

COACHING CASE STUDY

FEATURING



CUSTOM FABRIC COMPANY TRANSFORMED BY TAILORED COACHING

"I'm no stranger to the start-up world. My first start-up venture was a company that revolutionized the book industry with print-on-demand publishing; its success exceeded our expectations. One day as my wife was making new curtains for our living room, she wished out loud for a company that would allow her to design and print her own custom fabrics. I shared her idea with my business partner, Gart Davis, and we decided that if we could figure out a way to print books on demand, we could do the same for fabric. A new start-up venture, Spoonflower.com, was born, as we set out once again to flip a traditional business model on its head.

Spoonflower allows customers to design their own fabric (color, pattern, and material) and then purchase their customized product by the yard. We didn't know anything about printing fabric when we started our company, but we didn't let that stop us; what we lacked in knowledge, we made up for with passion and drive. A venture like Spoonflower demands all your energy and most of your time. "Flying by the seat of your pants", "riding a roller coaster", "putting out fires" – there are a myriad of clichés that perfectly describe the early evolution of a start-up. When Gart and I started the company in 2008, it was just the two of us and one volunteer. Despite starting our business the same year that the recession hit, we flourished. In January 2009, our company was mentioned in a *New York Times* article, generating even greater demand. Today, we have ninety employees working to fill orders from around the world. We went from earning our first dollar to generating \$6 million in revenue by 2012. In 2013, sales rose to \$10.5 million, and in 2014, we reached the \$15 million mark in revenue.

During this period of intense growth, Gart suggested that we work with business coach Jim Jubelirer. I had never worked with a business coach before; I envisioned a combination trainer and therapist – someone to keep us focused and accountable. Jim has certainly done that, but he has also provided significantly more.

I consider myself an introvert – managing others wasn't in my comfort zone. Jim recognized that and incorporated it into our list of overall operational management needs. He also noted that we were too hands-on in every regard. Gart and I were literally cutting fabric ourselves while chasing investors, hiring employees and improving operations. When you're pulled in so many directions and juggling competing

priorities with limited resources, it's easy to overlook the obvious. Jim's neutral perspective helps us to "see the forest for the trees."

Jim recommended a full day meeting with us once per month. I was leery about utilizing my time in this way – pull myself away from my daily responsibilities one whole day every month just to talk? But the payoff has been rewarding. It's not just talking; it's strategic planning.

In the time that we've been working with him, he helped us hire a third partner and create a seven-person management team, consisting of both internal promotions and new external hires. Once the management team was in place, Jim recommended two meetings a month: one exclusively for the partners and the other for the entire management team. We agreed to try it, and the team has come to appreciate this meeting culture. It provides clearer communication of the company's goals, enabling each person to understand and embrace our objectives.

Coaching is only effective if you're willing to put your reservations aside, and push past your resistance to change. Jim presents us with a wealth of proven tools and approaches for growing our business. But knowledge of these tools alone doesn't get us very far; we have to personalize them and put them into action for ourselves.

In other words, you can plant seeds in the dirt and hope they become flowers one day, but if you don't water them, pull away the weeds, and ensure they're getting enough sunlight, they're never going to blossom. Jim not only plants seeds of wisdom, but he also checks on us, encourages us, prunes away the unnecessary, and tailors his action steps specifically to our garden.

Entrepreneurship is a tough row to hoe. If I could give business owners two pieces of advice, it would be to have a partner to help bear the burden of running a company, and to choose a partner smarter than yourself; Jim has been able to provide our entire team with the focus needed to successfully manage our growth. I can't imagine doing all of this without him. – Stephen Fraser, Co-Founder of Spoonflower.com



Find your WHY and create a long-range plan for your business with predictable results.

Contact Jim to get started.

jim@jimjubelirer.com | (919) 969-7818 | www.jubelirerresultsgroup.com