

St. Ignace Entrepreneur Shares Business Lessons Learned by Experience

Offers Advice to Local Business Owners About Finding Competitive Edge

By Ellen Paquin

A St. Ignace man has collected hard-won bits of wisdom during his career in the business field, and now he wants to share them to help other small business owners. Entrepreneur Jim Plouffe hopes his new book will be useful for people facing the same challenges and frustrations he's encountered over the years.

Mr. Plouffe, who has been building businesses of his own and selling them at a profit since the age of 21, says he wants to offer struggling business owners clear-cut solutions that will work for anyone, no matter what their business is. His book examines several truths that are common to workplaces everywhere, and understanding them, he says, can help people work more effectively, and enjoy the job more. Salespeople, bar keepers, store owners, and anyone who wants to build a business of any kind may also consult Mr. Plouffe individually for advice.

Finding success comes down to 10 simple rules, he says.

"People make business a lot more complicated than it is," Mr. Plouffe (pronounced "Pluff") told *The St. Ignace News* September 3 at his home on Pointe LaBarbe Road. "A lot of these rules you'll read and say, 'Sure, I know that.' But you need a framework to help you put these rules to work in your business. This information can help you make something complex into something simple. It can take years off your learning curve."

Bart Stupak Seeks 4th Congressional Term Economic Development, Health Care, New Fuels Top Campaign

By Paul Gingras

If elected to a fourth term in the U.S. Congress, Bart Stupak of Menominee plans to continue economic development in the U.P., help businesses provide jobs by addressing high health care costs, further promote renewable fuel production, and reduce the cost of oil by regulating oil speculators, all of which will stimulate the northern Michigan economy, he said. He also addressed the possibility of reducing tolls to cross the Mackinac Bridge.

Mr. Stupak's First Congressional District includes all of the Upper Peninsula and a large portion of Lower Michigan. He is challenged this year by Republican Tom Caspersen of the Michigan House of Representatives. The race will be decided in the November 4 election.

Top on Mr. Stupak's list is his continuing effort to create jobs in northern Michigan. There are several ongoing and upcoming projects to look forward to in the Upper Peninsula, he told *The St. Ignace News* Thursday, September 4.

"If you take a look at it, there is a lot of development going on in the Upper Peninsula that I think will come to fruition in the next term," he said.

He cited the nation's first facility to use wood fiber to create ethanol, scheduled to be built next year in the Kinross area by Massachusetts-based Mascoma Corporation. It is a project Mr. Stupak pushed, and it coincides with his efforts to promote renewable energy. The factory is "at least a \$250 million project," he said.

Final details regarding the project are being worked out now, Mr. Stupak said.

Voted for Mandate To Bring New Soo Lock to Soo

A new Soo lock, considered critical to maintaining and enhancing the steel industry, will be built to accommodate the largest ships that pass through the locks, he added. It will take longer than his next term to complete, but the \$340 million project will be started during the next term. It is to be paid solely by the federal government, and the energy and water appropriations sub-committee has approved \$17 million to begin the coffer dams for the project.

Mr. Stupak voted to change the Water Resource Development Act to force the Army Corps of Engineers to build the lock, he said. Legislation states that the Corps "shall" build the lock. To stop the flow of water into other locks, the coffer dams must be put in first.

"The current super lock...is



Jim Plouffe recently wrote a book to help small business owners. A Michigan and Colorado entrepreneur, Mr. Plouffe is listed in the "Who's Who Worldwide of Global Leaders" and the "Who's Who in Executives and Professionals" and has been featured in *Entrepreneur Magazine*, in *Cars and Parts Magazine* three times, and on public television in *Metro Detroit*.

After buying four companies and selling seven of his own, Mr. Plouffe still uses these rules every day himself, and in fact carries a worn, printed copy of them in his pocket at all times.

"It's about a way of thinking, of acting and reacting, to everyday problems and issues that face the small business owner daily," he says. "These 10 rules are the real thing. I wrote them down as I discovered them."

The rules can guide people in making tough decisions. An example is Rule 3: "All business failures

are due to a lack of sales." Everything done in any business should be done in support of sales, Mr. Plouffe advises, whether the business is selling a product or a service. If a business owner can't figure out how his decision supports sales, it may not be the right decision.

Another of Mr. Plouffe's rules is "everything counts." "Everything you do counts for or against you with your customers," he says. "All actions have reactions. Most of the time, there are several very predictable reactions you can plan for. You should be surprised [by them] only once."

Figuring out what advantage you have over similar businesses is critical, he said, prompting another rule: "If you don't have an advantage, don't compete."

Appreciative of the marketing value of "telling a story," Mr. Plouffe takes this approach in his book, as he recounts the experiences of himself and a fictional friend who work their way through common challenges. He weaves his advice into the story along the way.

Telling a story can be used to advantage in business, too, he said, giving the example of a salesman he knows who was trying to make a sale to a municipality. He was facing competition from a local vendor, who had the inside track because he personally knew the board members who would vote on which seller

should get the contract. The salesman called Mr. Plouffe for advice before making his presentation to the board.

"You need to tell them a story," Mr. Plouffe advised. "Appeal to their emotional side with this story that lays out the problems they are facing, and how your product and your service can solve this problem."

The salesperson made his pitch in story form, and he won the contract over the local vendor, with a unanimous vote.

"This is what I love to see: people's success stories when I'm able to help," Mr. Plouffe said. "I love figuring out the angles."

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Plouffe's 10 Rules of Small Business Success

Rule 1: Never take advice or listen to anyone who hasn't already done what you want to do or who doesn't have the same dreams that you do.

Rule 2: Know what you want from your business.

Rule 3: All business failures are due to a lack of sales. (Everything done in business should be done in support of sales. "Profit and loss statements" are one or the other, but not both.)

Rule 4: Your job is to increase sales, build the business, and increase profits. (There are only two ways to increase sales: Sell more to the customers you have, and sell more to new customers.)

Rule 5: Everything counts in business. (Everything counts for or against you with your customers.)

Rule 6: If you don't have an advantage, don't compete. (Know what you do better than anyone else in your field. Know the most profitable thing you can do for your business.)

Rule 7: Everyone has their own agenda, and most of the time, it isn't even close to yours. (Personal agendas and corporate agendas are always in conflict. Everyone does as little as they can for as much as they can.)

Rule 8: Teachable systems and processes must be developed to grow any business. (Asking questions requires that we think. Three great questions to ask over and over again are: So what? Who cares? Why are you bothering me with this? See below.)

Rule 9: Be thankful for what you have.

Rule 10: There are no rules, except the ones you make, believe in, or allow to have imposed on you.

3 Power Questions

For Business Owners To Ask Their Employees

1. So what? (Is this an important issue? Get to the bottom line.)
2. Who cares? (Who is impacted by this? How does it affect our customers or the operation?)
3. Why are you bothering me? (Are you just chatting and wasting my time? Why is someone else not handling this? Should I be the person dealing with this, or should I set up processes and training so others can deal with it in the future?)

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Pope Family Sees Grandson Win Olympic Bronze



This photograph was taken in the hotel before the group left to fly home to the United States. Pictured are (from left) Diana Bailey, Donna Pope (foreground), Carol Raanes, John Bailey, Julie Wheeler, Adam Wheeler, Marley Wheeler, Jim Clifford, Mamie Garceo, Amy Peterson, and Gary Peterson. (Photographs courtesy of Pope/Wheeler families)

By David Latva

During the 2008 Summer Olympics Games, Donna Pope of St. Ignace traveled to Beijing, China, where she witnessed her granddaughter's husband, Adam Wheeler, compete in Greco-Roman wrestling, winning a bronze medal for the United States.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for everyone," said Mrs. Pope, who traveled with family members. "My daughter, Mamie Garceo, and granddaughter, Marley Wheeler, traveled together, and we spent eight days in China."

Mr. Wheeler wrestled in the 96 kilogram (211.5 pound) division, and recorded a 3-1 record that included victories over Lajos Virag of Hungary to open the competition and Hunchen Jiang of China before falling to Mirko English of Germany. In the match against Han Tae-Young of Korea for the bronze medal, Mr. Wheeler posted a 3-1 and 4-1 decision to win the first medal for the United States wrestling team.

In Greco-Roman wrestling, the oldest Olympic sport, the legs may not be used in any way to obtain a fall, and no holds may be taken below the waist. Other rules and procedures are the same as those for freestyle and other international amateur style wrestling.

Aslanbek Khushtov of Russia won the gold medal and Mirko English of Germany the silver.

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Donna Pope (center) with her daughter, Mamie Garceo (left) and granddaughter Marley Wheeler, during their trip to Beijing, China.



The medal ceremony for the Greco-Roman wrestling 96kg/211.5 pound division included (from left) silver medalist Mirko English of Germany, gold medalist Aslanbek Khushtov of Russia, bronze medalist Adam Wheeler of United States, and bronze medalist Aset Mambetov of Kazakhstan, along with Chinese presenters with medals and roses.

A Conversation With Jim Plouffe

The St. Ignace News asked author and Michigan entrepreneur Jim Plouffe to share some of his insights with local small business owners who may be struggling.

Q. You've counseled business owners from all over the country. Can you give any suggestions that would apply across the board to Straits area small businesses, in particular?

A. "St. Ignace, specifically, survives because of tourists. Then we have tradesmen who survive because of local business and Mackinac Island business. We need to create an advantage in the minds of travelers, then promote it. But St. Ignace doesn't compete. St. Ignace needs to create a story to sell itself, evoke emotions in people so they want to come here. Stress our advantages, for example, the boardwalk. How about 'Boardwalk City, where the fun begins.' It's a start. Fun is remarkably salable. We need to create fun experiences for our customers, and then make sure they're promoted downstate. The casino is another draw that should be promoted. Other local communities don't have that."

His advice for local businesses is the same: Promote a distinctive element.

"Across the board, businesses in St. Ignace need a competitive advantage, distinct from nearby destinations, that they focus on and actively promote. Reinvent the ambiance of St. Ignace."

Q. What about increasing traffic for small businesses here?

A. Developing more events in town is a good start, he said, to build on the success of perhaps the biggest draw, the car show.

"We theoretically need an event every weekend, and target different groups with every event. St. Ignace is gorgeous. We could make that competitive advantage just shine."

Small business owners are smart, he said, and they often know more than they realize about promotion.

"It doesn't have to be a great big idea. You don't need to come up with the next McDonald's. You just need one little idea, piled up on one other little idea, piled up on another. Opportunity is always knocking — it's whether you can find a way to exploit it that makes the difference."

Q. What is your advice for those who have a good idea, but struggle to find financing?

A. "Everything has a risk and a reward. The old saying is, if you have a great idea, you can always find the money. There's always a way to find financing. You might have to take a higher interest loan than you would ideally want. There are partnerships, equity stakes, even angel investors out there. It's staggering to me how many sources for funding there are."

Q. How can a person decide if he or she should go ahead with an idea to open a new business?

A. Any proposed venture should be put through the "paper and pencil test." Weigh the costs of operating the business against the sales needed to make a living. There are only two resources any business owner has to draw from: time and money.

"Those who don't have much money to invest, must invest more effort and time."

Q. What do you think of the small business climate here in Mackinac County?

A. The greatest hindrance to the business climate here is not having a sufficient year-around population. Too many businesses in Mackinac County fail because sales just cannot realistically support the business.

"What we really need is year-around employment that pays a livable wage. We need those jobs, and the way to do it is we'll have to somehow go out and get them. The way to do it will not be by getting the next grant, I'll tell you that — not that we haven't got some wonderful things accomplished here through grants. But you create an economy through jobs, not through grants."

"You make the big money in cities, not in rural areas. That's what draws people to cities, that's why I went to Denver. How many Mercedes Benz do you see in St. Ignace? But in Birmingham, every-

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