

TERRIEAGLE

The

CHAMPAGNE
CEO

A SPARKLING JOURNEY OF SUCCESS
THROUGH COURAGE, CONFIDENCE,
AND COLLABORATION

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The
CHAMPAGNE
CEO

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever woken up in the morning fresh and eager to start the new day, only to have a roadblock come your way several hours later? It might be a business-related issue that you know will take a long time to work out. Or it could be a challenge you're facing in your personal life. Whatever it is, it has the potential to divert your day or, at the very least, cause you to feel disappointed about what's ahead.

I'm here to say (and I've lived it!) that in those moments, you have a choice to make. You can choose to smile and work to solve the problem, or you can decide to frown and give up. In my case, I really try to smile. I love to bring enthusiasm to everyone around me, in all situations, both the good and the challenging. Even if there are steep barriers in the way at work or personally, I like to smile first. With good energy and a happy tone, I then work through what's in the way.

It may mean making phone calls, setting up a meeting, changing my schedule, or even taking the day to do something else than I originally planned. It's my aim to always keep going. I find that there's always something to celebrate—and I love to focus on the joys of life and business. It's what makes the small moments matter and how each day can have a sparkle of its own. It's why I am known as the Champagne CEO and how you can be too.

While this may sound trivial, I can assure you it's not a flaky take on how to live—not at all. Rather, it's a heartfelt way to approach both business and life. Trust me, I know what it's like to get through hard times! But I also know how great it feels to win. I've always had a great desire to achieve and accomplish every goal I take on. And I've won—many times.

I've reinvented myself five different times in five different industries. I've worked my way up the ladder, from selling Camp Fire Girl cookies at age nine to being a salesgirl at a pharmacy's makeup department and eventually holding senior-level executive positions. I recently was president and CEO at Morilee, a leading bridal and special occasion designer, manufacturer, and wholesaler that operates globally and sells to more than sixty countries.

I've spent the last twenty-five years of my career leading luxury brands to profitable growth in the retail industry (sometimes through astronomical gains!). I've built a track record along the way, and companies count on me to create strategies, build brands, plan for the long term, develop the business, and ultimately deliver, time and again.

This idea of smiling and having the right attitude, coupled with a focus on relationships, has brought me to where I am today. I've built relationships in business on many levels. I've met with owners of privately held businesses, executive management of premier global department stores, and CEOs of international brands, discussing and negotiating new business growth opportunities.

I've built up successful teams, and I continually look for ways to empower and encourage my employees. It's important to me to make others feel good and for it to go well for them. If you work for me, for instance, you can expect to get a gift box every time it's your birthday. I also love the element of surprise, and I've been known to order champagne for my staff while they're on vacation and hand out

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special gifts to guests at my dinner parties. I think these extra touches can help others know they are appreciated.

That's not to say I haven't had some hard knocks throughout my career, and I'll share these in the pages that follow. I invite you to see this book as a chance to sit down together, to go over stories that you can absorb, and then apply their takeaways to your own life. I'll share the path that I took to get to where I am today and how each situation was a chance to grow and build in some way.

You'll find there are five parts to the book, and each one focuses on a different capability that can help you achieve success both in your career and in your life. The first part covers the idea of believing in yourself, even if you don't have an extensive support system. In the parts that follow, we'll look at the importance of asking for what you'd like to achieve, taking risks, and learning from each experience you have. Finally, I'll touch on the essential component of care, both in the sense of looking after your teams and relationships and also prioritizing balance and your own well-being.

After reading this book, you'll be equipped every day to wake up and have a new lease on life. You'll see each morning as a fresh start and chance to improve on what you've already accomplished, to try new things, to be brave, and to take risks. You'll want to nurture the relationships in your life and remember that people really make all the difference. You'll be able to show that you care, both at work and in your personal life, and can reap the benefits that come from doing so. Most of all, you'll be inspired to have fun in both your professional and personal life. You'll want to toast along with me to a fabulous career and the joys that are waiting for us tomorrow.

One last note before we begin: the pillars of smiling and focusing on relationships that I mentioned were not my own inventions. I owe those teachings to my father, who showed me through his example

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and the conversations we had about how to be kind, how to treat others, and how to work hard. As you read on, you'll learn more about the impact he had on me, my life, and my career.

For now, I want you to know that Dad would want me to always smile. That was his wish, and that's what I do today. I hope that after reading this book, you'll do the same.





PART ONE

BELIEVE



CHAPTER ONE

A PRICELESS FOUNDATION

After owning and operating a pizza franchise called Pizza Pete, my dad went on a new venture. He sold the chain, cashed out life insurance policies, and together with my mom opened an Italian restaurant in a suburb of Seattle in his midforties. He started the venture with my stepmom, who had an Italian background. The menu was family-style and delicious, and the menu included pizza that was based on a recipe he had spent years refining.

For the first three weeks of business, the place was empty. Seeing that no one was coming in, Dad decided to try something else. He ran some ads, even though funds for the place were tight at the time. In fact, my parents had borrowed money from my grandparents to buy the restaurant. There was a lot of risk riding on the eatery. No one could guarantee it would generate an income, let alone enough to live on.

As it turned out, Dad's marketing efforts were successful. People came, and the place buzzed with activity. Dad was able to pay off the loan he had taken from my grandparents in the first year of the pizza

business. He and my stepmom ran it for the following twenty years. Eventually, he sold it to his manager when he was sixty years old on a ten-year personal loan to the manager.

I had some of my first lessons in business with Dad at Pizza Pete, the franchise he owned and operated prior to starting the Italian restaurant Aversano's. He was involved with Pizza Pete about fifteen years before opening the new restaurant. I started working there when I was fifteen years old. By then, I had already done some other jobs and discovered what it was like to work toward accomplishing goals. In every setting, Dad taught me so much, and his teaching expanded beyond the restaurant. He showed me what it meant to work hard to find time for people in your life and to always be kind to everyone.

The Value of Hard Work

My parents divorced when I was just seven years old, which was not very common in my area at that time. Both went on to remarry and live different lives, and I loved the two sets of parents I had in my life. My stepfather was a Renaissance man and very successful in what he did. Dad worked so hard, and he instilled in me the importance of going after a goal, even when it's challenging.

Drawing on these examples, I started working at an early age. And when I took on something, I always wanted to do my best and get the prize. I loved winning. My first business experience involved selling Camp Fire Girl mints in my neighborhood. They tasted pretty great, and I learned I could run faster than any of the girls in the neighborhood. I sold the most cookies of everyone! I did this starting at age ten and continued until I was twelve years old. I loved getting the badges and honors that followed those sales.

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When I was about ten years old, my mom sent me and my sister to the strawberry fields during the summer to work. We would get on a bus and take it to the strawberry farm, where we would pick berries and get money for the baskets that we filled. I did that for two summers, and then I started looking for something else.

At age twelve, I decided to start a babysitting business that I ran on my bike. I would ride around the neighborhood and book appointments with anyone who needed help. In addition to babysitting, I was soon asked to do other odd jobs like ironing. Business went so well that I booked gigs from morning to night and even worked weekends all summer long. My parents opened a savings account for me, and I had to put half of my earnings into the account. Even with setting aside much of my pay, I made enough to get some fun purchases for myself.

FINDING TIME FOR RELATIONSHIPS

My parents, and especially Dad, worked long hours and had to oversee detailed operations with very few breaks. Despite the commitment he had to the restaurant to keep it running and make sure it was profitable, he always made time for his family. He consistently would check to see that my sister and I were happy. He loved to sit and talk to us whenever he could.

During these times together, he never spoke a negative word. Instead, he would treat us well, and sometimes he would take me and my sister on adventures or to partake in fun activities together. He would often drive us to our grandparents' house, and I grew close to those relatives as a result. Dad also taught us to play miniature golf and to enjoy life's treats, like indulging in cotton candy.

BEING NICE TO EVERYONE

During my freshman year of high school, I decided that I wanted to be a cheerleader. When my dad first heard about my idea, he didn't want me to try out. Instead, he took me to Ocean Shores, a beach in Washington, and sat me down for a talk.

He started by explaining his reason for being against me being a part of the team. "The cheerleaders I knew," he began, "were not very nice." He paused and then continued, "Listen, honey, you can try out. I'll let you do it, because you'll probably make it on the squad. But you have to promise me that you'll always be nice to everyone in school. You will smile, and you'll be pleasant."

I did try out, and as Dad predicted, I made the cheerleading team. I was friends with other girls in the group, and I followed Dad's advice. I made sure I was nice to everyone and remained positive, even when practices were tough.

After I joined the team, Dad had more words to share with me. "Don't get into trouble," he said, "because I don't have time to deal with it. I work too hard." I followed this guidance as well.

Learning at the Restaurant

While I was in high school, and after I landed the cheerleading position, Dad let me have a job at one of the restaurants in his pizza chain, Pizza Pete. I was fifteen years old, and when summer rolled around, I lived with him for the summer months of break. I divided my time between cheerleading and working at the restaurant.

I was thrilled to have a job there, and I was ready to see what Dad would ask me to do. As it turned out, he had a system for new hires, much like a training program, to introduce staff members to the operations and customer service staff. At first, I worked in the table

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section. I greeted customers and showed them to their tables. Then I picked up dishes and took them to the back, where they would be washed. That lasted for about a month, and after that, I graduated to the cash register.

I was very excited to be able to count the money and did so at the beginning of my evening shift and also at night when the restaurant closed. The following month, I moved to the pizza counter and learned how to make the pies with just the right amount of ingredients. Dad always watched carefully to make sure that the correct portions were given, to keep the cost of goods from going too high.

I loved my time at the restaurant. It was fun to learn how to work, to be with Dad, and to watch my earnings. I had a bank account and a savings account, and I kept an eye on them as they increased. I knew then that business thrilled me, and I would follow that course for my long-term career.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR ACHIEVEMENT

Later in high school, I decided I wanted to be on the homecoming court. My dad wanted to see me achieve this goal too. There was one problem though. According to the school's government council, you couldn't be nominated to be on the court if you were a cheerleader. If I wanted to accomplish my goal of being part of the homecoming royalty, I would first have to change the school's policy.

So, following Dad's example of taking risks and pushing forward, I got on the government council. I worked with others to help change the policy and allow cheerleaders to get nominated. We were able to get a new rule in place that made it possible for cheerleaders to be on the homecoming court. When the time for the big event came, I was nominated and became one of the princesses on the court. It was a big win for me, and I couldn't wait to be on the float for the parade

with the other royalty. Dad came to watch the float and the game for homecoming that year. He was so happy and proud of me and knew what I had done to get there. It became a special event for both of us.

One time, during high school, there was a contest to write a speech about our dads. Every entry was to have the title “Why My Dad Is Number One.” Our writings were to reflect why we admired our fathers and what we appreciated about them. I decided to contribute and went up against the six hundred other students at the school. After we submitted the speeches, we were invited to come to an event where they would read the winning one.

The night of the contest final, I didn’t know if Dad would be able to make it. He had broken his ankle while working at a restaurant he had just purchased. I went to the event with my sister, and we waited to see if Dad would arrive. Soon, we saw him come in on crutches. He had made it (I should have known—he always made it to our special events).

The audience quieted as the speaker prepared to read the winning speech. We listened intently along with the crowd. Then I heard the words that were being read, and I knew ... it was the one I wrote about my dad. I had included how he always made time for us and encouraged us to follow our dreams. My writing had won—but really, Dad had won it for being the best dad he could be.

That speech really became the theme of my life in the years that followed. As I chased my career dreams, moved around the country, and went after positions of leadership, Dad was always beside and behind me. I called him once a week for years, and we regularly got together.

When he retired from the pizza business, Dad found new hobbies to enjoy, including a love for golf. He kept a vegetable garden and also took a liking to dahlias, which are beautiful and colorful perennials. His work ethic was still strong from his restaurant days, and he stayed

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active for many years. At one point, he planted five hundred dahlias in his front yard, and the result was gorgeous. He became such a master at gardening that his flowers won awards. He often participated in the Puyallup Fair in Washington, where his dahlia flowers won ribbons. (If he didn't get all first-place prizes at a fair, he was distraught!)

Even as I became very busy with my career (and I'll cover those experiences more in the coming chapters) and traveled frequently, I kept in touch with Dad. He was always eager for news from me. He continued to be a source of encouragement for me, and our relationship strengthened even more over the years.

When I visited his home and beautiful yard, I would always bring some Merlot wine for him. Merlot was his favorite. We would then sit together in his home in the Seattle area and sip a drink while we talked about life, his garden, work, and everything in between. He always wanted to know how my work was going, and he was a constant support for me. He would assure me he loved me and let me know that I would be able to make it through whatever challenges lay ahead.

Sadly, Dad passed away in October 2020 at age eighty-nine. And yet, part of him is still with me. He was such an important figure in my life and showed me how to work hard and to keep relationships in the forefront. To this day, I can still hear the way he ended our phone conversations by saying, "Honey, I love you, and I'm so proud of you."

Everything that I've accomplished stems from the upbringing I had and the role models in my life who set a path to follow. Dad instructed me to be kind to others (and not take on poor habits as a cheerleader!), and I try to do that every day, with everyone in my life. I don't take relationships for granted, and I value the people on my team.

In a way, this book is my way of sharing his message with you, dear reader. As you go through life, as you take on new positions and

look to move up, I encourage you to look for opportunities, to make the leap, to work hard, and above all, to remember that people matter. Lead with heart, and you'll be able to achieve big wins in work and in life.

Key Takeaways

- Striving for a goal often requires hours of hard work, and it's not always clear how the end will turn out. If you go after the win and commit to making it work, your chances of success will increase.
- While working hard is a key component to getting ahead, it's also important to find those moments when you can step back, slow down, and be with the people you love.
- Even when it's tough, being kind to others provides the assurance that you're putting in the effort to present yourself well and gives others the opportunity to establish a relationship with you.
- Achieving goals like starting a restaurant or moving up in your career often comes with a future that is unknown. Believe that you can give it your best, and then get ready to see the results that follow.