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MALCOLM STOGO BELIEVES IN LUCK AND BEING IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME AND TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION

He has told this story many times because when one is young, getting to where one wants to be needs encouragement, and luck sure helps.

My ice cream career covers nearly 40 years of experience as a retail operator, consultant to the ice cream world, and now CEO/President of Fal Foods Worldwide. But how I got to where I am today is a long story that I would like to share with many future entrepreneurs. For the most part, it's a lot of hard work getting to a place where experience really pays off, but luck and being in the right place and taking advantage of it is really the central part of this story.

An article published in the NEW YORK TIMES July 14, 2002 tells, for the most part, the story of how luck played such a central part in my growth. So, read on...

"Malcolm Stogo's professional opportunity in ice cream started back in 1978 when the ice cream store next to his restaurant, Another Someplace Different, in Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia went out of business, and Malcolm decided to make ice cream in the restaurant. It was a huge success. His daughter Emily, then 5 years old, cracked and separated the eggs, and the base French ice cream custard mix was prepared on the stove. The ice cream was sold under the name Malcolm's Homemade. It caught on real fast. Malcolm increased production and began distributing the ice cream in pint containers to retail specialty gourmet shops like Ashbourne Gourmet in Jenkintown, Pa. "Before we knew," Mr Stogo said, "we had all these new accounts."

Mr Stogo decided to focus exclusively on ice cream, because he said, "making ice cream was fun". In 1981 Mr. Stogo moved to New York. He formed a partnership with Bobby Shapiro, the owner of many New York restaurants in Manhattan. They opened Ice Cream Extravaganza in the Fulton Street Market Building adjacent to the South Street Seaport, selling ice cream made on the premises.

"Within three years it became the highest grossing ice cream shop (\$1.5 million) in the U.S." Mr. Stogo is credited with inventing the dipped chocolate waffle cone there. It was pure luck.

In 1988, after six years in business, Mr. Stogo and Mr. Shapiro were bought out by their landlord in order to renovate the building. Mr. Stogo decided to become a consultant and write a book, neither of which he knew much about.

He began by writing a letter to William Spoons, the Chairman of the Board of the Pillsbury Company, which owned Haagen-Dazs, telling him that their ice cream was terrible, their stores were disgusting looking, and that they should sell him their stores or hire him as a consultant to fix them.

“Three weeks later I get a letter from the vice chairman of the board, telling me that they don’t think their stores are terrible and their ice cream is fine.” Mr. Stogo said, “but if I could help them, I should contact the President of Haagen-Dazs.” He did.

Ben Silloway, former executive vice president for the Haagen-Dazs Company, in charge of franchise shops in the United States, recalled the conversation. He said the look and the merchandising of the shops weren’t as sharp and up-to-date as they should be given the strength and cachet of the Haagen-Daz brand. Mr Silloway said, “He was criticizing but he was constructive. I found myself agreeing with a lot of the things he was saying.”

Mr. Silloway, who eventually offered Mr. Stogo a consulting job, said “He was an operator in his youth and he absolutely knew the business from the grassroots level.” Eight years later Mr. Silloway told Mr. Stogo that he felt sorry for him when they first met because he knew himself how hard it is getting a consulting job. Mr. Silloway even let Mr. Stogo fix his own consulting pay price to the first contract. Now that’s luck!

And that is how I got my first consulting job, a lot of luck and being in the right place at the right time. (And having the knowledge to back me up.)