



Giovanni LiDestri

President of LiDestri Foods, Inc.

*"You miss 100% of the shots you never take."
Wayne Gretzky*

Giovanni LiDestri's success is one that stems from tradition. A tradition rooted in old fashioned values like devotion to one's industry, personal loyalty, the desire to succeed and be useful, as well as a solid family base that got him off to the right start. In many ways, his success story is one with all the trappings of the archetypal immigrant success story, so, it rings true and hits close to home. It would be Giovanni's devotion to these classical values and traditions, as well as an excellent sense for business, that would take him to heights of success that even he never quite dreamed of.

Giovanni first came to the United States from Italy at the age of fourteen. He was brought to the country by his mother and father, with his brother and two sisters. Whereas life in Italy had been one of relative comfort in the middle class, things were different here in America. Here, the six of them lived in a crowded three room apartment where attitudes were much more liberal, allowing Giovanni's mother to take a job outside the home for the first time ever.

Giovanni's parents and family had always believed in the value of hard work and they wasted no time getting down to it. Despite several disadvantages, such as the fact that Giovanni himself couldn't speak English, everyone went to work almost

immediately, with Giovanni washing bottles at the Ragu Packing Company where his brother also worked. After being in the country only nine months and saving all their money, his family was able to buy their first home. This event would help to shape Giovanni's outlook. Though he had grown up with a sense of family duty and similar values, here for the first time he really saw the potential tangible value of hard work paying off, in the form of the house that they purchased.

From the beginning, Giovanni was an exceptional study. He graduated from high school in only three years instead of four and quickly went on to college. However, his traditional hands-on type of personality left him wanting to pursue more practical work than academia would provide him. As such, despite his good grades, he dropped out of college to go to work full time at the age of 21.

The job that Giovanni took was one that would actually shape the course of his career forever. Much like the old traditionalists who practiced the value of company loyalty, he has stayed in the same base industry for the majority of his career. It all started when Ralph Cantisano, president of Ragu Packing Company (which started the Ragu line of pasta sauce), asked him if he wouldn't like to change his long-held part time position at the company into a permanent position. Giovanni accepted the offer eagerly and went to work.

It was here, in his first ever full time job, that Giovanni was able to demonstrate the real practical value of his work ethic and drive to succeed. Giovanni would perform basically every job that the company had to offer, from filing paperwork to driving a forklift and everything in between. Out of his pure desire to make himself useful and do hard, meaningful work, Giovanni learned how to work in just about every department in the entire company. He became famous for a certain catchphrase that he used to say while working there, which bears repeating here because it's really a very succinct summation of Giovanni's entire outlook on life. The very minute that one job was finished, he could be heard to remark:

“OK. Who needs me to do anything?”

No matter what the job was, Giovanni was always willing to do it, and this attitude would quickly come to pay off. In 1969, just one year after he started working there full time, the company was sold to new owners. When the Cantisano family sold Ragu to Chesebrough-Ponds (now Unilever), they granted the employees a share of the proceeds, and Giovanni was awarded a \$48,000 dollar bonus - at the time an enormous sum to him - as thanks for a job well done.

Much as his parents before him had used their work ethic to build a new life for themselves, Giovanni did the same: he put \$10,000 of that \$48,000 down on a new house.

Giovanni's reputation as a "mover and shaker" at Ragu paid off, when Ralph Cantisano later called Giovanni to run a cheese manufacturing company that Ralph had subsequently purchased. Ralph had seen an intriguing entrepreneurial opportunity in the cheese factory, but quickly found that the industry was rife with all kinds of technical problems particular to the making of cheese, like the problem of waste water disposal. Ralph was looking for someone dependable who could help them turn the business around. That's when he offered the job to Giovanni. At the time he received this offer to work with Ralph again, Giovanni didn't know that the cheese company wasn't doing so well. But he was eager to have the opportunity to work with Ralph again and loved the promise of a new challenge. Giovanni became General Manager of the cheese company and led it to modest success in a fairly short period of time, but knew there wasn't much more he could do to grow it.

Despite his success there, Giovanni once again felt that he could be applying his talents in a more profound way, so he approached Ralph and found that Ralph was experiencing similar feelings. Reminiscing over the good times that they'd had working together at Ragu Packing Company, the two of them decided to return to their roots and get back into the pasta sauce business. Ralph would put up the money for the equipment and Giovanni would manage the business - his

dedication to getting the job done and his experience as a successful manager, both being valuable assets.

When they began their new business, Cantisano Foods, they initially focused on the food service rather than the retail side of things. Before long, their gamble had paid off once again. Giovanni eventually bought the company from Ralph, and today Giovanni's company makes tomato-based products for the retail market as well, selling their proprietary brands Francesco-Rinaldi Pasta Sauces and Sante Fe Salsa, in addition to making sauces for many other well-known companies such as Heinz, Frito-Lay, Nestle and Newman's Own, as well as store brands like Wegmans. Giovanni's business continues to grow each and every year, overcoming challenges along the way for the sheer joy of doing successful business.

Giovanni's success, in a way, almost seemed inevitable. While he certainly had to work hard to get to where he is today, his devotion to the value of hard work is so strong that it seems almost in-born.

Indeed, it seems to be this devotion more than anything else that has brought him to where he stands today as one of the most successful entrepreneurs of his generation. It was a dream that first began to materialize with that house purchased by his parents nine months after arriving in America; a dream born of hard work, loyalty and perseverance.