

Rags to Riches, the Story of John Paul DeJoria

Speaker: John Paul DeJoria, John Paul Mitchell Systems, Chairman

Persistence and sharing. These two principles underlie the success of John Paul DeJoria, Chairman of John Paul Mitchell Systems. In his talk, “Rags to Riches, the Story of John Paul DeJoria,” given at the World Knowledge Forum on October 22, 2015, Mr. DeJoria emphasized and discussed these core principles time and time again.

Born in the United States to immigrant parents, Mr. DeJoria first discussed how he grew up with little but nevertheless learned the value of sharing with others from his mother. He described how one Christmas, when he was six years old, his mother gave him and his brother a dime to drop into the red bucket of a Salvation Army volunteer. He did, and then asked his mother the reason why. She told him, “Remember that in life, there’s always somebody that needs it more than you do.” This early Christmastime lesson left a deep impression on young DeJoria’s mind, and the value of sharing with others who are less fortunate has remained with him throughout his life.

He also shared the story of an early business venture to illustrate the value of persistence in business. As a seven-year-old boy, he and his brother built a flower box from wood they bought for 25 cents. They made the best flower box they could and went out to sell it for 50 cents. For three hours, they approached people and tried to sell them the box, but nobody was interested. Even so, they did not give up. “A lot we knew we could do,” said Mr. DeJoria, “if we believed we could do it.”

Still looking for a buyer, they eventually entered a restaurant. They showed everybody their flower box and sold it to a waitress. They then took their 50 cents and bought more wood. They built more flower boxes and sold them, too. These young entrepreneurs refused to give up when they faced initial difficulties and instead persisted and eventually achieved their goal.

Persistence and sharing are the principles that have helped guide John DeJoria throughout his life, enabling him to become successful and happy and to help others become successful and happy as well. When setting out to start a hair product company, Mr. DeJoria and his partner Paul Mitchell had no money. They found an investor who said he would put \$500,000 into their company, but the money never arrived. However, this did not discourage the two. They gathered the available money they had, which was all of \$700, put together a small order of 10,000 bottles of their hair care product, and then went out to sell it.

For three days, Mr. DeJoria knocked on doors of beauty salons. Time and time again, he was rejected; few salon owners were interested in trying a new product. Nevertheless, Mr. DeJoria did not become discouraged. When he was done, he had tried to sell his hair care product to approximately 150 salons, and despite the rejection of most, twelve salons were willing to give the Paul Mitchell hair products a try.

This persistence paid off. Although it took two years for Mr. DeJoria and Mr. Mitchell to make enough money to pay their bills on time, they remained dedicated to their business and persisted despite any setbacks. “We would never, ever, ever give up,” Mr. DeJoria said. Although others in similar situations may have lost hope and stopped trying, quitting was not an option for Mr. DeJoria. “Successful people,” he said, “end up doing all the things that unsuccessful people don’t want to do.”

Sharing is the other business principle by which Mr. DeJoria stands. He discussed the way he has maintained ethical and humanitarian values at the core of his business activities, and he proudly spoke about his efforts to help people facing hardships. Orphans in Africa and impoverished people in Mexico and the Appalachia have all benefited from his humanitarian efforts, and he fully lives by the principle that a person cannot be successful without sharing it. “Success unshared is failure,” he concluded.