

CHIR RADIO STATION

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Feature Mr. Goudas latest story

It stands to reason that the demand for a particular group of products will rise if the products are of high quality, and the management pays particular attention to what its customers want. It also follows that the company will experience some growth as a result. This is precisely what happened to Goudas Foods in the late 80s and early 90s.

The firm entered into a partnership for production with a number of factories around the world - in countries like Thailand, Pakistan, India, Malaysia, China, Brazil, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Peru, Ivory Coast, Sri Lanka, Greece and Canada. As part of this deserved expansion, Goudas Foods changed its location from the south of Toronto, to a much larger facility in the north of the city.

Such impressive growth and accomplishment does not go unrecognized for long. In October 1993, Peter Goudas won the New Canadian Entrepreneur of the Year Award at an awards ceremony at the Toronto Westin Harbour Castle Hotel. The award was presented by the National Council of Ethnic Canadian Business and Professional Associations (Toronto Chapter) and the Federal Business Development Bank. It was the highlight of the evening, during which the presenter noted that, "...Goudas imports, prepares and packages some 350 products around the world, and distributes them to many chain stores in Canada...."

Goudas contributes much to many ethnic communities in the form of foods and support for community events, school graduations and senior citizens, and sponsors numerous ethnic radio and television programs."

Goudas came up to the stage to accept the award, and joked about hearing the Greek national anthem in the background as he was leaving his seat. This, of course, was his subtle way of saying that, though he is not from Peru or Pakistan as some people think, he is still an immigrant.

At the podium, he thanked all his suppliers, the bank, his workers, and all the millions of consumers who buy his products.

Then he spoke about the accident he had in 1979 when he slipped on a patch of ice, broke a leg bone, ended up in the hospital, and as a consequence almost lost his business. He related how municipal government bailiff; George Hall later came by his office to seize his factory for non-payment of taxes.

"I thought that was the end of the world. The gentleman sat down for a few minutes, and talked with me. And finally he gave me the encouragement to fight and stay in business.... 14 years later...this gentleman is a great friend of mine, and he helped me to be whatever I am today." Goudas then surprised the entire gathering by saying, "I would like him to come and accept this award with me.

We did this together."

It was a very emotionally charged moment, and it constituted further proof the immense generosity of Peter Goudas. George Hall, 72

at the time, leaning on his cane, slowly came up to the podium, tears streaming down his face. "If this were a court of law, and I was asked to be a character witness for this fellow, I would be very happy," Hall said. "I know all of the good character features that you have. I am very happy. I wasn't expecting this - to be called upon to congratulate you, and those who chose you in their wisdom."

The people who selected him had considered the following criteria for giving the award:

- 1) that the winner creates his own business, little needed to be said about Goudas on this count.
- 2) That the winner demonstrates a degree of innovation. Goudas clearly was outstanding here. He created products that were never packaged or produced or distributed in Canada, such as jack fruit, papaya, and guava, and many more.
- 3) That the winner makes an impact on the industry. There is no doubt that Goudas Foods made a tremendous impact on the food industry: when Goudas began, Canadian supermarkets were not ready to accept the items he was offering. It required a great deal of convincing to get them to accept the products.
- 4) The winner should be someone who gives back to the community. Here, again, it is easily understood why the judges selected Goudas. His numerous activities in the community are well-known: he supports the Miss Black Ontario contest, he sponsored the ethnic

radio programs like CHIR and CHIK, puts on Christmas events for children supports children's graduations, supports senior citizen's organizations, and a number of other non-profit organizations such as the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Association of Toronto, the Jamaican Canadian Association, the Guyanese Heritage and Cultural Association, and the Beverley Mascoll Community Foundation, The Hellenic Home for the Aged, and many more.

Winning the Entrepreneur of the Year Award galvanized Goudas, and he moved quickly to put to good use all that publicity.

"After careful consideration," he says, "I decided that the best approach would be to improve the quality of the products, and try to make them even better than they already were." He decided that everything he produced had to be the very best grade, not just at source, but also in the way it was packaged and canned.

"I instructed my quality control people that, from that moment, nothing short of the best was good enough for my products."

The consumers are obviously the true judges of any improvements, and they pronounced their verdict very quickly--sales of Goudas products increased daily in response to all the positive changes. Many chain stores began to establish international sections that carried mainly Goudas Foods, along with the products of companies like S & F Foods, Young and Young, Aurora, Montini, B.K. Sethi, Vinga, Bedessee, Unico and Sardo Foods

and many other ethnic suppliers.

David Goodbaum is Vice-president of Price Choppers in Toronto. He says the ethnic food market represents a good 40% of their products. "The ethnic food market has grown exponentially in the last few years," says Goodbaum.

"We are meeting the challenge of a more diverse ethnic food market through having someone devoted exclusively to that. We are also doing a lot more micro marketing. That means we are creating flyers that are geared toward a specific store, targeting a specific ethnic market." According to Goodbaum, Goudas Foods represents about 60% of the ethnic food market in Price Choppers' stores.

The Goudas brand sells well, says Goodbaum, "because Peter has been doing it a long time, he's got a wide variety, and it's always been a quality offering. And he's worked hard at it; he's got a very hard working and knowledgeable sales force."

Obviously the Price Choppers management have done their homework and studied this market very carefully because their stores have experienced phenomenal growth over the last few years, and so has Food Basics who came from nothing a few years ago to be a major force in the market.

These companies saw the opportunities in the exploding ethnic food market and capitalized on it. They focused on developing their business based on what the customer wanted by providing them with well known and established brand names, instead of trying to

propagate a house brand or an unknown brand that the customers were not familiar or comfortable with. Just as there are specialists in each profession, there are specialists in food, and it's not simply a matter of putting product in a can and slapping your label on it. Just look at what happened to Marks & Spencers who tried to sell only their brands in their stores and ended up closing their stores in North America and Europe.

Because the ethnic complexion of Toronto was changing, Goudas went a step further with the foods he was producing. He started to make ethnic soups that would taste no different from the soups made in the country of origin.

In other words, he started to make soups that made little concession to the taste buds of Canadians, but that faithfully reflected the tastes of the country the recipe came from.

"When making Spanish soup, I made sure that Spanish people like it," he says. "If other groups want to buy the soup, fine, but as long as I am satisfied that people from the soup's country like it, then I am very happy." To do this, he had, for instance, Sri Lankan people living in Canada come and taste his Sri Lankan soups to ensure that he had the taste just right.

He also increased the variety of oils to include olive oil, sesame oil, sunflower, canola and soya oil. He brought in rice from many parts of the world, including the TAI-TAI brand rice from Thailand, considered to be one of the best scented rice in the world.

He went to the prime sources to get most of his fruits and vegetables. If a particular olive is best made in Greece for example, he went there to get it because his focus was not on how cheaply he could buy a product was, but rather how good it was, and this is just one of countless examples. On the Snappy pop, for each flavour, he spent more than 6 months like a chemist, mixing and tasting over and over again until he achieved the exact flavour that he wanted.

Today, the formula for Snappy pop is the same as it was 30 years ago but the ingredients now have to be sourced from a number of countries. Originally, he only had about three types of canned beans: red kidney, chickpeas and Romano beans. But today he has 32 varieties, which include soya beans, said to be useful to women who suffer from certain cancers, and fava beans (broad beans) also said to be helpful to people who suffer from Parkinson's disease.

Despite their appearance, canning beans is a very complex task if you want to have a proper product for your customer. For example, Mr. Goudas examines the beans for appearance, blemishes, size, texture, taste, skin defects, heating penetration etc. before giving the go ahead to can it.

Some beans have to be transported on air cushioned trucks with padded skids to minimize any skin defects during transportation, because Goudas believes that to get a good product out, you have to put a good product in. Goudas also brought in bitter cucumber, also known as Karalla, which has medicinal value because it contains a substance

similar in effect to insulin. He also tried to balance the flavor of his pepper sauces and create a variety.

For instance he had papaya as an ingredient in one and banana as an ingredient in another to balance the hotness and the enjoyment.

Then he created the Ready to Eat Food Line, such as spinach and rice, leek and rice, beans and potato, and many more.

In 1997, Peter Goudas' 30th year in Canada, one of his senior employees invited him to visit a supermarket on a Sunday afternoon, to see how the products looked on the shelves.

As a rule Goudas does not go to any supermarkets and had not been in the doors of one for many years, so it took a lot of persuasion to get him to go.

When he arrived at the store, he found about 500 people waiting there, all of whom were people associated with his business in one way or another from around the world. It was a surprise party of suppliers and employees, and he did not have a clue anyone was planning one!

In the middle of 1999, the Canadian government stopped the importation of dairy products (rice pudding and custard.) because of health issues. Goudas rose to the occasion, spending an enormous amount of time and money to develop and produce these products in Canada.

Currently he produces custard, regular rice pudding, as well as rice pudding with almond and raisins, and rice pudding with peach. Goudas is also recreating the labels on his products to make

them more attractive.

Right now he is working on putting the essence of the canned fruit or vegetable on the label; this wonderful innovation will allow a customer to know what the fruit smells like even before opening the can, and a customer walking along the aisles in a supermarket will know that the item is in the neighborhood even before seeing it. Goudas is working on this innovation to make shopping more helpful to the blind.

This was initiated after an encounter with a blind person. He made a gift of some canned food to her, as is his custom, and he noticed that the first thing she did was rub her fingers on the top of the can, trying to feel the embossed can codes. He then realized that with the new system of inkjet printing of these codes on the cans, the blind would have no way of checking this information. So he embarked on this project on their behalf.

He has put a lot of effort on this project, and has expressed a desire to complete his mission before he closes his eyes permanently.

One of the more interesting developments at Goudas Foods is that Peter Goudas has brought his son Panos into the business.

Panos has been placed in an intensive learning program that has him working on mastering various aspects of the business.

It is not altogether correct to say that this is a new development since Panos has grown up with Goudas foods: since he was a toddler.

He spent a great deal of time with his father in the office, and absorbed a lot of knowledge about accounting, manufacturing, and how to meet with suppliers and corporate people.

A student of International Business, his experience has become very valuable to Goudas.

Right now, he handles such things as the importation of goods, costing, letters of credit and the office administration procedures.

“I enjoy working with my father because we have a good relationship,” says Panos.

“He’s taught me a lot about the firm. I have a solid understanding of how the company is being run.”

There is no doubt that with Peter Goudas at the helm and Panos supporting him, Goudas Foods will remain at the top of the international food market for a long time to come.

Note from the author:

Today, Peter Goudas and Goudas Foods enjoy immense popularity in the market.

But this was not an overnight accomplishment and life has not been “Peaches and Cream” for him.

He has seen highs and lows, looked at financial ruin in its face, and persevered despite the tremendous odds against him.

Please refer to the other articles on this web site to share the ups and downs in the career of Peter Spyros Goudas

(Σπύρος Πήτερ Γούδας).