

Startup Snapshots

Sharon Dauk, MBA '89: No longer lonely at the top

Where do CEOs go for guidance? Most people would ask their peers. But many CEOs have no peers.

Enter Sharon Dauk, executive coach since 2007. Dauk draws on her multifaceted experience in finance, investment, and corporate boards to help high-level executives manage their relationships with boards of directors and other stakeholders, or navigate through transitions.

The CEO-board relationship is a complex one, especially in the post-Enron world, Dauk explains: “The dynamic between CEOs and their boards tends to be almost adversarial, and the board has an inherent conflict in its dual role of being a fiduciary to the shareholders while providing strategic guidance to the CEO.”

Dauk also helps executives in transition, often individuals starting up an enterprise. “Unique issues come up when you start a business, such as deciding what sort of people to hire, and how to relinquish some control,” says Dauk.

Dauk became aware of her coaching talents while at the investment company she runs with her husband. “Two of the CEOs of companies we had invested in said, ‘Sharon, you’re a very good coach, in terms of understanding all the intricate needs of what senior management has to deal with.’”

Dauk acts as a combination peer, guide, and confidante. “A lot of people need help identifying what their goals are, and charting a course to reach them,” she says. “I add a heavy dose of common sense, reality, and business perspective.”

That business perspective is what differentiates Dauk from the competition (most coaches tend to be psychologists). “All those problems you try to solve by yourself while standing in the shower, you can talk to me about,” she says.



Sharon Dauk, MBA '89, founder and principal, Sharon Dauk Executive Coaching, LLC [sharondauk.com]

Brian Thompson, MBA '00: Premium beers for a premium market

To hear Brian Thompson describe it, the microbrewery business is still a homespun cottage industry with considerable regional charm. His company, Santa-Barbara-based Telegraph Brewing, produces handcrafted beers for sale in surrounding areas.



Brian Thompson, MBA '00, founder and CEO, Telegraph Brewing Company [www.telegraphbrewing.com]

“One nice thing about the microbrewery world is that there is still regionalism — you can find distinct flavors in California, the Northeast, or the Pacific Northwest,” says Thompson. “For a beer aficionado, that makes travel very interesting.”

It should come as no surprise that Thompson himself is a beer aficionado. After graduating from the Johnson School and working

as a Wall Street equity research analyst, he decided to pursue his passion for microbrewing by joining New York City-based Heartland Brewery as an assistant brewer. There he honed his craft — and hatched his plans for founding his own brewery.

“I had always toyed with the idea, and I really enjoyed David BenDaniel’s entrepreneurship classes,” says Thompson. “I thought, ‘I’ll make a fortune on Wall Street and start a business I really want to start.’” He didn’t make the fortune, due to bad timing — he began on Wall Street shortly after the dot-com peak in 2000 and quit just months before the market hit rock bottom — but he did realize his dream, founding Telegraph in 2005.

He wisely chose Santa Barbara for its affluence and its inhabitants’ taste for gourmet products. The company has grown more than 65 percent annually. Recent growth is due to expansion to Los Angeles, San Diego, and the Bay area.

Telegraph’s product line is simple, elegant, and upscale. Its latest creation is a rye wine (“barley wine” describes a beer with high alcoholic content, and Telegraph has added rye to the mix). “It’s new and different,” Thompson says. “Rye has a nice spiciness. I think it’s going to be a very exciting flavor profile.”

— IRENE KIM