

Michael Pulizzi: A Lifetime In Electronics Leads To A New Company In The Ultra-Competitive Electronics Services Field

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Electronic Design

John Edwards

Michael B. Pulizzi has over 40 years of experience in electronics manufacturing, product development, AC and DC power distribution and worldwide safety agency approvals, including RoHS compliance for both China and Europe.

In March 2011 Pulizzi launched his own company, MB Pulizzi, which provides new product development engineering services to data center, medical, military, aerospace, government, financial and other organizations. The Hartford, S.D.-based business also offers small-run manufacturing services for PCB's, cable assemblies and any other assemblies that "clients require but the 'big' manufacturing firms do not like to quote."

Mike recently spent a few minutes with me reflecting on his experiences launching a new electronics services company. and the challenges faced by all beginning entrepreneurs.

Electronics in the Blood

JE: What's your technology background, Mike?

MBP: Growing up in the family business, I was 11 when we started and was always surrounded by engineers.

JE: How did you begin growing your business?

MBP: After the sale of the family business in 2007, I had a three-year worldwide "non-compete" placed against me. I spent that time thinking and planning what I could do next, either find a job or start a business. MB Pulizzi was a legal company in 2010, but the website was not launched or the press release announcing the start of business issued until March of this year. Now I'm just doing what any new business owner would do, getting the word out, making cold calls to potential clients and walking trade shows talking to whoever I can find.

JE: How did you find reliable advisors?

MBP: Because of my many years of experience, I was able to call friends to bounce ideas off of and gain their insight to balance with my thoughts.

JE: How did you raise the capital to begin your business?

MBP: I didn't. My wife and I did our best to pinch pennies over the past few years and still do so to this day, paying for one thing at a time. This does slow down the launching of a business, but at least we're not in debt and we're starting with a financially clean slate.

JE: Was there any point at which you had to compromise your vision?

MBP: Yes, many times. I'm constantly adjusting my thoughts and actions to balance our financial ability to pay as we go and find clients. My original business plan was to purchase an automobile car care franchise. I had the bank and SBA loans all approved and employees ready to come on board, but I just could not find the right location for the business at a price that I had built into the business plan. At the same time, I just kept thinking about MB Pulizzi and how maybe that's the direction I should go in.

JE: How did you create a leadership team?

MBP: This pretty much goes back to my many years in business and working with people that I've known. In addition, there are many very qualified people out of work and I was able to find a few great people through my friends putting out the word for me.

JE: How important is marketing in a startup business?

MBP: Marketing is many things. I firmly believe in advertising and press releases, but with a start up and limited funds, word of mouth, making cold calls and walking trade shows works great.

Entrepreneurship Insights

JE: Mike, how would you define entrepreneurship?

MBP: It's something in your gut that tells you there is a better way or a better life for you and your family out there somewhere. You can't let go of that feeling. It pushes you and sometimes you fight it, mostly out of fear, but you can't stop yourself from moving forward. You have to try.

JE: How does one start to become an entrepreneur?

MBP: It's an innate part of who you are. You may not know you have it, but eventually something triggers the desire to do something different: be your own boss and go out on a limb to see what's out there and know you could do better.

JE: How do you balance your technology and business skills?

MBP: By surrounding yourself with people who are smarter than you, truly listening to them, bouncing ideas around and not locking yourself into a single thought just because you had it.

JE: What is the biggest challenge associated with being an entrepreneur?

MBP: Fighting the fear of failure; it is a constant internal battle. Fear can be pushed aside as you start to succeed, but it is always in the background waiting to pounce on your guts and desire.

JE: Can entrepreneurship be learned?

MBP: Great question. Anything can be learned, but it's like swimming. You can learn to swim, but only a few people have it as part of their being to become an athlete, go on to the Olympics and win a medal. I believe it has to be a part of who you are, that it has always been inside of you and just needed to be awakened.

JE: How does one develop the confidence to be an entrepreneur?

MBP: Again, I believe it is a part of who you are. But just because it is a part of you, don't be fooled into thinking that you are 100 percent confident, 100% of the time. I'm not. Fear is the biggest battle you will fight as an entrepreneur. Fear is always there. Sometimes it is very small and not noticeable and you go charging ahead, but other times you have to fight it in order to move forward.

JE: Are entrepreneurs control freaks?

MBP: Like any aspect of life, there are control freaks, but I do not believe that this is a natural aspect or requirement for success in an entrepreneur. I believe that a control freak can be very successful or a great failure. But if they are successful, the question becomes "are they lonely or happy?"

JE: Is there an ideal age for being an entrepreneur?

MBP: If I had to pick an age, I would say seven. My brother and I would collect bottles around the neighborhood, turn them into the store for a nickel each. In those days you could do that. We would then use that money to buy watermelons, bring them home to get cold and then sell them by the slice to the kids in the neighborhood. We would also put on neighborhood talent shows at which we would sell cold watermelon, hotdogs, cold punch and small bags of chips, which we got from the big bags we purchased. By the time I was 11, I was going door to door selling Amway with my wagon of products in tow.

Seeking Balance, Skills and Inspiration

JE: Do most entrepreneurs have balance in their lives?

MBP: I think you will find different answers from different entrepreneurs. I know some that would say no, their life is consumed by their business. Others would say yes, because they make the time to enjoy owning a business. It is a balance. There are times when your business will be all-consuming and you better know how to find the time to enjoy owning your business and enjoy your family and friends. As an example, my parents, the first year we did \$1M in sales, they took all the employees and their husbands or wives on a four-day cruise.

JE: What skills would you advise an entrepreneur to acquire?

MBP: Number 1: always be open to learning. The best way to do this is by listening to the people around you, such as employees, vendors,

family members and other entrepreneurs. Number 2: don't be afraid to learn from your mistakes. You can't run from them or hide from mistakes, so you might as well learn from them. Number 3: read.

JE: *Are entrepreneurs happier than other people?*

MBP: I think happiness is a part of who you are as a person and being an entrepreneur has nothing to do with it. You can be a successful business owner and be miserable or an assembly worker and be very happy. It can also be the other way around.

JE: *Are there any entrepreneurs who inspired you?*

MBP: My grandfather Bernardo, who came to this country from Sicily just days after his 17th birthday. He never looked back. My father and mother, who through very hard work started Pulizzi Engineering, raised their family and employed God knows how many people over the years.

JE: *What is the biggest crisis you ever faced as an entrepreneur?*

MBP: Starting. After that, you just deal with it and move forward.

JE: *Are most entrepreneurs serial innovators?*

MBP: I believe the answer is yes. This does not mean that they are constantly creating new products, although they could be thinking about it. But in order to be successful, you must always be innovating better ways of doing things for your business. You have to be aware of the problems that exist in manufacturing, accounting, sales and marketing and always be ready to jump in and help solve problems or, better said, innovate solutions.

JE: *At what point does a company cease to be a start up?*

MBP: There is not a point in which a company ceases to be a start up that I know of. I think most entrepreneurs run their business like it is a start up no matter how successful it becomes, because they are always innovating, always thinking, always moving forward. A successful business can also decline, either by marketing fluctuations or by bad business decisions, so it takes an entrepreneurial spirit to bring it back from edge of the cliff and grow it again. I would suggest that Apple Computer is a great example of a huge company that, at its core, has always been a startup company.

JE: *One last question, Mike. Does an entrepreneur ever stop being an entrepreneur?*

MBP: No, you can't stop being who you are.

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