

Teenage Entrepreneur to Business Mogul: the Journey of a Junkman

by Sandy Struss

Have you ever wondered how some business ideas come to life? How does a company or brand become a household name? And why is it that many (if not most) of the world's greatest business leaders were first mocked in the beginning and told they were crazy?

The ideas and businesses that change the world and how we live and operate in it have something in common: **a leader with uncommon vision.** Such is the case with a certain junk removal service you may have heard of...



1-800-GOT-JUNK? and its founder, Brian Scudamore.

If you were to look at his resume, it would show that he is a two-time dropout without a diploma to his name. But he always had an entrepreneurial streak, even as a child – running a paper route at age 9, a car wash in front of his house at age 11, and a school store inside his boarding school's dorm at age 14. Business was just intuitively obvious to him, although his marks in school certainly didn't reflect the success that was in store for his future.

The idea which would become his life's work began back in 1989 in the line-up of a McDonald's drive-thru. Brian was just 18 when he spotted a beat-up old truck with "Mark's Hauling" painted on the side and said to himself, "I can do that – and I can do it better!" **While others may have just seen "junk," Brian saw opportunity.** Nobody had ever "branded" junk removal before! He took a chance with \$700 and

bought a used pick-up truck, built plywood sides and painted "738-JUNK" on it. He called his new company "The Rubbish Boys" and even created a slogan, "We'll Stash Your Trash in a Flash."

What started off as a summer business eventually got so busy that Brian left university to become a full time 'junkman'- a decision that did not go over well with his parents, to say the least, but Brian knew he was on to something.

Every entrepreneur faces fear, doubt, and opposition in the early days – and inevitably has to learn things the hard way. This was no different for Brian, as it took many years of trial & error and fine-tuning with systems and getting the right team together before he could create an expansion model that would work.

A drastic decision came in 1995 when the company had grown to a reasonable size and Brian took a hard look at the people working with him. The company was doing all right, but the company *culture* felt absolutely wrong. His truck team drivers were unmotivated; his office staff were catty and the overall culture was not what he wanted it to be – so in a bold move, Brian let every single person in the company go and began to rebuild on his own. He started again from scratch, working in the trucks again himself, and gained a key distinction that would forever alter the future of his business: ***it's all about people.***

It was a defining moment. He spent the next five months tirelessly interviewing and bringing on board the most positive, motivated people that he knew would take his company from good to great, and who would share his vision of becoming 'the Fedex of junk removal.' To this day, the company still operates with the same philosophy of "We don't *motivate* our people. *We hire people who are motivated!*"

The next major turning point came in 1998 when the company went from being “the Rubbish Boys” to 1-800-GOT-JUNK? and adopted a franchising expansion model. Brian set a goal of expanding his company to the top 30 metropolitan centers of North America by the end of 2003 (an ambitious goal over 5 years!), and created a “painted picture” document of what his company would look like, what it would feel like to work there, and what accomplishments they would have under their belt by that time.



In two pages, it described a vision in vivid detail – a company culture driven by fun; a fleet of clean, shiny trucks that would act as moving billboards; a team of drivers and staff that took pride in providing world class service; and even being featured on *Oprah*! The very act of painting such a bold vision for the future and sharing it with everyone helped to align their efforts and energy in order to map out what was needed to do in order to reach the end game. They succeeded...including the crowning media achievement of having a 4&1/2 minute story on Brian and his company featured on *Oprah* in March 2003...9 months ahead of schedule!

The company has continued to push the limits of possibility with hyper-growth year over year and continuing audacious goals, all the while maintaining the same sense of fun and pride that made it successful. 1-800-GOT-JUNK? currently has more than 300 franchises operating in 4 countries and over \$100 million in system wide sales, and the projection is to be a billion dollar company by 2012.

There are endless stories that could be told about this company – its hiring practices, its daily “Huddle”, its “Can You Imagine?” wall, its open concept office space, its commitment to give back to the communities where it operates, its crazy marketing stunts – it’s the stuff legends are made of and business cases are written about. But perhaps the greatest lesson here for all of us is to never doubt the power and momentum of a determined group of people with a shared vision who dare to THINK BIG.

Given the company’s success now, it seems hard to imagine that junk could actually be such big business.

And it was once just an idea by a kid in overalls.



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