



Book Berried in Chocolate

How I Built a Multimillion-Dollar Business by Doing What I Love to Do and How You Can Too

Shari Fitzpatrick
Pelican Publishing, 2011

Recommendation

Shari Fitzpatrick, also known as the “Strawberry Lady,” oozes enthusiasm, optimism and sugary wisdom. With dozens of personal anecdotes describing her business journey, her background, and even her faith and favorite recipes, Fitzpatrick’s accessible, enjoyable tale provides basic business advice that could help almost any small business. As a former broker with little more than \$1,500 and some big ideas about chocolate-dipped strawberries, Fitzpatrick founded Shari’s Berries, a multimillion-dollar business based on unique edible gifts. In her breezy book, she explains how she succeeded. She comes across as a fun, grounded, hardworking businessperson who would be charming to meet. As a result, her story – which targets newcomers to the business world, particularly women – is more of a pep talk than a dose of serious advice, though she details the quite serious loss of her original company. Since publication, her spinoff firm, The Berry Factory, also filed for bankruptcy protection. That news may detract a bit from the book’s lessons, although Fitzpatrick’s cheerful stories and warm approach to life and work should prove inspirational to most readers. And she’s right about always having a good lawyer and plenty of chocolate. *BooksInShort* suggests her saga to budding entrepreneurs and small-business owners.

Take-Aways

- To succeed, build your business around your life’s passion.
- Pay attention to what brings you joy in your life or your job. Consider what you loved as a child, and find a way to create the same feelings.
- To define your path, remember your earliest lessons: Always work hard, be responsible and be honest.
- Think constantly and creatively as a marketer. Don’t miss any promotional opportunity.
- Distinguish your business with superior quality, a unique product and exceptional customer service.
- Give gifts, and go out of your way to thank your employees, suppliers, and customers. Investments in appreciation always produce dividends.
- Believe and trust in yourself. And once you’ve done a little preparation, don’t delay. Jump into your new life as an entrepreneur.
- Hire good help – part-timers or interns, if necessary; you shouldn’t do it all alone.
- Learn from your mistakes; they’ll teach you more than your successes.
- Hire good lawyers, and always retain 51% of your business.

Summary

“Do What You Love”

Success starts with passion, so figure out what you love. It might not be exactly what you loved as a kid, but it’s probably pretty close. That’s because it evokes the same feelings as your childhood devotion to horses or knitting or even your current zeal for baking. It’s something you could do all day, think about all day, keep learning about, and enjoy forever. Shari Fitzpatrick, the originator of Shari’s Berries and, later, The Berry Factory, found her passion: dipping strawberries in chocolate, creating beautiful gift baskets, and making other people happy.

“Here’s a secret: life is fun...Laugh more often...Give lots of presents. Eat more strawberries, especially when they’ve been dipped and decorated.”

Be patient as you dream about what your perfect job would be. It won’t always seem obvious, but trying various other jobs along the way will teach you what you like

and don't like. If you pay attention, you can identify the elements of your ideal job. Fitzpatrick worked as a stockbroker and a mortgage broker while spending her spare time filling holiday gift baskets with chocolate-dipped strawberries – and that gave her great joy. When you find your passion, it will be something that fills you with happiness, too, but that doesn't mean that making the move to entrepreneurship will be easy. You'll need to be brave and to know that your enthusiasm and conviction will carry you through. In fact, your zest for what you're doing will be the door to success. Build your bottom line around making people happy, rather than making money, and the profits will follow.

“Look Back to See Ahead”

Remember where you learned your most valuable lessons – probably from your earliest teachers, your parents, grandparents and others who set good examples when you were young. Don't forget those people or their wisdom. Thinking about them will keep you focused on your central ideals while you're bombarded by attractive but off-course alternatives in life and in business. Let your core values be your guiding force. For Fitzpatrick, those values are working hard, being accountable and enjoying life. Her family's teachings kept her course straight and true. She learned that you must work passionately to earn the wherewithal you need. Take care of your cash by saving, but also by spending on what's important. Keep an eye on your own money; don't let someone else oversee it. Financial security is crucial, but don't let it stop you from having fun. Your job includes wisely handling your time as well as your money. Work and play with relish. Thank the people who taught you essential lessons; gratitude makes you feel good.

“Find Your Talent”

Use your creativity to discover your niche. Fitzpatrick felt like the gift industry's “queen of marketing and PR” as she developed new candy ideas, such as “Baseball Berries” and “Jelly Belly Berries.” Let your creativity flow. Listen to everyone. Customers, employees and other businesses all have ideas that can lead to your next great concept. Keep your mind and eyes open. Ideas can come to you at any time, so stay alert. While launching her strawberry business, Fitzpatrick decided to send a personal note and a free box of chocolate-covered berries to celebrities named Barry or Berry. That gift made actress Halle Berry a regular customer. In fact, she sent berries to her friends and family after she won the 2002 Academy Award for Best Actress. Think differently and maybe something exciting will occur to you, too. Don't be afraid of surprises and change; they could generate great results and new energy. Don't hesitate to voice your ideas; sharing takes courage, but it breeds creativity and shows that you want to help others.

“Do It Right”

Quality matters in any product or service, from having great ingredients to offering timely, kind customer interactions. Success is simple, but it isn't easy. Focus on whatever makes your company the best or the most distinctive. Build your customer base by providing the ultimate products or services in your industry. Treat everyone you work with well. Communicate openly. Showing your colleagues that you appreciate them is the way to build something special. Plan and prepare impeccably, especially if you're in a business where timing matters. Fitzpatrick had to have just the right supply of chocolate-dipped strawberries for Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, the busiest delivery times of the year. Don't miss the details. Hire effectively and treat your employees well. They are crucial to your success. Teach them your company's values so they'll enjoy the job as much as you do – and they'll treat your customers like gold. Do whatever it takes to give clients what they want, what they ask for and then some. Be honest. Admit your mistakes, and do what it takes to make them right. Be real and personal. Customers appreciate it, and that should translate into more success.

“Clap Until Your Hands Hurt”

Run your business on the fuel of praise and appreciation. Gifts and compliments show people that you value them. The cost of a gift doesn't matter, but knowing what a person likes and presenting the gift nicely matter a lot. Some people aren't easy to read, so finding out what would make them feel that you care is a challenge. Seeing who someone truly is makes gift-giving easier and more rewarding. Another way to show gratitude is to do the work involved in saying thank you, for instance by writing individual cards to customers, as Fitzpatrick did. Show that you value people by returning their calls promptly and personally. Treat your customers like beloved family members. Treat your employees well and be a team player. Don't be too important to do any job, if needed. Parties, gifts and personal appreciation all authenticate your gratitude. Finally, value yourself, particularly if you're the boss. Buy yourself a gift. Give yourself a vacation. Taking care of yourself and recognizing your hard work is important.

“Have Faith”

Everyone has fears and doubts, but you must find a way to deal with them. Trust is the simple solution. Put your faith in yourself, in your instincts and in a higher power. Others may question your ideas, but if you have confidence that they can work, disregard the naysayers. Believe in your knowledge. You might not be book-smart or have a formal education in your field, but if you rely on your experience and knowledge, you'll go far. Trust who you are. Embrace your reservations about yourself, as well as your strengths.

Start Now

Don't let fear talk you out of starting your business. Just as important, though, don't spend every last penny on an overly ambitious new venture. Make your preparations, and then start slowly and simply. Get a little experience in the field before you strike out on your own. Accept that you will make mistakes. That's why you're starting small, to learn about the industry and work out the kinks. Rely on family members and friends to help you, and use word-of-mouth to get started. Along the way, watch your pennies. Take calculated risks with your finances. Look for good deals, and spell out the details before you sign anything. Save money wherever you can. Expand slowly and wisely. Avoid debt, if possible. Keep your product simple and streamlined, and take a different approach to marketing by trying a little of everything to see what works. Flex your creative muscles, and attempt as many wacky ideas as you can afford. Consider radio advertising. Try anything that gains publicity, even if it requires giving away free products. Be bold. Dream big. Look around for opportunities. Pay attention.

“Get Help and Use It Wisely”

Don't try to do everything yourself. Everything does not need your personal touch. Think creatively to find a way to afford to hire helpers – especially for the tasks you don't enjoy that probably aren't your strengths. This prevents burnout, ensures that chores you dislike still get done properly and frees up your time for doing more of whatever you do well. Delegating improves your success. Farm out unpleasant but necessary parts of the job, whether that means hiring part-time bookkeepers or temporary technical experts. But don't get carried away. Run background checks on anyone you hire. Remain the decision maker. Seek help for challenges like packaging your products. Rather than spending time and energy developing the perfect package, find someone who has already done it. Scrimp where you can, but pay for good advice when you need it.

“Go for the Win-Win”

Whether your business is big or small, focus on marketing. Brand everything. Promote locally by sharing your product or service. Use any and all connections. Cooperative marketing with other firms, particularly big ones your customers patronize, enhances both businesses. With such arrangements, you control your marketing while sharing the benefits. Try to align with big companies, even if it seems impossible. You never know what might happen. Try to get your product into the hands of well-known people – for example, politicians, sports personalities or Hollywood stars. Getting endorsements from public figures is worth more than you'll pay. “People complain about America's ‘celebrity culture,’ but celebrity endorsements can help you.” Writing down your dreams can be an effective way to make them come true. Consider creative ways to get what you want, like trading homes with someone instead of selling and buying. One practical tip: Go to the top when trying to make a deal. You'll simply waste time and effort if you don't speak with the person in charge. Wait for the decision maker, and even if you get no for an answer, at least you'll have an answer.

“Eat Your Mistakes – They're Good for You”

You can learn from your mistakes and missteps; in fact, they can be your biggest teachers. Sometimes, big mistakes come right before big successes, so resolve to keep trying after a daunting failure. To protect yourself, don't spend your resources in areas where you aren't well informed. Take the time to learn. Shortcuts don't pay, and neither does trusting too much. Don't let optimism blind you. Before you bring in new partners or make agreements with other people about your business, spend time checking out their backgrounds and hiring attorneys to protect your interests. “You can't afford not to have good counsel.” Remember the number 51. That's the percentage of your business you must retain to control your company, so hold on to it. When Fitzpatrick made an unwise decision to cede too much of her original company to her partner, she sowed the seeds of her own dismissal from Shari's Berries. “Life is a series of lessons...and many of them are hard,” but you have to stay true to your sense of what's right and what brought you to this point. Sometimes, letting go of the past is the only way forward. When times get tough, take a break to evaluate your life and find a new perspective.

Share Your Success

If you're going to speak to a crowd, prepare well to reduce your anxiety. Use stories, especially funny ones, to capture attention. Make a list on index cards or some other tool to remind you of all the topics you want to mention. Share what you know with others, whether at national seminars or in small groups. Don't let fame, if you achieve it, go to your head. As an entrepreneur, you can become a role model. Look for opportunities to give back that help you, your community and your business. Consider donating a portion of your profits to causes that matter to you. Giving time is even better than giving money. Spending energy gets you more involved, your work helps the organization and your presence teaches important lessons to others.

“Set the Right Priorities”

Remember that your job supports the people in your family, so don't let them suffer because of your business. Mary Kay Ash of Mary Kay Cosmetics said her priorities were “one, God; two, family; and three, work.” Set priorities just as firmly, and dispense with guilt by sticking to them. Trying to do everything well won't be easy or convenient, but following your priorities can make it all worthwhile.

About the Author

Award-winning entrepreneur **Shari Fitzpatrick** founded Shari's Berries and The Berry Factory. She also wrote *Chocolate-Dipped Strawberry Fame*.
