



Spindriff: 3 lessons learned along the way

Bill Creelman, founder and CEO of Spindriff and co-founder of Stirrings, gives advice about entrepreneurship.

Dawn Reiss | Sep 19, 2019



On the white wall in the kitchen of Spindriff's headquarters in Newton, Massachusetts, are six words painted in big block letters: ambition, respect, collaboration, trust, agility, innovation and trust.

Like a guiding North Star, Bill Creelman, founder and CEO of Spindriff, says these words serve as a daily reminder.

"We all come from different backgrounds and experiences, but we must share these core values as a business," says Creelman, who co-founded Stirrings which was sold to Diageo in 2009. "It's made us open to change and not afraid to challenge ourselves."

Here's his entrepreneurial advice to other founders.

Lesson 1: Failure is a necessary stop on the road to success.

This phrase is a favorite of Creelman. Everyone in the beverage industry is seeking to find an idea or product that is unique and different. That means pushing boundaries.



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"Any time you are pushing boundaries you are going to run up against a series of challenges," Creelman says. "During our first batch of Spindriff, the production facility said this is impossible, this will never work."

For example, when the pulp from the fresh fruit used in Spindriff backed up the product lines and sellers were worried, Creelman kept pushing, which ultimately created the brand he has today.

Instead of looking at things only as a big challenge, embrace the rollercoaster of excitement that comes with growing a business. Those scars help season a new entrepreneur to make you more prepared for when your business is larger.

"You can have to fail a lot and fail frequently, so when you are bigger you can avoid those problems when you're really on the clock," Creelman says.

Lesson 2: Find a place to tell your story.

To find your story, founders should be great listeners, and learn through trial and error to find fans. Start by looking for the "white-hot center" of your burning fire, Creelman says, and then fan the flames.

Finding the exact location of your fire to set up camp isn't always easy.



"You don't always know where it is coming from," says Creelman who says 10% of finding a place to tell your story is coming up with the brand and 90% is the execution.

After approaching various channels, including foodservice, Spindriff discovered its tribe at fast casual bakeries and sandwich shops—not mom-and-pop operations—where consumers could witness their food being made.

"That environment spoke loudly to us," he says.

For other founders, the physical place to tell a story might be a yoga studio, grocery store, or having a presence online.

"Don't assume that all channels will self-select on their own," Creelman says. "You have to be quite purposeful about that journey. You have to go out and look for it. The important thing is you have to find it."

Lesson 3: Entrepreneurs can make terrible CEOs, so seek advice from others.

"Of course, I'm referring to myself," Creelman says with a laugh. "The reality is that everything that makes you a great entrepreneur makes you a terrible CEO."

That's because many founders embrace counterculture and aren't all that compliant in their day-to-day life. That's why as a CEO it's important to be a consensus builder, to "park your opinion," and be a great listener, Creelman says.

His advice: acknowledge that you're a non-linear thinker, reach out for help from other thought leaders and surround yourself with a diverse subset of opinions. Then be aware of your weaknesses and hire to fill the void.

"More importantly, remain curious, be open to change and be an active, engaged listener and leader," Creelman says. "The danger is when you stop doing that and say 'I've got my way of doing things.' That's when you can run into trouble."

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