

Jack Baum

BBA '77, President/CEO of Food, Friends & Company, which owns Cozymel's Mexican Grill and is now creating an upscale seafood restaurant called Red Sails, as well as a Pan-Latin concept called Tango. Founded Canyon Café, Sam's Café, and Newport's in Texas, as well as Sagebrook Technology Partners, an investment firm that provides capital to early-stage technology companies. (Sagebrook subsequently merged with 2M Capital.) On the boards of a few privately held companies. Has competed in five Ironman triathlons and finished in the top tier in the amateur division.

AS TOLD TO ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

When I look at the traits of successful people, I think of a triangle or a stool with three legs. First, successful people have meaningful relationships with their family and friends. They really nurture those relationships. Second, they take the selfishness and the ego out of making money and elevate what they do to make money to a point where it's good for society. I call this "improving the world." For instance, a business owner could make sure that a part of the bottom line goes to help those in need or create a company that puts people to work. And third, successful people know how to recharge their batteries. For some people that's jogging, for some it's reading, for others it's gardening; but whatever it is, people need to take care of their own needs so they'll be energized in the other areas of their lives.

I think the most successful people find a very personal and careful balance among these things. The unique characteristic of a three-legged stool compared to a four-legged stool is that if you pull one of the legs out, it will be out of balance and fall over. So, I don't consider people who just have a lot of material wealth to be successful. I try to learn from everybody I interact with, and my triangular definition of success probably came more from seeing people out of balance than from seeing them in balance. I call this triangle "The Equilibrium Success Triangle." So, if a workaholic is ignoring his family and not taking care of himself, he might achieve short-term success, but he won't experience long-term success.

Of course there are times when, for a month or six months, you need to focus on one thing, and you have to make some sacrifices in the short-term. For example, when people come out of college and they are trying to get their



ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

careers started, they often need to make sacrifices, but I think eventually they need to find a way to bring these three parts of their life into balance.

When I talk to young people, I often use the metaphor of training for a marathon, which is something I know a lot about, to illustrate how to be successful. I know I can increase my training by 5 percent a week without injuring myself. If my goal is to run a marathon, and the longest run I'm capable of today is three miles, I then calculate how long it's going to take me to be ready and I can enter a marathon after that date.

I think the same thing happens in life. A lot of young people coming out of college are rushing to get their careers started, but I think they need to look at it more as a marathon than as a sprint. I believe they need to say to themselves, "Here are the tools that I need to put in my toolbox to be successful. I've got plenty of time to do it. I don't have to do everything today." If they can have that perspective, they are more likely to stay balanced and to keep each leg of the stool on the ground.

The "Success to Me" series is prepared by Aruni Gunasegaram, BBA '92, MBA '98, an Austin entrepreneur, and Pam Losefsky, an Austin writer and editor