



Lancaster County Leaders: Phil Lapp

From the rural farmlands of Lancaster County to an Entrepreneurial “jet-setting” phase of growing a business, Phil Lapp’s business journey has been one “delicious” ride.

Delicious, in part, because he’s been in the food business – building brands like Auntie Anne’s, “neat” and now Isaac’s Deli. It’s been an interesting journey for Phil and we learned more about this Lancaster County Leader in a recent RBF Executive Forum.

“My personal mission statement is to make a difference in people’s lives. I happen to be a person of faith and I use the business field as my mission field, so to speak. I really enjoy people. I enjoy meeting new people. I’m most comfortable where most people would be

uncomfortable. That’s in rooms full of people they don’t know. I think every interaction matters.”

After a career start at DuPont, Phil and his family moved back to PA and he started working at Auntie Anne’s Pretzels. This wasn’t his first stint with the company, though, because he had worked at one of the first Auntie Anne’s Pretzel stands in high school, going to rodeos, sampling and selling pretzels.

While at Auntie Anne’s he started a fundraising part of the business and created a new revenue channel for the company, which also included



Phil Lapp



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private label work and launching the brand into grocery stores. Phil told the Executive Forum attendees how important that time period was for him, "Sam Beiler was a tremendous leader. I'll give you one quote that I always loved from Sam. He said 'It's easy to criticize, condemn, complain, critique; but find something you're for in life and not against, and passionately work towards advancing what you're for.' He was a great leader. He had a tremendous trust with me, I think. He gave me the resources to really do my job. It was the best experience of my life. It was the best culture I've ever seen."

Phil's next career move was purely entrepreneurial.

"At one point, our two girls became leery of eating meat after seeing some meat processing on a food show and so my wife, who is a scientist, developed a product that mimicked the taste of ground beef. About a year before I left Auntie

Anne's, we're passing this around the dinner table having tacos and my daughter says, 'Mom, this isn't meat, this is neat.' I don't think I said another word the entire meal. I just gazed out the window and had one of those light bulb moments. I thought it was a cute statement. The story was good and the girls kind of liked it."

From that "light bulb" moment on, Phil's marketing instincts kicked in and he started a grass roots effort to see if there was a real product in "neat." He and his wife went to trade shows, sampled in grocery stores, developed the brand story and packaging and were getting great feedback.

"We began to really accelerate things. We didn't have millions of dollars lying around. We raised \$430,000 of cash from friends and family. We hired a VP of sales, a marketing person, and a controller and had a little office in Lancaster city. We began to bring the elements together to create a good brand story. Industry articles were written, my wife Laura went on QVC, we were on national radio shows – we were getting good exposure."

The next three years were a whirlwind for "neat" and resulted in fast growth, contiguous product development and the classic Entrepreneurial problem: cash.

"2015 comes around and we need millions of more dollars. All of

JEFF BLEACHER

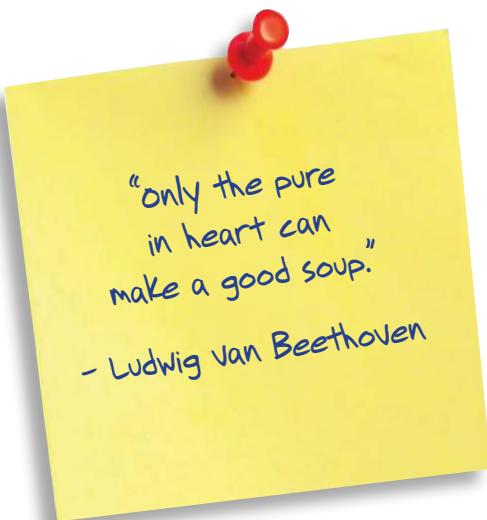


"Phil Lapp has an amazing entrepreneurial spirit and we really appreciated his business story to our Executive Forum. I found him to be completely open and transparent about the challenges he faced, how he approached and resolved them. He painted a realistic picture of the Entrepreneur's Journey and our audience gained so much insight into leadership and business through the sharing of his story."



KEN FALK

"What an incredible story of perseverance, integrity, hard work and staying true to your values in the face of tough times and in the glow of success. We all enjoyed Phil's candor, humor, insight and acknowledgement of how difficult the journey to success can be. Kudos for staying the course and crossing the finish line for the "neat" brand and for continuing to bring our great leadership to our business community."





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a sudden these meat alternatives became super competitive. Bill Gates began to invest in them. The category became saturated.”

Phil and his wife decided it was time to sell and they found a buyer with a reasonable offer. “Selling a business sounds like I can just retire to the islands somewhere. That’s not how this works. They paid off all of our debt. We have a three year tie into the performance of the company and they employ my wife as a brand ambassador. In hindsight, I’d say I survived. I’m not sure that I would say anybody should really go through what we did.”

Currently, Phil is working with Isaac’s Deli overseeing marketing

for all 19 restaurants and menu development. It’s still early in Phil’s work on the Isaac’s brand, but his “stamp” is already showing up in menu changes, new concept exploration and brand refreshment.

“Isaac’s has been around since 1983 and we have decades of brand equity. What we’re doing now, I like to explain it this way: If there’s a safe that has a million dollars of new business in it next year, and that safe has six digits to open it, I think Isaac’s knows and possesses four of those digits. Not going to help, right? It’s like emailing someone and missing one letter. Not going to happen. We have worked really hard to unlock those two last digits. They’re totally new, totally different and if we understand them, implement them and crack the code on the safe, we are going to open up a whole new area.”

Knowing Phil and his track record, we think he’s the right person to crack the code!

JEFF GROFF

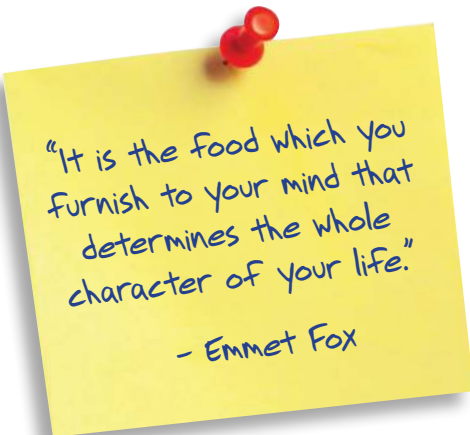


“Phil shared so many insights with us that are of value to Entrepreneurs and really everyone in business. His ability to tell his story with such transparency and to give us the ‘real deal’ insight into the ups and downs of a business career was inspiring. Our community is better off with him in it and we applaud his new efforts at Isaac’s.”

PATRICK GENDRUE



“A fascinating journey through the business world was shared by Phil Lapp to our Executive Forum and we are all wiser and inspired because of the depth of what he shared with us. I am impressed by his tenacity to ‘crack the brand code’ and his ability to get at the ‘gold’ in telling the story or a product or brand. Phil has a real talent in sharing his story and in being a leader in the community.”



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