



Richard Sands

Chairman Constellation Brands

"The purpose of this life and all its experiences is not to make ourselves what we think we should be. It is to unfold who we already are."

Gary Zukav from Seat of the Soul

Richard Sands' success has always been inextricably intertwined with his environment and the people that he has around him. Understanding has always been his primary goal, and he has certainly demonstrated a knack for it. Richard has the unique capacity to look at both a set of numbers and a group of people, and fully understand the intricacies and inner-workings of both. He is equally capable of mathematically analyzing a situation and producing a highly accurate statistical modeling analysis, as he is putting people first and figuring out what drives them and how best to do business with them. It's this devotion to understanding more than anything that has made him a success in business.

Richard grew up in the 1960's and was most definitely a product of that generation's influences. He held liberal values and whether they were systems of numbers or people, was more interested in the unspoken dynamics of systems than he was in concrete matters like dollars and cents; in other words, he was a self-described hippie. He went to the University of California in Berkeley, but dropped out of school at the age of 21 because he had no particular idea what it was that he wanted to do. Like many of today's successful business owners, he comes from a family background rooted in the area: both his grandfather Mack

and his father Marvin had worked in the family business and achieved a good deal of success there. Despite that, however, they were sympathetic to the idiosyncrasies of the new generation, and Richard never felt any particular obligation to enter into the family business. As such, he resisted it for a while.

Continuing to pursue his education, Richard had two major influences acting upon him. He recalled that, while driving him to religious school on Saturday mornings, his father would teach him mathematics - and algebra in particular. This approach had allowed him a unique understanding of mathematics and numbers, an understanding that seemed to elude his classmates who were more interested in rote memorization than truly understanding the formula they were using. On the other hand, his interest in what drives people to behave the way they do was strong as well. Looking for a field where he could flex both sides of his intellectual muscle equally, he decided to get a PhD in social psychology from the University of North Carolina. That didn't come easily, though.

When Richard was writing his dissertation, he quickly realized that the scope of the work was so great that it would take him at least another year and a half to complete it. Having no desire to stay in school that long, he told his father that he was considering quitting. Knowing that leaving such a huge task unfinished would always bother his son, Richard's father convinced him to reduce the scope of his dissertation and get his degree within a few months, and moreover that when he had finished, they could talk about Richard coming to work for him. His father spoke of the role of "social entrepreneurship", and how a dedicated entrepreneur could use his or her financial success to enact positive changes in the lives of others. Thus emboldened, he decided to join up with the family business.

The business, called Constellation Brands, is the world's largest producer of wine and spirits. Richard worked

alongside his father in managing the company, drawing on the expertise that he had taken away from his college experiences to give him insights into employee behavior and desires. Before long, he was surprised to find himself thrust into the primary leadership role as his father fell ill. While his father was out, Richard continued to implement his people-oriented approach to business management and adopted the philosophy learned from his father that he calls the "hub and spokes" approach. Namely, he operates as the hub of a wheel, around which the spokes (the individual members of the management team) revolve. It takes the cooperation of the two in order to get anywhere. In addition, he used his mathematical modeling skills to make some very wise acquisitions of other companies, which helped the business to grow in dramatic and unexpected ways. In other words, as a leader, he was a resounding success.

Richard's dedication to running a business from the standpoint of understanding how things work has clearly made all the difference in his career. Since he was a young boy, he had been disinterested in the typical strategies of business and preferred to **focus on figuring out the minds of those individuals who make up the business, learning what made them tick.** This interest has given him the amazing ability to aid them in working together in a way that has brought outrageously successful results, as well as an appreciation for the quirks of life in general. To put it in Richard's own words,

"As much as people think they actually control their destiny and their lives, I'm not sure it's not a random walk. We don't always make our own decisions. Even when we think we are, those decisions are reactions... they lead us to a place we never would have imagined."

This "big-picture" perspective for how humans work and interact with one another is something that only Richard could have brought to the table, and capitalizing upon it has given him a definitive edge in business.

This perspective has also helped Richard and the company to weather the many ups and downs that life has thrown at them. For example, in the early 80's, with the introduction of California-based wine coolers to the marketplace, Richard and his father looked to start their own wine cooler brand. They did so successfully, but unforeseen market forces ended up turning on them and costing them quite a lot of money. However, it was viewed by everyone involved as a valuable learning experience, something that would not have been the case in a company that was focused on the bottom line of profit over understanding and long term growth!

Like many businessmen from that generation, Richard's success in business lies soundly in his unique approach to business strategy. His dedication to his ideals is inspiring in the way he has made them work for him in practical reality, building up the business of his father and grandfather to become something that no one ever expected. As such, Richard's story is a perfect model of the success that one can achieve by adhering to the kind of ideals that the competition might be lacking.

His ideas don't stop at the office, though. Recently, he passed the CEO role to his brother Rob, which allows Richard to devote much of his time and money to charitable causes in an effort to give back to the community. Through the years, he has given an astonishing amount of money to various charities, as well as establishing his own charitable institutions, and he estimates that he presently spends nearly half of his time driving the ultimate agenda and direction of his charitable interests. Richard founded Education Enterprises of New York in order to help learning disabled children and their parents. In this way, he not only continues the traditions that led to his own success, but ensures that his values will continue to live on in future generations.