

DREAMING THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM PAYS DIVIDENDS

By Melanie Threlkeld McConnell

Need a mountain moved? Call Kathleen Weiss. Mixing oil with water for a possible new energy source? Have at it, she would say encouragingly.

There is always a way to make the seemingly impossible possible, says this 1994 BSU sociology graduate.

That positive attitude is what helped propel Weiss from corporate employee to co-owner of her own business and is the strategy she uses on her new clients as a human resources consultant.

Weiss was 39 years old when she quit her job four years ago as a training coordinator for Hewlett-Packard to launch her own business assisting organizations and employees through job transitions.

She was intrigued, she says, by the changing world of work. She found a niche helping employers and their workers with resume writing and interview skills, networking, and the emotional aspects of rethinking their relationships with their jobs and their careers.

She also liked the idea of being what she calls a contract or portfolio employee. "I wanted the flexibility of moving from position to position rather than having my career dictated by organizational needs," she says.

She forged ahead despite the advice of one business-type who told her she was not qualified to take on such a task because she did

not have a Ph.D. She used the naysayer's advice to her advantage by telling potential clients up front about her lack of that particular academic degree. It paid off.

"They said it didn't matter because most of their employees didn't have a Ph.D. either," she says. "It made me more acceptable to them in some ways."

The small business she started in her home office as Workforce Dynamics has since merged with Utah-based Organizational Consultants to Management (OCM). Weiss and her business partner, Chris Anton, now own 50 percent of the Boise company. OCM has offices in Salt Lake City, Boise, Lakewood, Colo., and Orem, Utah.

Before Weiss made the leap from corporate employee to entrepreneur to big business owner, she locked herself in

her home office one night and forced herself to focus on what she wanted to do with her life. She was picky, she decided, in more ways than one.

"I wanted to be productive, interactive, creative and implementing," she says spelling out her motto and acronym, PICI.

With the support of her husband and their three children, she stuck with her plan to allow herself two years to make the business work.

"The worst case scenario was I would lose money for two years, but I would have tremendous experience and exposure," she says.

Weiss launched her business by knocking on doors of companies, mostly small manufacturers with no human resources department, and explaining that she wanted project work — not a job. "It sold very, very well," she says.

CHUCK SCHIER PHOTO



Her work boomed as former West One Bank, Morrison Knudsen and Idaho Power all downsized or experienced transitions within their corporations and called on her to help their workers redo resumes, learn new skills and determine new career paths.

Weiss predicts that many more businesses and employees in the Treasure Valley will undergo similar transitions because of the nature of today's business world.

Starting a new business is both exhilarating and frightening, Weiss says. So she offers this advice: "There is no such thing as failure. Things may not always turn out the way you expected, but you still went somewhere by trying." □

"Productive, interactive, creative and implementing" is Weiss' PICI motto.

FAMILY BONDS UNDER ONE NAME: RV FURNITURE CENTER

By Chris Bouneff

As a fresh Boise State graduate in 1993, Chris Veloz faced a choice. He could take his economics degree and join the suit-wearing corporate world of mergers and downsizing.

Or, he could take an unusual route to entrepreneurship. He could join the family business and work alongside his sister, brother and parents at RV Furniture Center in Nampa.

"What appealed to me was having a small business that I could help run," Veloz, 36, says. "I thought, 'If I'm going to do something, it's going to be for my family.'"

Founded by Veloz's father in 1989, the small business repairs and replaces furniture and other interior features for recreational vehicles and installs custom window coverings for commercial businesses.

Veloz took a roundabout route to the family business, taking some college courses after high school but mostly bouncing around until he enrolled at Boise State in 1989.

When he earned his degree four years later, he immediately joined RV Furniture Center, partly to learn about small businesses.

And he joined the business partly to learn from his father, Ray, about entrepreneurship and community activism. In addition to running a successful small business, Ray Veloz leads the Hispanic Business Association and is a community activist in Nampa.

"The one other reason I came here was my father," says Veloz, who recently joined the Nampa Planning and Zoning Commission. "I thought there was a tremendous wealth of knowledge I could obtain from him."

As in any small business, Veloz is more tradesman than businessman. He looks after the financial books, but

he's also a salesman and, along with his brother, the firm's furniture installer.

Part of what Veloz says he enjoys is the "micro-business aspect of it. You're not dealing with a multimillion, multibillion dollar company. You're just dealing with something that's simple."

The job challenges him, but in a different way than had he opened his own business. The business suffers many of the same pressures: cash flow, sales and other issues that can mean life or death for a small firm. But Veloz also faces family issues.

Unlike most partnerships, his family members are his family and his co-workers — an inseparable dual role. If a disagreement brews at work or in family life, they can't walk away from the business as some partners might. The Veloz family bond is too strong for such a split.

"You don't have the same relationship with your family that you do with your colleagues," he says. "You've known each other all your lives. No matter what happens in the business, they are still your family."

Veloz says working with his family has been a growing experience. He says he's closer to his parents and siblings and believes that the bond will continue to strengthen as they work together, adding another fringe benefit to his decision to join the family business.

"As long as the business is growing and I'm growing and the family is growing," Veloz says, "there's no reason to leave."

As for the future, Veloz foresees his brother and sister taking greater roles as the business develops, and he predicts he'll get more involved as he learns more.

The children, he says, will have to take on more responsibility to help push the business in new directions.

But until then, Veloz says he will continue to enjoy working with his family.

And his father agrees. Ray says he never pressured his children to join the business, but he adds that he's proud they work with him.

"They could all go other places," Ray Veloz says. "They're all qualified, but they want to stay here." □



Mixing family and business, from left: Ray, Chris, Cynthia and Mary.

LOLLIPOP MAKERS TAKE THEIR LICKS BEFORE SUCCEEDING

By Melanie Threlkeld McConnell

What do you get when you mix six children, one long, hot summer and a lollipop-making kit?

Would you believe a million-dollar business?

Boisean Debra Fugal (BBA '97) still laughs in disbelief when she talks about how a summer of lollipop-making to occupy her family turned into Custom Confections, an international business that now grosses more than \$1 million a year.

"I could never imagine we could take an idea out of the kitchen and see it through into a full-time business," says Fugal. "You have to believe in yourself, and you have to believe in your ideas. That's been neat to see that happen."

This tale of commitment and hard work started in the summer of 1981 in the Fugal kitchen with a \$19.95 lollipop-making kit from a local craft store. They needed something to keep their five boys and one girl — all younger than 6 — busy.

The suckers became so popular with the neighborhood kids that soon the Fugal children were selling them at the local swimming pool, athletic events and other neighborhood gatherings.

Fugal's husband, Lowell, an electrical contractor, closed his business, already slowed by a recession, and started helping his wife in the kitchen, learning by trial and error how to properly make the batch of sugary treats for their growing clientele. He then would load the family car with the 100 or so suckers made in the family's kitchen and sell them door to door to local retailers.

Now, some 17 years later, Debra, 47, and Lowell, 48,

are churning out nearly 140,000 suckers a day in a 25,000-square-foot plant in downtown Boise and shipping them all over the world.

Fugal is using her human resources management degree from Boise State to establish better training and employee programs, while Lowell handles the marketing and sales.

Their niche, Debra says, is custom-made lollipops. You name it and more than likely they can produce it. One of their most popular sellers a few years ago was a Dennis Rodman sucker.

Others are heart-shaped suckers, 3-D suckers, gourmet and seasonal suckers such as for Christmas, Valentine's Day, Halloween and Easter, and the double dip ice cream cone sucker that won an award from the shopping network, QVC.

Schoolchildren around the country sell the Fugal's suckers for fundraisers. The couple's success resulted in a 1995 award for Idaho Entrepreneur of the Year.

But, as Debra warns, the path to

success was not lined with, shall we say, sugar. A literal meltdown of a \$10,000 order, which was never recouped, forced the couple to seek help from a candy consultant to refine their recipe. They rebounded long enough to produce a successful \$25,000 order, only to have the customer not pay. With their bank account empty, the couple was forced to sell the business but stayed on as employees, and eventually bought the company back a few years later with a loan from a family member.

Shortly after, another budding entrepreneur approached the couple about supplying lollipops to his start-up fund-raising catalog to be marketed to schools across the country. The Fugals agreed. The key to that successful venture, Debra says, is to supply a successful lollipop they were already producing and customize on request.

From the family kitchen to a 25,000-square-foot-plant and a million-dollar business — not a bad return-on-investment from a \$20 craft store lollipop-making kit. □



Debra Fugal started making lollipops 17 years ago in her family kitchen for her children and their friends. Now she markets the suckers around the world from a 25,000-square-foot building in Boise.

CHUCK SCHIERS PHOTO

ON OR OFF THE FIELD, LIFE IS ALL SOCCER FOR BSU STUDENT

By Bob Evancho

Chris Adams is consumed by soccer.

But for the 24-year-old Boise State student, it's more than a pastime, or even a passion — it's his livelihood.

As the managing partner of The Soccer Post, Adams spends most of his waking hours selling soccer. Located on Boise's Fairview Avenue, Adams' store is part of a New Jersey-based franchise that specializes in soccer equipment and apparel.

Of the chain's more than 30 stores, The Soccer Post in Boise is the only one in the Northwest.

"There will be three in California by the end of the year," Adams says, "and there are a couple in Chicago. All the rest are in the East."

Boisean Jane Francis is the majority owner, and the store also has a silent partner. But it's Adams who has made the investment in money *and* time.

"The store is my No. 1 priority," he says. "I'd say I spend an average of 13 hours a day, six days a week there. When I'm not at the store, I am often at home working on personnel matters, inventory, whatever."

Adams first met Francis in 1993 when he coached her son's youth soccer team. "We both had an interest in opening a soccer store, and when an existing store in Boise went out of business a few years ago, Jane and I talked seriously about buying it," Adams recalls. "But it just didn't work out financially."

That failed opportunity, however, kindled their interest, and last year when Adams and Francis got wind of the possibility of buying a Soccer Post franchise, they decided to take the plunge.

"I know it's kind of a cliché to

say our partnership started on a bar napkin, but it was just about that simple," Adams says.

Adams and Francis began negotiating with The Soccer Post last April, and the store opened its doors in August. "There are a few franchise guidelines we have to adhere to," Adams says, "but there is a lot of flexibility and freedom. It's not like working for a major corporation."

Running the store, which has four part-time employees, has cut into Adams' social life and slowed his progress toward earning his business degree (entrepreneurial management with an accounting minor), but he doesn't seem to mind.

"Right now I'm taking one class [per semester]," he says. "But some of the courses I've taken have been especially helpful, especially [accountancy professor] John Medlin's managerial accounting course."

And Medlin's influence extended beyond the classroom. "He taught me about spreadsheet work and how to tweak numbers," Adams says. "He also helped with business projections and putting ideas down on paper when we were thinking about the Soccer Post

purchase. He was instrumental in the success of the store — both as a professor and a mentor."

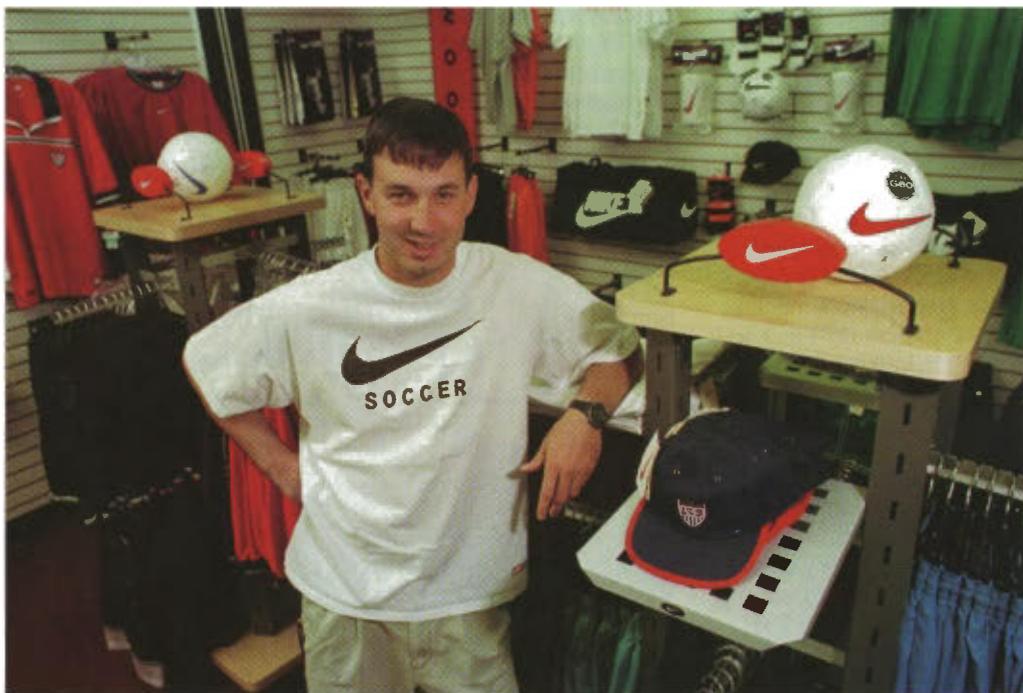
Despite the time constraints, Adams plays city league soccer, and in the fall he will coach the junior varsity squad at Boise's new Timberline High School.

As a four-sport athlete at La Grande (Ore.) High School, Adams learned that the determination necessary in sports is just as applicable in the business world. "The discipline and work ethic that it takes from playing athletics works just the same as in running the store," he says. "If you want to be the best, you have to work at it."

Despite the long hours he puts in at The Soccer Post, Adams still manages to get involved at Boise State. Two years ago he served as business manager of *The Arbiter*, the school's student newspaper, and he is currently a member of the Publications Board, the university committee that provides fiscal oversight for the paper.

Adams' job is a classic case of mixing business with pleasure.

"I like the details of marketing and working with people and the hands-on part of the store," he says. "I even like the pressure." □



Adams' soccer business requires him to stay on the ball.