

BUSINESS TOOLS

INSIGHTS

What steps do you take to avoid employee burnout?

"We like to get in and figure out what people are learning, what they want to learn and train them in a new skill. The biggest thing for us is we try to transfer that knowledge. We look at what motivates them and what gets them going internally, aligning them with how they prefer to behave. We do that by getting them in the right role."

"We are very active in employee wellness. We have drawings for employees on their anniversary dates. We had them doing this thing where an employee has an opportunity to receive a \$1,000 gift card. Knowing some of the economic challenges employees have, we want to create those types of opportunities for them."

"We have very strong teams as a result of attracting and retaining the best consultants to our company. Because of strong teams, each member can be counted on to pull their own weight. As part of this culture, our leaders practice servant leadership, and that means leaders serve the employees they lead, including proactively working with team members to deal with issues of job satisfaction."

Eric Guy, chief victory officer, Center for Victory

John R. Dickson IV, president and CEO, Redstone Presbyterian SeniorCare



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Rick Newton, president, Newton Consulting LLC

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—BY JENNIFER CURRY

Uncle Jimmy finds right partner to expand brand

BY MALIA SPENCER

It took someone with more than a decade in the candy business to help Jim Urbanski commercialize the horse treat he cooked up one day in his kitchen.

The unusual partnership worked, and the company it spawned is gaining a foothold in the \$2 billion horse product and services industry, with the cofounders setting their sights on the larger pet product market.

The story of Uncle Jimmy's Brand products started when Urbanski teamed with Tom Joseph Jr., owner of New Castle Candy Co., to use the confectioner's equipment and deep sugar knowledge to make the treats, designed to fight stall boredom.

The treats are a mix of grains and a special sugar that produce something resembling the size and hardness of a bowling ball. They are hung in stalls and keep horses occupied.

"Anytime a horse is in a stall for very long they get antsy," said Urbanski, an avid horseman.

An antsy horse will find unhealthy activities like pacing or chewing on wood. And Urbanski, who owns seven horses, knows the horse set will spend money on a solution.

The pairing of candyman and horseman is paying off. Following the success of the first horse treat, the duo created two more treats for horses, plus a product for chickens and the most recent, a cake mix for dogs. Uncle Jimmy's has 30 unique products distributed in about 20 countries through an estimated 4,000 distributors, said Tom Joseph III, vice president of Uncle Jimmy's Brand.



JOE WILKIN

Uncle Jimmy's Brand cofounders Tom Joseph Jr., left, and Jim Urbanski, are continuing to expand their line of animal products.

It's been so successful that, six months ago, Joseph and New Castle Candy Co. got out of the candy business to focus exclusively on Uncle Jimmy's products.

"We did know before we launched that it was a great product," the elder Joseph said of the first horse treat. "We had a lot of confidence if we could get it in the hands of horse owners, they would run with it."

So far this year, Uncle Jimmy's has seen 43 percent growth from last year, and that is on top of more than 55 percent year-over-year growth in 2010, said Tom

Joseph III.

There were other products on the market designed to fight horse boredom, but they didn't last long enough, Urbanski said.

"(The existing product) is aerated sugar, and if (horses) can get it, they crack it and it will go away in 20 minutes," he said, explaining why he started tinkering in the first place. "Ours, you can throw off a building and it won't break, and if you keep it pinned, the ball will last three weeks."

In addition to the unique sugar and cooking knowledge Joseph brought, his former candy company

Uncle Jimmy's Brand

Horse treats and other animal products

BASED: New Castle

FOUNDED: 2006

EMPLOYEES: 13 to 15

REVENUE: \$1 million

WEB SITE: www.uncle-jimmys.com

■ **CHALLENGE:** Create a sustainable business based on an idea cooked up in the kitchen.

■ **SOLUTION:** Team with a partner with complementary skills.

also had the capital equipment needed to allow Uncle Jimmy's to scale fast with minimal cost.

Ann Dugan, founder of the Institute for Entrepreneurial Excellence at the University of Pittsburgh, noted the lucky combination of Joseph and Urbanski isn't always easy to find, but as an entrepreneur is starting a business, the capabilities of the early team must be thought out.

It also takes brutal honesty to know not only your weaknesses but your strengths.

"Don't duplicate yourself," Dugan said. "In the strategic plan, (include) what are the characteristics that I need and that I am weak in, and that will be of strategic value to the company."

This value can take many forms. In Uncle Jimmy's case, it was market and technical knowledge from each of the two founders. It also can be customer relationships, network connections, or even geographic location, she said.

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Lessons from drumming can help you keep a steady sales beat

When you see drums and selling together, you don't see a logical fit.

I didn't either, until I thought about what was behind them.



AT YOUR SERVICE

Hal Becker

My profession is a sales consultant. My responsibilities are to consult with companies and senior staff, assess their situation and improve the sales process. That can be a total reorganization or simply training.

It is the only thing that I have ever been really good at doing in my entire life. That includes hobbies.

One of those is drumming.

I bought my first set of drums in 1968. I have never been a good drummer. I played in wedding bands to pay for college tuition, and that was the end of my "live performances."

In the past year, two bands asked me to sit in and play. In both cases, I wasn't that good. I knew it, and they really knew it!

The problem here is that I was enjoying myself, and it was a blast to play music and watch people dance or sing along.

The drummer is the backbone of any band and must keep a strong steady beat. I needed help, and I wanted to improve.

During the past year, I took lessons and constantly practiced so I could at least go from a C-minus to a solid B musician. The amazing

part is you are never too old to learn.

What happened was simple and profound: I actually became a better drummer.

It felt good, and the band members also could see it. When they do not look at you and tell you about the tempo being too fast or too slow, you know you found the right beat.

I am invisible now, which is what you want. No one is giving me the "evil eye."

Why the personal story? If you want to excel at anything, including your chosen profession, why not learn, practice and gain proficiency? Everybody wins, especially you.

HAL BECKER (halbecker.com) is an author and trainer in sales and customer service.