



The First Venture Brand, Organization and People

by Joshua Fowke

Three years ago my buddy started making a few extra bucks cutting lawns around the block. This year he wanted someone to work with to make it a more enjoyable experience, so he offered that I join him. I accepted and after a few months I noticed that we were making a lot of cash for high school kids. So I connected with Don Fowke, a very well respected and experienced management consultant at Fowke Limited, who also happens to be my grandfather. We crunched some numbers and did some research and saw huge potential for a real business. We had 12 clients on only three small side streets with no marketing or energy targeted at prospects. I took my findings to my partner, Sebastian Kleefisch, and we made a deal to expand and run as a company.

Three Key Elements

For the remainder of the 2012 summer I have been focusing on my first venture and through all the research I have done, as well as people who I have consulted, I have come to the conclusion that there are three key elements to the success of a start-up. These elements are; brand, organization and structure, and people. The element that sticks out most for me is brand.

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Brand is Where it Starts

This summer I was preparing for grade eleven, since this was my first senior year of high school; I told my grandfather that I was interested in learning about business. He sent me a book, right about the time I was starting to research businesses for my start-up, by Ted Matthews called *Brand, It ain't the logo, It's what people think of you*. The book preached how to make a brand foundation and what the benefits of brand discipline are. It looked at many examples of businesses doing things poorly and with excellence.

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Joshua is a Grade XI student at Birchmount Park Collegiate Institute and a member of the Birchmount Exceptional Athlete Program. He is CEO and General Manager of New Lawn Care Toronto.

His professional goals are to graduate high school with honours, attend university for an undergrad in science, get a specialized postgraduate degree and later in his career attain an MBA. Additionally, due to his entrepreneurial characteristics, he is interested in growing his start-up business and hopefully joining another venture.

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Ted's book highlighted the importance of branding and inspired me to create a brand foundation for my start-up. The final result of my brand foundation was an organization that's main goal was to employ and train high school students in addition to making a profit. As a high school student myself I am extremely passionate about providing an opportunity for impressionable kids my age to grow their business skills as well as improve their chances of getting and keeping a job in the future. The plan is to improve our employee's punctuality, discipline, and a sense of responsibility as well as communication with both customers and the rest of the staff. This approach to business has many benefits to the company, like attracting new employees; Ted states "Attracting and retaining the best employees is a matter

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of communicating, through the Brand Foundation, what your culture is." This is the same for the most important members of your business, your customers! If prospects have a choice between a company that is only profit driven or one that is in business for a greater reason, like empowering youth to become more professional, they will chose the latter. Overall I discovered the concept of brand and culture is so important to creating a working business that without them a business is set up for failure.

Organization and Structure

I also found that how your business is organized is vital to its success. The main focus when I met with Don Fowke trough out the summer was making sure we had a business structure that would allow a prosperous business. Good advice that Don gave me was; "good strategy is not enough,

you need good organization structure to make it happen in the real world".

The biggest challenge we see is how daily operations will be organized. At our busiest time of year (April, May) all our employees are in school during the day, which lowers our operating hours substantially. On top of that, it is the rainiest time of year, we can no work on a day that has rained because its bad for the grass, this also lowers our hours by a considerable amount. The concern is how are we going to get the lawns serviced in the little time available, it's a logistical nightmare. The answer that we have is to train leaders beforehand and implement systems like real-time online schedules, communication lines and crew production procedures to better our efficiency and ensure everything gets done on time. If everyone knows their role and each other's roles they can hold themselves and others accountable. The important part is that employees

"April, May...it's a logistical nightmare"

understand that they are an vital part of the business and their actions have a huge impact on the bottom line, this will motivate them to keep the team on task.

The way that I plan on creating this understanding of employee importance is by having workshops through out the year to demonstrate everything about the business and what affects it; have experienced workers mentor new ones on the job; include all employees in monthly meetings and reviews; and most importantly to open up the company so employees can invest as limited partners.

This will allow all employees to feel like they are a bigger part of the company and that what they do matters because the better the business does the more money from dividends is in their hands. It's no longer just about the weekly paycheck. Because it is such a small company buying shares is affordable for a high school student. An expected product of motivated employees who can keep each other accountable is strong communication, and that is a big part of organization.

Creating a Working Partnership

Another important decision we made was to create a working partnership at the top. From all the advice I have received about partners I decided that my partner Seb and I both needed our domain of power. Dennis Hewko, WPOer and CEO at Enviroshake Inc., told me "The only time I have seen a partnership work is when, early on, they bought a second company and each of them ran one of them". In other words they each had their own domain so my partner and I agreed to both take control of our areas of strengths. I was clearly stronger at the administrative position due to my knowledge about business as well as organizational and communication skills so I am in charge of business related affairs at both daily and annual levels as the general manager. Sebastian's strengths happen to be complimentary to mine as he is a very mechanically minded innovator with more experience in the industry and so he is in charge of equipment and is my main advisor for production efficiency. With our structure and organization in place we have a strong chance at success as a company.

The Right People in the Right Role

The final element to a healthy business is the people involved. This summer I have talked to over half a dozen experienced entrepreneurs and consultants and the recurring theme is "have the right people in the right role". A great example I was so lucky to be shown was at my uncle's restaurant. He took me in to work in his kitchen for a Friday night and showed me how he runs his business.

New Lawn Care Toronto



The Partners

Joshua Fowke and Sebastian Kleefisch

The main point I learned was how important his staff is. "I don't hire people based on their skills, I hire a personality", says Brian Fowke, chef at Kits Daily Kitchen, which is rated in the top seven fine dining restaurants in British Columbia. The culture Brain is able to create in his kitchen is a key to his success, and is a perfect example of how the right people make an enormous difference. "The right person in a properly tailored job creates a happy motivated employee in a healthy growing business and directly effects the bottom line" Bonnie Fowke, experienced management consultant at Fowke Limited. The next big step for my company is the recruiting process, which is imperative for the venture to work. The company's plan is to recruit good, hard working local kids at the high school in the area and create chemistry in our staff, because the people make the difference.

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In conclusion in my on-going journey to turn a teenager and a lawn mower into a fully functioning business that is a great environment for the workforce of tomorrow to learn and grow, I have stumbled upon three vital elements that we need to implement into our plan. The most important element is the brand; we have a sound and attractive brand foundation that is our biggest advantage. Additionally we have organized our business structure and communication lines with a realistic plan that ensures every situation can be dealt with. The third element is having the right personnel in the correct position, which we are currently doing. With all these elements well covered we have truly set ourselves up for success.

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