

VOLUME TWO • WITH DAVID CAWTHORN

**ALL NEW**

Twenty  
fascinating  
success stories  
and the people  
behind them



# SUCCESS

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# SECRETS <sup>OF</sup>

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# SACRAMENTO'S

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# BUSINESS

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# PROFESSIONALS™



*Shari Fitzpatrick*

**Shari Fitzpatrick**

*is the owner of Shari's Bear'ys, a gift basket business that specializes in elaborately decorated chocolate-dipped strawberries. Before she established Shari's Bear'ys in 1989, Shari worked successfully in the world of finance, first as a loan agent for a mortgage company and later as a stockbroker.*





## Success Has Never Been Sweeter

**S**hari Fitzpatrick was destined to work with strawberries. When she was very young, her dad planted a strawberry patch just for her although she couldn't even pronounce the name of the succulent fruit—she called them “two berries.”

When she was only twenty-four, Shari combined her love of strawberries with her innate flair for marketing to form what is now the highly successful Shari's Bear'ys in Sacramento. Begun in 1989 with only \$1,500 in a one-bedroom condo, the company now has two thriving stores in Sacramento, and Shari has set her sights on opening a San Francisco store.

Although chocolate-dipped strawberries may be found at other stores throughout the summer, Shari's year-round plump, juicy strawberries dipped in smooth, rich chocolates stand out from the crowd. Who else sells patented long-stemmed strawberry roses?

Formerly a successful mortgage broker, Shari would dip strawberries in chocolate during the holidays and pass them out to realtors. She enjoyed it so much that she decided to leave the money business and follow her heart and her taste buds. Through hard work and creative, inexpensive marketing methods, she has carved a place for herself in a market once dominated solely by florists. Now she's enjoying the fruits of her labor and making a basketful of money in the bargain. Shari's Bear'ys is now doing 100 percent more volume than it did two years ago, and her newest store in the Wells Fargo Center downtown carried itself the month it opened.

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*"You really sell yourself short when you spend your life doing something you don't love to do."*

**F**or three years, I was a mortgage broker in L.A. for my brother's company. I enjoyed it, I learned a lot, and I made a lot of money. I was twenty when I started and made rookie of the year my first year.

My sister-in-law, who is an excellent caterer, taught me how to make homemade baskets on all the holidays for the realtors. The baskets included strawberries dipped in chocolate, and the realtors went nuts over them. It was a stress releaser to me to make those baskets. I'd be up until two or three in the morning dipping those strawberries and loving it.

I did mortgage loans for a few years, dipping strawberries as a hobby and a marketing tool, and eventually got into the stock market. I did pretty well. I've always loved money, I've always wanted to be successful, and I've always been driven. Even when I was a little girl, I was always able to give my own money during collection at church.

While I was a stockbroker, we had a grand opening party at our office. I made chocolate-dipped strawberries. My spread was more beautiful than what the caterers had prepared, but it cost only a tenth of what they charged. My mentor in the office, a remarkable woman and a really successful stockbroker, said to me, "You're working for me, and you can do this?" And I said, "What do you mean?" She was the giant, and she was complimenting me on those chocolates. Because she saw how much I enjoyed it, she wondered why I didn't do that for a living. This was the first time that I wondered if it was possible to make money at something I truly enjoyed. I had always assumed that you had to have a prestigious job working with money and investments to make a good income.

### **FROM STOCKS TO STRAWBERRIES**

One day I was feeling really stressed. I was sitting in my car, taking care of some financial business, and a florist delivery van was parked nearby. I compared my day to the driver's, and I thought, "All day long, people are happy to see him, he's around something beautiful, and he has no stress." I thought, "Wow, what a great job."



You really sell yourself short when you spend your life doing something you don't love to do. Even though I'd made a lot of money, I was in a job I hated, and I wasn't working to my potential, so I soon depleted my savings until I had only about \$2,000 to my name. That was the most broke I've ever been. I was miserable.

I think you get guts from being in a real pressure situation, so I left to follow my vision—to deliver chocolate-dipped strawberries.

I worked for a balloon delivery company for two months for \$5 an hour to quickly learn the ins and outs of the gift delivery service. Then I went to the flea market, I bought two old rickety card tables, and I set them up in the corner of my little one-bedroom condo. I bought some baskets and ribbons and cellophane—just the minimum of what I needed to get started. And then I bought 200 pounds of chocolate.

## GETTING THE PHONE TO RING

Before I started the company, I woke up every morning to KRXX 93 Rock, and I heard them give away gifts through a company called Dial-a-Gift. I thought, "I bet they're just trading for the mention on the air. When I start my business, I'm going to get on 93 Rock." And I did! I got up at five that morning and had an appointment with the promotions manager. Then I was on the air live with Boomer and the Boys. It was in October, so I brought in a Halloween basket. They said, "Gee, Shari, you sure have nice berries," and I played along and people loved it! That got the phone ringing.

I would read the newspaper every morning to see which women's groups were meeting that day, and I'd go to every meeting I could. I went to wine tastings and parties and women's functions, and I gave my strawberries out for free. Taste is such a strong sense that I figured if I could get them to taste the berries, they would remember me. I gave them my card and told them to use us instead of a florist. That's always been my approach: We're an alternative to a florist, and our product is edible! If you have the type of product that you can give away, do it. You have to give in order to receive. Don't be stingy.

Traditional advertising is so expensive, and you really don't get that much back for it, so I recommend finding inexpensive ways to advertise your product. I get greater results from advertising that's free than advertising that I pay for, so I trade my product for marketing in newspapers, in magazines, and on the radio. Word of mouth is

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also a huge advertiser. I recommend belonging to lead groups. That sort of networking is really helpful because it gets people talking about you and looking for leads for you, and those groups are really supportive when you're starting out, when you need it most. They give you the pat-on-the-back support that you miss when you're self-employed.

### **HAVE PHONE, WILL TRAVEL**

I thought, "If I'm going to be a one-man band, people are going to have to call me. The phone is going to be my lifeline." So I had my calls transferred to a pager, and my message machine would say, "Shari's Bear'ys will return your call within ten minutes. Leave your message after the tone." I didn't want callers who hated answering machines to think this was a normal answering machine procedure and hang up. As soon as my pager went off, I went looking for a phone, and I would always call back within three minutes. I knew every pay phone in town, and I had a bucket full of quarters in my car. You work hard to get that phone to ring, so don't miss a call or trust it to an answering machine if you can avoid it.

Eventually, I bought a cellular phone, and I had all my calls transferred to it. I'd wear the phone over my shoulder while I was making deliveries. I can remember many times when my phone would ring while I rode in a cramped elevator with my arms loaded with berries. Everyone would look at me with curiosity as I answered the phone, "Shari's Bear'ys!"

### **PROVIDING A TASTY ALTERNATIVE**

Some people say, "Oh, well, I don't like strawberries." And I say, "Just try one because people who don't like chocolate like them, too." Men tend not to like sweets, but they like these, so women can buy them for the guys. People spend so much money a year on sending flowers because there's nothing else to send. What do you send men? What do you send business clients? What do you send your wife or girlfriend when you've sent her flowers three times already?

### **ONLY 25 PERCENT BAD**

I encourage dieters to choose our berries if they're going to cheat, promoting us as the healthy choice. I tell them, "If you're going to be bad, choose our berries because they're actually only 25 percent bad. A piece of cake or a



truffle is 100 percent bad, but our berries are 75 percent strawberry and only 25 percent chocolate."

### A TUXEDO ROSE TRIBUTE

When I was in second grade, my parents got divorced and my mom married a wonderful man named Ben Starr. Ben had three sons and Mom had two daughters, and we moved into his house. It was like the Brady Bunch. Most people, when there's a divorce and a remarriage, get a crummy stepfather, but he accepted me totally as his own daughter and was largely responsible for my strength and creativity.

He died of cancer in August 1993. Before he died, I told him that if it wasn't for him, I'd still be in Oregon without the strength and confidence that have allowed me to go after all the things in my life that I cherish the most: my husband, my son, and my thriving business. He made me strong because he always encouraged my growth. For several years, he told me, "You need to market more for Father's Day," and I would say "Well, Father's Day just isn't a big holiday." And he would say, "Because you don't market enough for Father's Day." Sometimes, we talked about these tuxedo roses that I had in mind as a new product.

This year, my mom said, "You should sell those tuxedo roses in his memory." So my new product, which we introduced for this past Father's Day, is tuxedo roses. Each strawberry is dipped in chocolate to resemble a tuxedo. We're calling it Ben's Bouquet in his memory, and 10 percent of all the profits from the tuxedo roses will go to prostate cancer research. Everything related to Ben's Bouquet has fallen into place so easily that I know Ben's up there helping me along with it, saying, "Great marketing tool, girl!"

### AN INSPIRING RELATIONSHIP

One of the things that has inspired me is getting my high school sweetheart, Clay, back. I was able to marry the love of my life. We were apart for five years, and for five years I dreamed about him. It was a miracle we even dated again, and now we're married and have a son, Paxton. Another boy is on the way. I'm so lucky. He lets me be me. He's a true '90s husband. (Every woman entrepreneur should have one.) I don't have to have dinner on the table, and the house can be a mess. Every night, he bathes Paxton, feeds him, and puts him to bed so that I can take care of correspondence, read things I need to catch up on, and have time to myself.

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One passage in the Bible that has always inspired me is Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord and don't wonder why. Just go with your instincts on what you feel he wants you to do, and he'll lead you straight." That's paraphrased, but if things are going wrong, and you're wondering why, just keep going straight ahead, and most of the time it will work out. I also believe, however, that sometimes when things are not working, it's best to stop banging your head against the wall to make it work. Be honest with yourself. Admit that it's not going to work, and then go on to plan B.

### **GIVING SOMETHING BACK**

I call our downtown store my tithing store. The Bible says you should give away the first tenth of everything you make. So right off the top, 10 percent of all sales at the store goes into a separate account for people who are poor and for a large number of charities that tug at my heart, mostly those having to do with children and animals.

In addition, we donate about \$150 of product every month, contributing a box of strawberry roses to practically every fund-raiser and silent auction in town. The community really seems to appreciate that.

### **LOVE AMONG THE BERRIES**

People are proposing with our berries! About a year ago, a couple became engaged right in our store! He put the ring box in with the berries. She had no idea what was going on. We all watched secretly through the one-way glass in my office. She found the ring, he slipped it on her finger, they kissed, ate the berries, and then left. One man came in with an \$11,000 engagement ring. We put it in one of our little gold boxes, right in the middle of the basket, and covered it with strawberries so she would have to hunt for it. The woman came in a week later flashing the ring to see if we would recognize it. When I asked her if she was surprised, she said she was so excited about the strawberries that she didn't even notice the ring box. Another man wanted us to take a beautiful diamond ring—it must have been half a karat—and smoosh it into a strawberry and dip the whole thing in chocolate, but I talked him out of it.

### **NEVER BOW DOWN**

Right from the beginning, make your business sound big. Don't tell people that you're just starting and that you're



alone. When I first started, I always said, "We chocolate-dip strawberries, and we put them in these baskets, and we deliver them." Once my brother said, "Who's *we*?" I was somewhat embarrassed, but I realized that I had made a habit of saying "we," which was good. Always make your business sound big and seasoned.

When Nordstrom opened up, I went to see Jim Nordstrom. His staff kept telling me how busy he was and offering to find one of his assistants for me instead, but I didn't want to talk to anyone else. So I sat and waited and waited, and finally I was able to see him. I said, "Congratulations on your new location. I'd love to have my berries in your store." Within three weeks, my berries were in Nordstrom. Always go to the decision maker. Don't mess around with the small guys. They're only going to tell you that you can't do it.

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### IF BUMBLEBEES CAN FLY, SO CAN YOU

Mary Kay Ash's accountant told her that her cosmetics business would never work, so you can't always go by what people say. I've always liked the bumblebee symbol that Mary Kay Cosmetics uses. It really is the perfect symbol for women in business. As everyone knows, aerodynamic engineers studied the bumblebee and couldn't figure it out. They said, "This creature simply should not be able to fly. Its wings are too weak, and its body is too heavy." I like to think something divine whispered into the bee's ear, "You can do it," and so it did. You will always find people who will tell you that it can't be done. Women, especially, run into that attitude. But Mary Kay reminds us that you can do it. You don't have to choose between your family and your career. You just have to set your priorities and be organized.

Keep focused, and keep your business simple. Be careful not to take on too much—you don't want to burn yourself out. I catered for a while, but I decided to cut back because I was feeling too scattered. Specialize in one thing. Then your customer knows exactly what you do, which makes marketing your product much easier. And if you do choose to expand, do it carefully, and be patient. It often takes a while to get off the ground. We've been selling chocolate-dipped bottles of wine and champagne for a year now, but it's just now really taking off.

### MAKE USE OF EXPERTS

When I need something written, I have a professional freelance writer do it, so then I look like I'm an expert writer.



*"If you don't make mistakes, how can you learn? I think making mistakes is healthy, as long as you learn from them."*

When I need graphics done, I have a professional artist do that, too, so then I look like an expert graphics person.

Don't spend time bookkeeping—get a bookkeeper to do that. Spend your time doing what you're good at—chocolate dipping, marketing, whatever. But go out and delegate to the best people you can find to do it. Then you gain their expertise and you look good. Then projects get completed in the most professional way possible. They may cost more, but you get better results, and that's what it's all about.

### **TREAT YOUR EMPLOYEES WELL**

All my employees think this is their business. They know that they can give me suggestions and that I will listen to them. It's their company, and they make their own schedules.

I also spoil the heck out of them. I pamper them with manicures and pedicures and massages, and I take them out to dinner and concerts. I've got awards for them, crystal letter openers, and certificates of appreciation. I can't pay them a high hourly rate, but I want them to know how much I appreciate them.

### **DO WHAT YOU LOVE**

The number one secret to success is doing something you love to do. Who was it who said, "Take something you love and figure out how to make money at it"? It works.

Don't worry if you make mistakes. If you don't make mistakes, how can you learn? I think making mistakes is healthy, as long as you learn from them. You're much better off. I read that many people found their greatest success after a great failure, so I tell people who have experienced a setback to try one more time. That might be the time they succeed.

I define success as freedom. Right now, I don't *have* to go to work. I go because I enjoy it. It's self-contained. Get your business to the point where you can come and go whenever you want.

I've never felt like quitting. Even in the most difficult times, when I'm up all night for two days with major orders, I know that the only reason I'm busy is that business is good, so why would I want to quit then? You just have to get the job done.

I can't think of anything better than being self-employed, being your own boss, calling all the shots, creating things with no limits to your creativity. I remember when I used to ride the bus to school. I'd look out at people in



their cars and think, "They're free. They can do whatever they want." I think that's why I'm good at running my own business: I love what I'm doing and I've got freedom—that's always been my driving force.

### ONLY THE BEST

During the summertime, other companies chocolate-dip strawberries. Theirs are a lot cheaper than ours. They sell them for about \$1.25, and ours are \$2, but when someone complains to us about that, I say it's like comparing Wal-Mart to Nordstrom. We may sell the same item, but we have a patented, trademarked, unique product, and we deliver on the same day, year round. Most important of all, the quality of our berries is excellent. We do not sell berries unless they were dipped that day. If we have to dip all night to have them fresh on Valentine's Day, that's what we do. This year, we dipped more than 9,000 berries on the night before Valentine's Day.

When I got into the business, I said, "I like the fact that I'm high priced. You get what you pay for." You're not paying for only a chocolate-dipped strawberry. You're paying for the quality, the service, and the magic—the whole package. I never wanted to sell a low-class, cheap product to have higher volume.

People obviously like what we're doing. We've had major increases every month—even in a recession—and I expect to improve. Thank God for the recession because it's given us the opportunity to get all the quirks out of the system. When the economy turns around, we're going to be prepared to blast out of here and open more stores in other cities.

I've always wanted to be rich and famous. I think everybody in the world would like to be. I can't sing, I can't act, and I can't model—I'm too short. But I know that I'm going to be famous someday. Maybe that sounds conceited, but what's driving me inside is that I know it's meant to be.

**Shari Fitzpatrick**

**Shari's Bear'ys**

**4443 Auburn Boulevard, Suite I**

**Sacramento, CA 95841**

**916-482-3279**

**400 Capitol Mall**

**Sacramento, CA 95814**

**916-444-1714**

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## VOLUME TWO • WITH DAVID CAWTHORN

What lessons does a World War II detention camp survivor bring to weather the early years of a business start-up? When the bank says, "No," what does one young man do to raise money for his new business? How does a woman come back from bankruptcy to build a highly profitable service-based business? What uniquely American idea does a foreign visitor discover to help him build a multimillion-dollar business?

In this inspirational sequel to the best-selling first volume, author David Cawthorn reveals the personal secrets of twenty more Sacramento businessmen and businesswomen who have overcome perils and pitfalls on the rocky road to success.

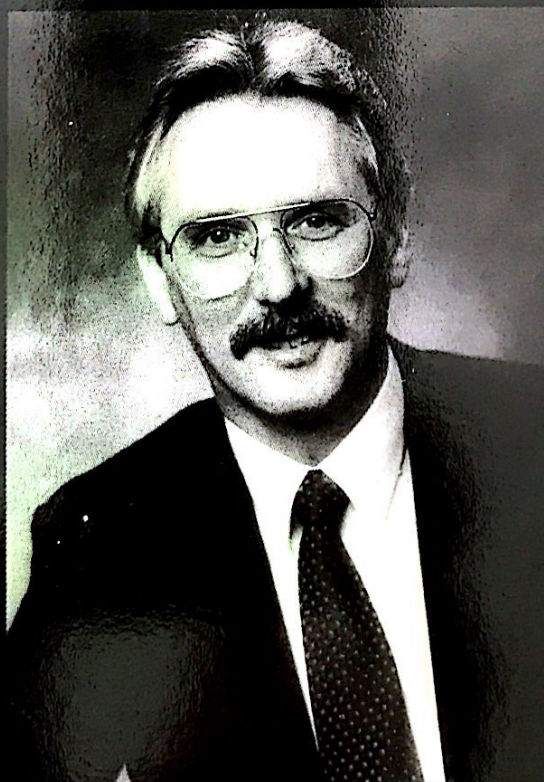
Anecdotal first-person portraits drawn from in-depth interviews with these business leaders will provide you with valuable insight into building a successful business and rewarding life.

Each chapter features a capsule biography that highlights the family upbringing and the special entrepreneurial skills, drive, and imagination each person has brought to building and running his or her organization.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Cawthorn is the president of Tzedakah Publications, publisher of best-selling books in the areas of personal growth, alternative health, business, cooking, and social issues. Specializing in working with first-time authors, Tzedakah continues to gain a national reputation for publishing high-quality books that empower the individual.



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