

Second Half There **Are** Second Acts in American Business

F. Scott Fitzgerald famously declared that there are no second acts in American lives. Well, maybe. But when it comes to American business, there are second acts aplenty, as the two creative businesses profiled here make clear.

WINNING ON AND OFF THE FIELD

With 347 (remember that number) notches in the win column during his career, Don Shula is the “winningest” coach in the history of the National Football League. He’s the only coach ever to post a perfect season, going 17–0 and winning the Super Bowl with the Miami Dolphins in 1972. He won a second championship in 1973 and was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 1997, two years after his retirement from coaching. So after more than 40 years as a player and coach, you might

expect to find Shula relaxing on the golf course, and deservedly so. Instead, he and his son, Dave Shula (himself a former player and former NFL coach), are running a successful chain of restaurants that will number 37 by the end of this year.

Shula’s Steak Houses got its start on the strength of Coach (as Don is widely known) Shula’s star power, no doubt, and the father-and-son team’s history of on-the-field success still generates lots of goodwill. “After I finished coaching, there was a restaurant near where we live that wasn’t doing well,” Coach says. “They suggested putting my name on it

to see if that would affect business. We did that and advertised it as having the best steaks in South Florida, and business tripled. I said to myself, when something triples, that’s not a bad deal, so that was the start of it.”

But when it comes to building a successful business in the competitive restaurant industry, there’s no resting on yesterday’s accomplishments. “We have to wow our customers every time they visit, and we have to market aggressively to win new fans and keep our old ones coming back,” Dave says. To do that, the Shulas are fanatic about the quality of the beef they serve. The company owns and breeds registered Angus cattle and has trademarked its own special cut of beef.

The Shulas use a combination of traditional and new media to advertise and promote their business. They do some print advertising in markets where their restaurants are

▼ **Snapshot:** Shula’s Steak Houses

Business: Franchised restaurants

Founders: Don and Dave Shula

Location: Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Established: 1989

Employees: 14

Mission: To create “Raving Fans” who will promote the business by word of mouth due to the high quality of the food and excellence of the service.

Quote: “I’ve always tried to stay a step ahead of the competition and been willing to try things that hadn’t been done successfully by anyone else.”

Northwestern Mutual Financial Representative: Jerry Upthegrove, Fort Lauderdale, Florida



Secrets of Success

Shula's Steak Houses

- 1 Have a good plan.
- 2 Hire good, talented people.
- 3 Train them well and continuously.

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located and in the in-flight magazines of airlines serving those cities. But like many businesses today, they are expending more and more effort on social media. "Dad's actually tweeting now," Dave announces proudly. "He's got more than 3,500 followers on Twitter."

Each of the chain's franchised restaurants has its own Facebook page, as does the parent company, and marketing staff closely monitor any comments or questions that come in via social media and travel and dining sites such as Yelp, OpenTable, and TripAdvisor. More than 210,000 members belong to Team Shula, the company's loyalty program, and about 38,000 of them have also earned entry into Shula's 48oz. Club by polishing off the restaurant's signature 48-ounce porterhouse steak. One lucky "Raving Fan" (as the Shulas call their most loyal customers) got to eat his 100th 48-ouncer with Coach Don Shula by his side. Coach presented him with a commemorative football to honor the accomplishment.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the chain's marketing effort is its dedication to making sure its customers are happy with the food they're served and the people serving it. "We want our customers to be raving about their dining experience when they leave," Coach says. "Word-of-mouth advertising has been very effective for us, and attention to detail is our strategy for winning it. We feel there's no detail so small that we can afford to ignore it."

The 16 Shula's Steak Houses are white-tablecloth establishments where the average check runs upwards of \$75, but the Shulas have expanded their market reach with several additional formats. Shula's 2 Steak & Sports offers a transition from a sports bar to casual dining with an upscale menu but smaller portions. Shula's on the Beach adds a broader seafood mix to the traditional steak house menu in a tropical setting. Shula's 347 Grill (there's that number again!), is positioned somewhere between the traditional steak house and the Shula's 2 concept, and Shula's Bar & Grill is a format developed for airport terminals.

Both Shulas agree their second act in the restaurant business has a lot in common with their former pro football careers. "You have

to set the goals you want to achieve and develop a plan to get there," Dave says. The key to doing that is getting the right people in place, training them, then turning them loose, Coach adds. "My coaching philosophy was never to ask a player to do something he wasn't capable of doing. I never tried to make a Dan Marino out of a Bob Griese, or vice versa," he says. "Dan was a talented passer, and Bob was an excellent field general. I let each quarterback do what he did best, and we take the same approach with our talented team at Shula's Steak Houses."

TAPPING GROUP CREATIVITY TO REINVENT A BUSINESS

Valley Screen Process Company is a 45-year-old commercial screen and digital printer specializing in interior and exterior pressure-sensitive graphics. Founded by Jerome Bauer in 1967, it is headed today by his daughter, Karen Barnett, president and CEO. It's always been a family-owned venture, and Barnett's husband and brother also work at the company. Over the years, Valley Screen gradually became more and more reliant on a single market segment: the recreational vehicle industry. They didn't quite put all their eggs in one basket, but they came close, and that affected them when the bottom fell out of the RV market during the Great Recession.

"We learned the danger of being overly reliant on a single industry the hard way," Barnett says. The company's sales plummeted by 70% due to the recession, and she had to lay off more than half her employees. It was an extremely painful lesson, but one that had an upside. The company reinvented itself by harnessing the creative power of remaining staff from all parts of the organization. "We've learned to be diverse," she says. "We've learned to see the signs and react more quickly and appropriately when key indicators signal a slowdown might be coming."

After the layoffs, Barnett embraced a brainstorming strategy with her remaining staff,



looking for ways to diversify without increasing overhead. She gathered representatives from all departments—creative, sales, customer service, production—and instituted once-a-week meetings. One of the main topics of discussion was expansion into new product lines that were a good match for the company's resources, personnel, and expertise.

Then they began putting in orders for “practice jobs,” as she calls them. “We recruited local business owners to try us out, either at a discount or sometimes at no charge at all, so we could evaluate a new product and see if it was a good fit for our capabilities,” she explains. “We also included trusted vendors in our meetings, and they helped us fine-tune what we needed to produce new parts. In some cases, they even donated materials for us to use while we practiced.”

The exercise in creativity paid off. Under

Barnett's guidance, the company, which today is a certified woman-owned business, diversified into several new markets, including vehicle wraps and architectural graphics, and launched two new websites. *OleeKids.com*, a consumer website, focuses on cute kids' décor, including life-size wall graphics made from digital photographs. *OleeCreative.com* showcases the company's architectural graphic products, which include wall murals, artwork, window etchings, and signage.

It's probably no exaggeration to say that creativity saved this family-owned business from extinction, and that would have been a loss not just to its owners and employees, but also to the “Michigan” (Michigan-Indiana) community it calls home. Valley Screen Process was named a Top Women-Owned Indiana Business by DiversityBusiness.com in 2008, 2009, and 2010, when it was also presented with the Economic Development through Growth Entrepreneurship (EDGE) Award by Indiana Lieutenant Gov. Becky Skillman. In 2011, Valley Screen was chosen as the Small Business of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce of St. Joseph County, and this year it was honored by the Samaritan Center as a Family Friendly Workplace.

The creative brainstorming process that Barnett facilitated promises to continue paying benefits. “As a result of that process, we learned to make do with the resources we had,” she says. “We learned not to go into debt to pay for equipment that we might not be able to get a return on. We learned to engage the whole team in the process so that they feel like part of the solution. And we learned to cut expenses so that the company could get healthy and reduce our debt.”

Asked what the greatest rewards have been for her as a creative business owner, Barnett answers without hesitation. “Seeing our products out in the marketplace, having dedicated employees who genuinely like to work for us, and being able to share with the community some of our treasure,” she says. “Those things make it all worthwhile.”

Secrets of Success Valley Screen Process Company

- 1 Stretch out of your comfort zone.
- 2 Fake it until you make it.
- 3 Never give up.

Snapshot: Valley Screen Process Company

Business:

Commercial screen and digital printing

Founder: Jerome Bauer

Location:

Mishawaka, Indiana

Established: 1967

Employees: 51

Mission: To help its customers put their best foot forward by taking their ideas and making them realities.

Quote: “Creativity is extremely important, both in the work we do for our clients and in developing new products and entering new markets.”

Northwestern Mutual Financial Representative:

Melinda “Myndi” Aven, Mishawaka, Indiana