



ANITA RODDICK
1942 – 2007

The Body Shop

CHAPTER 21

ANITA RODDICK

“Business with a Conscience”

Anita Roddick is globally one of the best known of our PG-40ers, although it's probably not so well known that she made it late. While she has been widely credited with revolutionizing the cosmetics industry, opposing animal testing and encouraging sustainability, her legacy has recently been subject to intense scrutiny and questioning. What is unquestionable though is that despite first stumbling out of the starting blocks at the age of 34 she went on to build a hugely successful business, proving yet again that the early bird isn't the only one that gets the worm.

From her birthday in 1942 Anita knocked around a bit before zeroing in on her success vehicle. Born in England to immigrant parents, she had early memories of what she called “legitimate child labour” when she worked in the family café every spare hour. She trained as a teacher and then wandered the world for a while living in; and being kicked out of, a kibbutz in Israel and visiting Tahiti, the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Australia and South Africa. Returning to England she met and married Gordon Roddick. The couple then ran a restaurant and a hotel before Gordon decided to take a sabbatical and travel from Buenos Aires to New York by horse. On his return to England he was to find that his wife had reinvented herself, opening the first Body Shop in Brighton, a seaside town on England's south coast.

Far from being the seed of a multinational operation Roddick's first "Body Shop" sounds decidedly kooky. Situated between two funeral parlors; The Body Shop indeed!? It stocked hand made products, with handwritten labels and on opening for business offered customers only five products. Anita had also prepared five of each of them just to make the shelves look stocked. Customers were charged 12 pence (US\$ 0.19) for a bottle or they could bring their own bottle in and save money.

The Body Shop was the right idea at the right time. Growing concerns among many consumers about ethical business and sustainability plus the homespun appearance of The Body Shop, and its products, resonated with those consumers; tapping into a huge latent market. Business was good and another shop was opened and then, responding to requests, Anita started selling franchises.

The Body Shop was off and running and between its 1976 start up and 1984 business expanded swiftly; so well that the company floated on the Unlisted Securities Market (USM) in London, an incubator bourse designed to encourage start ups like The Body Shop to raise capital. The stock listed at a lowly 95 pence but the company continued to flourish and its shares became known as "the shares that defy gravity" when they increased in value by over 500% on listing on the main London stock exchange. By 1991 there were reportedly 700 branches of The Body Shop increasing to 1,980 with a customer base of 77 million in 2004. Business was so good that in 2006 the company was sold to L'Oreal for a reported £652 Million. Without access to internal financial information it's a bit of a guess but I'm pretty confident that Anita could be said to be well on the way to having made it by the time the company first listed on the USM, when she was the very young age (for a PG40-er) of 42.

Like all businesses where a high profile entrepreneur is synonymous with the company and the brand, the woman who was to later become Dame Anita Roddick was very much the face of the business, even though she didn't use her own name on products in any way. It's of course always difficult to say when an owner makes it though in this case her success was the growth of the business itself. The success of The Body Shop is interesting in another way given that, just like Wayne Gould of Sudoku fame, its founder may have got the inspiration for the business during her travels. True or not, her story reinforces a point that

every PG-40er should bear in mind; it's one thing to have a great idea but it's more important that you then recognize its potential, run with the idea and take it as far as it will go.

Anita Roddick is a great yardstick to measure our goals, ambitions and dreams against as she nurtured one small shop into a global business valued at £652 million and created a multi-million dollar fortune for herself along the way. And she made the business world a better place whilst doing it.

So we can take away at least two things from the story of Anita Roddick. Firstly, like all our featured PG40-ers it doesn't matter at what age you start. After or before 40 is OK as long as you know you can never be too old to get going. Secondly, don't underestimate the potential of your idea; think of Anita Roddick, Ray Kroc, Colonel Sanders and the rest of the gang. The sky or billionaire status doesn't have to be the limit.

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