

## Brand You: Start Something Dull

I'm asked upon occasion, often it's by parents of a son or daughter in an MBA program, "Well, what industry should you go into?" And my clear answer to that is, "Get rid of mold in basements." We'll come back to that.

Quite seriously, if you read the management books—including mine—you would honestly believe that there were only two industries: Information Technology and Biotechnology. And you would only believe there was one company on earth, General Electric.

Well, the essence of the economy—our giant economy, anybody's economy—is really shockingly interesting people who often do very dull things. I'm desperately in love with two guys, and I'll tell you their stories really quickly. A guy by the name of Jim Penman was in the midst of studying for a Ph.D. He had no money. He was very good at mowing lawns, or enjoyed it. So he started a little company called Jim's Mowing, despite the fact that he was pursuing a Ph.D. in cross-cultural anthropology.

Jim's Mowing today is called Jim's Group. It has 2,700 franchises in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom. It is ingenious for today's world where many families have two busy professionals. He does all the stuff that busy professionals don't have time to do. For example, among his twenty-seven hundred franchises is a whole set of franchises called Jim's Dog Walking. And he has Jim's Dog Washing. And he has Jim's Driving School. It's a wonderful company. It has wonderful people practices. It has insanely strict customer service practices.

I'm not sure whether Jim is my favorite person in the world, or whether it's Larry Janesky. Larry is out of Seymour, Connecticut, and he is the guy who runs Basement Systems, Inc. If you have a basement—a lot of people in a lot of countries don't—you know that basements fill with mold. You can't store things in them, you can't turn them into a family room, and the mold makes you sick.

Well, Larry takes care of all that stuff. Basement Systems, Inc., the magic mold guys. Last time I looked, they were a 60-million-dollar business growing at 20 percent a year, and incredibly profitable. I only have one problem with Larry, and that is he wrote a book on this called *Dry Basement Science*. And that's okay, too, except that it out-sold my last book. And that really annoys the hell out of me.

Which brings me back to my original point. Years ago there was a book called *The Millionaire Next Door*. And I don't know why, but I paid no attention to it whatsoever. You know, getting to know Larry, and getting to know Jim kind of brought me back to it. So, who the heck *are* these people? Who are these people who really are the essence of the economy who are not Jack Welch of GE or Ted Turner of CNN?

Well, let me tell you what *The Millionaire Next Door* says about the real people who run the economy:

- Lived in the same town their entire life.
- They're the first generation that's wealthy, had no parental support at all.
- Don't look like millionaires, don't dress like millionaires, don't eat like millionaires, don't act like millionaires.
- And most of their businesses, to quote the author, are businesses that could be called "dull."

And so you want to know what you ought to do when you grow up? Why don't you get into the dog walking business? Why don't you clean mold out of basements? Which is to say, anything—in fact, even the stuff that sounds the most dull—can be seriously cool, seriously fun, and *seriously* profitable.