He Had $2,000 and No Idea How to Run a Business. Here's How He Turned That Into Two Thriving Barber Shops.

If you want to run a great business, then you need to learn from the greats. And they're all around you. They are the mom and pop shops in every town – the barber shops, the coffee shops, the bookstores, and the diners. But these aren't just small businesses. These are master classes in community building, customer service, and innovative marketing.

See the list our list of America's Favorite Mom and Pop Shops

Entrepreneur magazine has teamed up with Walmart Business to go on a nationwide trip to meet these mom and pop entrepreneurs to learn what it takes to build meaningful businesses that last.

Our first stop is New Haven, Connecticut, home of prestigious universities, world-famous pizza and the rocking world of Skull & Combs. It is a barbershop, but it's so much more. Founder Jason Bunce started with just $2,000 in his pocket and no idea how to start a business. But with grit and determination, he built not just two thriving locations, but an incredible community.

So what spurred his decision to start his own business? "I wanted to really create something, and everywhere that I worked, and everybody that I worked for, it felt so difficult to create the best version of myself within their company," Jason told me. "And I quickly realized that I had to create

this brand because no one else could capture the same things that I had in mind.”

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The motto of Skull & Combs is “Friends made, hair slayed.” Jason explained, “We’re a salon and barbershop that leads with our hearts. I built this place to accommodate the average person who just likes to get away at the barbershop and experience the salon – but then also piggyback that with really great hair.”

He started his journey as a business owner when he was 35 years old. “I just kind of hit the proverbial dead end.” He says he felt like it was do-or-die time to try his own thing. “Discontent was the seed of change for me. I was just so frustrated with myself that I had to make a big change. It started with a reflection, and I just kind of reverse-engineered my life into accepting who I was and it led me to an artistic path. And here we are 10 years later with two shops.”

A lot of hard work and just a little bit of luck helped Jason establish his business in New Haven. He was eventually able to buy the building from his landlord who was supportive of his goals. “When I first signed the lease, I got very friendly and familiar with the landlord. He and his wife had owned the property since the ’80s, and I mentioned to him, ‘Hey, if you were ever interested in selling the property, I would really appreciate first right of refusal.'” The landlord called 18 months later, but Jason was not yet in a financial position to get approved for a traditional mortgage. However, after a five-minute meeting, the landlord was so impressed with Jason’s passion that he agreed to hold a privately held mortgage. “I was elated,” Jason says. “I couldn’t believe that he said yes.”

Looking back, I asked Jason what advice he would give himself

at the start of his journey. “Always follow your heart, lead with your passion,” he says. It is easy to get thrown off by doubters and early business struggles, he says, “But just stay true to yourself and stay committed to the goal and it will pay you back and reward you.”

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Walmart Business is fired up to support entrepreneurs like Jason, which is why they set him up with a six-month Walmart Business Plus membership. Benefits include free shipping and limited-time offers on products for business owners and 2 percent cash back on purchases over $250. They also gifted him $1,000 to spend on whatever you need at Walmart Business

I appreciated Jason sharing his story, including all of the hard stuff because that’s what entrepreneurs need to hear. They need to see the challenges along with the growth because that’s the real story of Skull & Combs and other mom and pop businesses like it. It’s great to have a vision, but a vision by itself only gets you so far. When you share that vision, when you align your vision with other people’s visions, that’s when an idea turns into a lasting business.

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