship, but through it all I got my first taste of how, if you want something bad enough and are willing to do anything necessary to make it happen, you *can* make it happen. This lesson has served me well in love and in life. Mariah was always the first person I went to for support and advice on the challenges we faced in the early years at Dogfish Head. She became my true partner in the company in our third year in business, and we've worked side by side to grow Dogfish Head since then. She is much more focused and practical than I am and has been as committed to guiding Dogfish Head toward where we are today as I have been. There are a million reasons why I love Mariah, one of which is that she is undoubtedly the only person in the world who has higher expectations of me than I have of myself. She is never surprised when we achieve great things; she would expect nothing less. I sensed that the first time I met her at NMH, and even more so after I was kindly asked to leave the school. In those first few weeks apart, our relationship became more difficult but also more rewarding as I saw she was willing to stand by me.

What sounds like a sad ending to a high school career was actually a pretty revelatory beginning. As I mentioned, getting kicked out of high school was one of the worst things to happen to me because that was where I learned who I was. The day I got kicked out, I also came to realize the person I wanted to be. I wanted to create. I wanted to make something that was a reflection of who I was. After getting kicked out of high school, I decided I wanted to be a writer, so I went off to college as an English major with hopes of being just that. Yes, I'm one of the elite fraternity of

people in the country who graduated from college without ever actually receiving a high school degree. . . . We aren't exactly Mensa.

## RECOGNIZING YOUR STRENGTHS

Because beer has always played an important role in my life, I continued to hone my creativity with and passion for beer while at college. I modified an all-weather, thrift-store reclining chair to include a covert compartment that could hold a keg. When security showed up to bust a party, we'd sit on the chair and ask, "Keg, what keg?" I proudly contributed toward the invention of a drinking game called Biff that involved squeegees, milk crates, a Ping-Pong ball, and four contestants dressed only in tube socks and ski goggles (if it ain't broke, don't fix it). I graduated from college and realized I was more passionate about beer than a career in writing. So I started making my own beer and decided I wanted to open a brewery.

As an entrepreneur—as a person—you have to ask yourself what your defining inmost thought is. And then you have to do everything you can to express this belief to the people around you. I learned to love to read and write and express my creativity at Northfield Mt. Hermon. My inmost thought when I was first enrolled there was: "Rebel against authority in order to express yourself." This is pretty much the same defining instinct that drives me today, but I've been fortunate enough to find a constructive outlet for this angst. I've created a company that subverts the definition of beer put forth by the so-called authorities at Anheuser-Busch and Coors.

If you are like me and did not earn a business degree or follow a clear and common path to create your business, you know there is no prescribed method to ensure success. I'm sure that majoring in business or getting an MBA gives you more tools and familiarity with the mechanics of business. But tools are useless unless you are able to use them. You could have the best set of tools in the world, but if you are not ready and capable of working with them they are useless to you. If you believe in your idea enough to make it happen, it must be a powerful idea. The way you harness the power of that idea is to believe you are the only person capable of making that idea a reality. Once you have this mind-set, you will see that a set of tools is not what builds a strong company—it's the builder.

Opening a brewery—opening any business—seems like an impossible feat from a distance. But it starts with a faith in yourself—a belief that just because something hasn't been done before doesn't mean it shouldn't be done at all. If anything, the more impossible your business idea seems to the world at large, the more opportunity there might be for you to succeed. Thomas Edison didn't invent the lightbulb from scratch, but he was the first to imagine an entire country illuminated and powered by electricity. He set to work not just to create a durable lightbulb but to create an entire industry while naysayers around him predicted his failure. If you are going into business, the core of your strength lies in your ability to picture a world in which your idea makes a difference. However big or small that difference may be, however many people's lives your idea ends up affecting, you need to recognize and celebrate your opportunity to make a difference. The lightbulb that went off above Edison's head was not so much an actual physical lightbulb as it was a vision of a world in which he could make a difference.

## **TAKING RISKS: BEING A BUSINESS PIONEER**

One of my earliest and fondest childhood memories is being “shot” in the back with a real arrow by my father as I rode a horse. He loaded the car with me, a camera, a bow, an arrow, and some ridiculous kiddie Western clothes he bought on a business trip to Texas. We drove to a farm that didn't belong to anyone we knew but had a very old horse that he felt confident wouldn't run away if he placed me on its back. He stuffed a flat piece of lumber under my shirt and jammed an arrow through the shirt into the wood. He placed me on a horse and “shot” me as I was doing my best wounded-cowboy impression. He was putting together a slide show for a group of fellow oral surgeons. He planned to end his lecture about a new, unorthodox tooth-implant system he had created with that picture of me on a horse with an arrow in my back. The message revolved around the perception of risk that comes with trying something new. The pioneers were the ones who risked their lives in order to create a new community in a new land. All small businesspeople are pioneers, and their companies are the hearts of their communities.

Of course there is risk that comes with being a pioneer, but the risk is minimized if the community is built on an impressive set of values—impressive in that they make an impression on the lives of the people who

come in contact with them. These values start at home and shouldn't be separate from your professional values if you are going to succeed. I think I sensed this idea emanating from my father even then, at the moment he was "shooting" me with an arrow.

The only predictable thing in the world of business is that the future cannot be predicted. Going into business is about embracing the unknown. You recognize very quickly that there is no safety net to catch your fall. While you cannot recover what could be lost by taking those risks, even many failed entrepreneurs agree that those risks are well worth taking. You have to believe in yourself and the integrity of your idea to really make a go of it. Business integrity is a combination of your values and work ethic and the value of your product or service to potential customers. To connect your personal values with a product that reflects those same values takes education. First you have to educate yourself on how to get into business and how to apply your own values to those of your business. Then you have to educate your coworkers and customers on what that business is all about. Unwavering faith and devotion to seeing your idea through are critical. This faith will come through your values and your education. No matter how much the daily unknowns of business push and pull you out of your comfort zone, you can execute your ideas if you are anchored by strong values.

## VALUES

There are as many different reasons, motivations, methods, and models for starting a business as there are businesses. The one major characteristic consistent in every successful business that survives long past its inception is an adherence to core values.

The values you choose to focus on and emulate in your business create the backbone of your company more than your business plan, management team, marketing plan, budget, or product line will. Your values determine the quality of your product or service, how you treat your customers, the culture of your business, and how you interact with coworkers. The values essential to being a successful entrepreneur are not learned in a classroom or from a book. Values are acquired daily by interacting with people. In business, values are maintained through relationships with

coworkers, colleagues, and customers. Having good business values starts with a single, all-important idea—either you treat people with love and respect or you don't. It may sound naive and simplistic, but the execution can be quite complex. The manifestation of this respect is reflected in your business offering—either it represents a good value or it doesn't. Before creating a valuable product or service, one must take inventory of personal values. In business it is easy to be conflicted between making a large profit and consistently satisfying customers and coworkers, thereby gaining their trust and loyalty.

Whether you are an MBA graduate running a publicly traded company or a one-person home-based entrepreneur, too often we measure our individual success by our paychecks. We focus on the monetary value attributed to our labor. For a business owner, this translates to your business's profit margin. A large profit margin may feel like success for a short while, but a company focused entirely on increasing profits will not experience sustained success. To really know success in business is to have your personal values and those of your company be perfectly aligned.

## **FITTING THE PIECES TOGETHER**

After graduating from Muhlenberg College in 1992, I moved to New York City because English was the only subject I had excelled in and I had a vague notion that I wanted to either teach or write. I also had a pretty strong notion that I wanted to move to the biggest city in the United States, go out all night, and revel in my youth. I moved in with a friend and enrolled in some writing courses at Columbia University. To pay the bills I worked as a waiter at a restaurant called Nacho Mama's Burritos. There, I quickly became friends with Joshua Mandel, one of the owners. While the decor and the fare bespoke a Mexican restaurant, Joshua was so passionate about beer that serving unique and high-quality beers became a specialty of the restaurant.

Joshua was one of the first restaurateurs in New York City to seek out not only the obscure import beers but the beers made at small American microbreweries that were just starting to gain favor in a few corners of the world. The restaurant was serving beers like Sierra Nevada Bigfoot, Anchor

Liberty, and Chimay Red. We noticed that many of the patrons shared our excitement about these innovative brews. I slowly began to realize that my work in the restaurant in general, and selecting, recommending, and serving beer in particular, was very rewarding. There was definitely a pivotal moment when I saw that a core of regular customers at Nacho Mama's actually cared about and trusted my opinion on the unusual, exotic beers we were selling. These were people I admired simply for taking the risk of trying something new. Like me, they were ready and willing to experiment. They trusted my understanding of what they were looking for. They trusted themselves enough to make up their own minds about the quality of the beers we served. I remember taking great pride in earning their trust, and I continued to educate myself further about the world of good beer in an effort to protect and enhance that trust.

Joshua and I wanted to take our love of beer to the next level, so we decided to brew our own. We located the one shop in all of New York City that sold beer-making equipment and ingredients and began what would be my first of many batches of beer.

For this first batch, I began by sterilizing two dozen large beer bottles by baking them in the oven for 20 minutes. Then I took them out, piping hot, and placed them on a cheap rug, which promptly melted, permanently affixing the 24 bottles to it. I filled the bottles (still attached to the rug) with beer, capped them, and dragged the whole thing into a dark corner. After the requisite week had passed, I cut each bottle out of the rug and placed it in the refrigerator. Other than the odd packaging—a small chunk of area rug melted to the bottom of each bottle—the beer looked pretty good. It was a pale ale made with cherries. I called it Cherry Brew since it was my virgin batch and all.

We threw a party for the inaugural tasting, assembling a motley crew of taste testers to sample the batch. In addition to my two roommates, Mariah drove down from college and, oddly enough, Ricki Lake, of talk show fame, joined us for the festivities. I had been subsidizing my Nacho Mama's income with infrequent acting gigs and had just done a spot on her show.

I pulled the chilled bottles from the refrigerator and opened them to share with roommates and friends. As I handed out glasses of beer, people began commenting that it tasted fantastic and looking at me in wonderment. I wasn't exactly known for my cooking abilities or my cleanliness,

but somehow the beer came out really well plus it had a subtle red hue and fragrance from the cherries. The original pale ale recipe we had followed did not call for cherries but, like my great-grandmother, who was known in her town for making the best sausage using only pinches and handfuls to measure for her recipes, I felt comfortable trusting my judgment and it had actually worked out well. I was dumbfounded to recognize this latent, hereditary skill.

As I watched my friends kick back and enjoy something I had made, I experienced a sense of pride and accomplishment on a level I had never felt before. The beer was the hit of the party. More than that, I had created something unique that people enjoyed. I had given people something that, at that moment, they really needed. That evening I spent as much time as my friends could stand talking about all the different beers in the world, the ingredients used in making them, and all of the small breweries that were popping up around the country. My buddy Joe listened, sipped, and said, “Dude, you’re obsessed.” He was right, and, instead of being embarrassed by his comment, I was actually quite proud.

As we sat there drinking, I could not help but begin planning the next batch to brew. I began considering new ingredients and different methods, but I decided to keep my signature rug-bottomed bottles for the time being. I also started thinking that, while maybe I would never actually write the Great American Novel, I might be able to make the great American beer. That evening I stood up and, with Ricki Lake as my witness, told everyone in the room that I was going to be a professional brewer. They laughed at my bold and unlikely statement, and I laughed at myself, but I woke up the next morning, left the apartment with a fuzzy head, and camped out in the public library to research just what it would take to open a brewery.

I suspected that starting my own business wouldn’t be easy, especially considering I had zero practical business experience. What I knew for sure was that I had a good head start because I had an idea I was passionate about and solid, people-oriented values.

As you consider opening your own business, try to condense your reasons for wanting to do so into one main idea. What is it that is so appealing about the business you want to open that you are actually ready and willing to take the big step of doing so? If you can successfully complete this exercise, congratulations—you have a firm grasp of your big idea. Not that

the hard work is behind you. It is one thing to have big ideas. It is a whole other thing to actually execute them.

## THE VALUE OF EXECUTION

After continuing to research the brewing industry for a number of months and brewing more batches of beer in my kitchen, I came to realize that, since I was young, inexperienced, and broke, I would need to start small. In my research I learned there were essentially two kinds of small breweries: microbreweries, where beer is brewed and then packaged into kegs and bottles and sent out the door to be sold in bars and stores; and brewpubs, where beer is brewed within a restaurant and sold primarily on tap within the restaurant itself. The start-up costs were relatively similar, so I decided to open a brewpub. I figured I could reduce my risk of failure if I had revenue streams coming from both a brewery and a restaurant. My parents were supportive of the idea and were actually impressed when I came home for a holiday with a business plan that was nearly half complete.

While in Maine taking a short brewing class at a small commercial brewery and completing my business plan, I decided to name my brewery Dogfish Head after a small peninsula off Southport Island, Maine. My parents have a summer cabin on Dogfish Head where I spent a lot of time as a child, so the name has sentimental value. I also thought the sound had great rustic connotations that would work well for the brewery I imagined I would someday build. I returned from my Maine trip ready to make the leap. It was time to seek out a location and financing.

I decided to open the brewpub in Mariah's hometown of Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, where we had spent a few summers together. The coastal towns of Delaware are absolutely beautiful, with wide beaches, pretty harbors, and a thriving commercial community. I needed a location where the little capital I had would allow me to get the doors open and commence brewing. I had to find a leasable building that was already a turnkey restaurant. For a small, seasonal town, Rehoboth has a ton of restaurants and a sophisticated, varied clientele that includes locals, transients, and vacationers from the surrounding cities. The lack of choices for potential sites made me nervous, but I also realized it said good things about the community's support of the

local restaurant scene. If there were a lot of abandoned restaurants ready to rent I would have wondered about my decision to open in that area.

So I had only a couple of choices; there were two buildings that fit within my parameters. I decided to focus on the one that was farther from the beach but had its own parking lot. Since rents were relative to proximity to the beach, every block you moved back cut up to 30 percent off the price of rent. The building I decided on was a good number of blocks back, farther away than any of the successful restaurants in town. To put it in Monopoly terms, if the beach were Boardwalk and Park Place, the building I hoped to rent was the equivalent of a light blue property. Though the rent was fair it wasn't cheap, and the best move I made in negotiating the lease was having 20 percent of my annual rent count toward an option to buy the building at the end of five years. I think the landlady allowed that section into the lease because she realized the odds were very much against my business surviving that long. The place had been rented in previous years by a series of fly-by-night party animals. The most recent tenant had left town very quietly at the end of the preceding summer without paying rent or notifying any suppliers. Not only did the restaurant have all of its equipment in place but there was still booze on the bar shelf and a couple of onion rings floating in the fryer. We even found a few bras, a pair of boxers, and a random stiletto. The building had a room attached to the main bar that used to be a take-out kiosk. I realized that if we put a picture window into this wall, which overlooked the main dining area, this room would be the perfect spot to install the brewing equipment.

Now all I needed was a brewery to install.

## **INNOVATION: TURNING LEMONS INTO LEMON-FLAVORED BEER**

I contacted every manufacturer and broker of new and used small-scale brewing equipment in North America. I knew we would need \$100,000 to buy and install even the smallest prefabricated commercial system. At this point I had exhausted much of my capital renovating the building, upgrading kitchen equipment, and installing a wood grill. All I had left to build my beloved brewing system with was \$20,000. I recalled reading about a small rack system used by home brewers that might fit within my budget.

While it would be a challenge to brew enough beer on such a small system, I figured I could buy it and just brew a lot more often than I would on a true, full-scale commercial system. Of course, I would need somewhere to store and ferment all of the little batches that would come out of the brewery. We bought a bunch of used kegs, cut the tops off, and installed sanitary ball valves at their bases. We then built an air-conditioned room full of racks where I could store my homemade fermenting vessels. The little home-brewing system finally showed up one chilly spring day. In addition to a few other packages we received from UPS that day, there was a big box containing a little brewery in the back of the truck. I unwrapped it, rolled it into place, plugged it in, and began making test batches in the weeks before the restaurant opened.

In the months prior, I had visited the few area breweries to take tours and learn more about the hands-on work it took to run a brewery. A number of the brewers I had met stopped by now to see how I was progressing: I was pretty embarrassed to show them my brewery system. Brewers calibrate their world in barrels, which is also how the federal government taxes us. For every barrel brewed (31 gallons), small brewers are taxed \$7. Therefore brewing equipment is built in barrel increments. The average microbrewery system produces 30-barrel (930-gallon) batches. The average brewpub system in a restaurant produces 10-barrel (310-gallon) batches. My original brewing system produced 10 gallons or 0.3 barrels per batch. When brewers I had met while visiting other breweries would stop by the brewpub, I felt like a boy among men. I suffered from an acute case of brewery-envy, but I would not be discouraged. It's not the size of your brewing system that matters; it's what you do with it . . . or so they say.

Although brewing on such a small system really sucked from a labor perspective (it takes pretty much the same amount of time to brew a five-barrel batch of beer as it does to brew a 50-barrel batch), it was great from an experimental perspective. To make enough beer for the restaurant, I had to brew two or three batches a day five or six days a week. I quickly got bored brewing the same beers over and over again, so I started to wander into the kitchen of the restaurant for new ideas. I would grab some apricots or maple syrup or raisins and toss them into the beer. Like my great-grandmother had, I worked on these recipes by instinct. I trusted my own palate more than any recipe I'd come across in a brewing book. I would change one variable each time I brewed and track the progress

and evolution of that batch through fermentation and into the keg. From the beginning, I knew I wanted to experiment and find my own way. I was unaware of it at the time, but Dogfish Head's reputation for experimentation and quality was born from the humble beginnings of that 10-gallon system.

## **OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO BUSINESS: REPEALING PROHIBITION**

With the brewery in place, I still had one small obstacle to clear before I could open the pub: My plan to open a brewery in Delaware was totally illegal.

About a month before our scheduled grand opening I learned from a local restaurateur that breweries were not legal in the state of Delaware. I needed to rewrite state laws in order to do business. After Prohibition was repealed in 1933, it was up to each individual state to establish and regulate its own brewing laws, so Delaware still had laws on the books prohibiting breweries in the state.

One of the main reasons I decided to open the brewpub in Delaware was that, in 1995, there were only a handful of states that didn't have breweries yet. I recognized the marketing opportunity and curiosity factor that would come with being the first brewpub to open in the state. I drove to the capital of Dover and literally knocked on the doors of a few state senators and members of the house. They were helpful from the very first day and sympathetic to my situation. I learned there had been attempts to change the laws in previous years but the legislation had never made it to the floor. The sponsors of the proposed bills had just given up.

My big idea was to make off-centered beer and food for off-centered people. Before I could do this, the laws needed to change. Traditionally one would hire a lawyer and hand off the responsibility of navigating the bureaucratic process. However, I knew that unless I was very active personally in describing our intentions to the legislators our proposed bill might not be voted on in the spring session. It was imperative that this be resolved quickly enough to allow me to open for the critical summer season. While I worked with a great lawyer, I did a lot of legwork and lobbying myself. It was an off-centered approach that was in keeping with my big idea. I found an ally in a lawyer named Dick Kirk who was

affiliated with a Wilmington-based law firm. He had worked with a man who owned a chain of liquor stores, so he was already familiar with the state liquor laws.

Dick and I went to work drafting a bill and then spoke for it on the floor of the state senate and house of representatives. We met with some resistance from a couple of neoprohibitionists in the senate, but our bill passed with an overwhelming majority. I was amazed and delighted by the support we got from the majority of the legislators. Before I could sell Dogfish Head to customers I had to sell it to legislators, and it proved to be a rewarding experience as they all got behind our company and saw us for what we were—a David in a brewing world full of Goliaths. They moved quickly to help the first brewpub open in the state.

The story of that victory and the brewpub's impending opening hit the pages of the state and local newspapers simultaneously. I used the interviews with local publications as opportunities to further the community's education about us. I told the story of Dogfish Head, and our intentions to offer fresh wood-grilled food and fresh beer in a unique, rustic atmosphere. I talked about our values and our goal of teaching people to expect more from their dining and drinking experience than they had in the past. Days before the brewpub opened, people began driving into the lot hoping to get an inside glimpse of the first restaurant in the state to brew its own beer. I hired a great staff of restaurant veterans from the area and trusted friends from college and home. We worked night and day painting and decorating the restaurant, hoping to open before the summer rush. I was furiously pumping out little 10-gallon batches of beer to stock up for opening day.

Whatever challenges you may face in opening and running your business, use your big idea as a touchstone to keep you focused—it will serve you well. With each challenge that you put behind you, your faith in your idea will grow stronger.

## **EDUCATION + BODY + MIND = PERSONALITY**

This equation proves true whether you are talking about a person or a company. The mind is the *who*, the body is the *what*, and the education is the *how*. My goals were to focus on the Dogfish Head brand (mind), to offer great unique beers and food (body), and to educate our customers about

our values of making better things to provide a better experience for them (education). People don't want to just use a product. They want to like the product they are using. Your personality forms the basis for whether other people like you. The same philosophy holds true for a company. Consider the who, the what, and the how of your business. If you can develop and implement these three objectives in a way that shows your distinct approach, the personality of your business will shine through.

## **WE ALL NEED A LITTLE HELP . . .**

Even though I was able to stockpile dozens of gallons of beer, and our chef and general manager were able to get the menu and bar ready, I had started the licensing process later than I should have. In addition to changing the law I had to get a business license, a fire inspection, a health department inspection, and a liquor control board inspection. We had stairwells to paint, lights to install, and fire extinguishers to mount, and we were running out of time. I looked out the window one morning and saw a man with a white beard peering back at me. Lots of people poke their heads into a construction site just to be nosy, but I recognized that this was the third or fourth time I had seen this particular face looking inside from various windows. I took a break from my desperate preopening chores and went outside to introduce myself. The man's name was Doug Griffith and he was a home brewer really excited that we were opening a brewery. He asked if he could see it. I told him not to expect much and took him back to the room. Instead of scoffing at our diminutive brewery, his eyes widened further in excitement as he asked me about the different gauges and pumps we had installed. He obviously knew and cared a lot about brewing. I told him I'd love to sit and chat but we had a bunch of stuff to get done before our next inspection and moved to excuse myself. He asked if he could help. I said sure, if he didn't mind being paid in beer and pizza.

Within two hours he had our back stairwell painted and was framing out some drywall for our secured liquor storage area. He had every tool you could think of and could use them better than any of us. Doug has truly turned out to be a guardian angel for Dogfish Head. He built the room where our second, upgraded brewery was set up; then he actually helped build the brewing system as well. He has installed stoves and load-bearing

steel I beams, and he built the original copper bar located at our Milton, Delaware, location. He has done so much for our company and asked for so little in return. For that reason, he and his wife, Patty, don't have to open their wallets when they come to the brewery or the pub. I don't know where our brewery would be if it weren't for Doug, but I do know we would not have passed our inspections in the days leading up to our grand opening without his assistance.

A good company is nothing more or less than a group of good people gathered around a good idea. If you can locate even one person in addition to yourself who believes in the who, what, and why that you plan to build your company around, you should trust that person to help you spread those beliefs to others. When you are just getting started in business, it can be easy to slip into a myopic, dictatorial mode. Your life is on the line, and you have the most vested interest in making your business work; but if you notice there are other people who share your passion, and if you can bring them on board and motivate them to help you move forward, you will gain momentum more quickly than if you try to do everything yourself. Once your idea is embraced by someone other than yourself, you have the basis of a new community.

## MAKING YOUR IDEA A REALITY

It wasn't pretty, but we were finally in business. I was a professional brewer. Three years earlier, if I had told my friends and professors that this was what I'd be doing, I'm sure they would have laughed at me just as my friends had when I announced my intention that fateful day I christened Cherry Brew. I would have laughed, too. I had always been a creative person, but I hadn't always shown great initiative or follow-through. That's because I was never really passionate about anything until I decided to be a brewer.

The only reason to make that leap into opening your own business is the unwavering belief that you can make it work and that making it work will make you happy. So many people have great ideas: Some of them go into business, and some of them fail. It is not having the great idea that makes you a success in business; it's executing it.

Your faith in your idea will be challenged many times as you go into business for yourself and even after your business is well established. You

learn not only to be undaunted by the challenges and obstacles you face but to be nourished by them as well. Every small victory should be recognized as a testament to your faith. Having confidence in your idea begins with having confidence in yourself. This confidence is born from the belief that your idea has a place in the world and that you can deliver your customers something they will value. You will encounter many hurdles as you make this delivery, and some will surely trip you up. It's okay to falter, and it's okay if customers or coworkers occasionally see you fall. But they will also see you get up, dust yourself off, and continue running toward your goal. If you truly believe in what you are doing, nothing can stop you.

So many emotions went through me as we counted down the days to our opening. I remember a monumental moment of truth that, while I can look back and laugh at it now, gave me great anxiety. Our big, spiffy Dogfish Head Brewings & Eats sign arrived a week before we opened. I drove my piece-of-junk pickup truck onto the sidewalk alongside the façade of our building to hang the sign. Mariah stood across the road ready to capture a historic moment with a disposable camera. However, before we could put up our new sign, we had to remove the old one from the previous business. We got a great picture of us doing this.

Behind that sign was yet another, older sign from the business that occupied the space before the last business. I asked Mariah not to take a picture of us removing that sign. As I pried it off the building, a flood of emotion came over me: *Oh, my God! What am I doing?* But I also remember that it was not at all a negative feeling. I remember thinking, *They are not you, Sam. Their ideas were not your ideas. If your ideas are as potent as you think they are, and you work your ass off to see them to fruition, nobody will tear your sign off the front of this building.* Execute your ideas well, and you will achieve your goals.

Opening day finally arrived, and we put the finishing touches on the restaurant as we unlocked the door. I remember standing by the front door with my mother and staring at the throng of people who crowded the bar and tables before me. Mariah, my parents, sisters, grandparents, investors, old friends, and new friends were there to celebrate with me. I remember thinking how much my family meant to me, how my family had successfully balanced a love for business with a genuine love of people, and how I was blessed to now have the opportunity to carry on this tradition. I intended to work hard to expand my family to include the coworkers and customers

I saw sprinkled throughout my relatives and friends that evening. In so many ways the birth of a business is as miraculous as the birth of a child. An entrepreneur who witnesses a vision come true and sees the reflection of that vision in the eyes of customers and coworkers is participating in the development of a magical, culture-transforming entity. Even if that culture never transcends a neighborhood or a strip mall, once it exists, it takes its place in history. I kissed my mother and went back to the cold room to put a fresh keg on tap. I sampled a bit before heading back to the bar. I silently toasted all of the people who had influenced this outcome, and I was very proud to have made something that people wanted to enjoy.

