

A Journey of Experiences

By Genevieve D'Souza

You would think at this point in his career, Marc Gordon would be too big for his boots. As a media personality, marketing professional, corporate speaker, and an internationally recognized thought leader in the field of customer experience, he has provided guidance to some of today's most well respected organizations.

But to meet Marc isn't a privilege; it's a must-do. He's witty, down-to-earth, and has an entrepreneurial spirit that exudes passion, persistence, and perseverance. And if that's wasn't enough, he's approachable, ready to share ideas and stories, or just listen.

However, unlike many of his colleagues who came from the corporate world or were instructed by mentors, Marc had to pave his own path through determination, hard work, and plenty of setbacks.

The story of Marc's journey into business isn't glamorous. And it isn't rags to riches material. But it is the journey of a young man who struggled to understand his strengths, improve his confidence, and was smart enough to get creative and triumph over trials.

Born in Toronto on January 14, 1970, Marc was raised by his parents to have strong personal, social and professional

ethics: importance of family, embracing diversity, personal responsibility, and taking initiative. His father had a successful 30-year career working for Nortel. He was well-organized and always maintained work-life balance. "For him, there was never a question between work and family. And he knew that being a husband and father involved more than just bringing home a paycheck," says Marc.

Marc's stay-at-home mother provided guidance and unconditional support for him and his younger brother, Sean.

A change of plans

Marc showed no signs of leadership or entrepreneurial qualities growing up. He was an adolescent dreamer with a passion for Star Wars and watching professional wrestling. He lacked an athletic ability and was "a bit of a social misfit," introverted, and often bullied.

In high school, Marc's plan was simple. Graduate and then off to university for an MBA. After that, a career in the business world – whatever that might be. But in his final year of school Marc realized his poor math skills would prevent him from getting into a business program. "I was badly failing math. And my teacher had little interest in my success. I realized things were not going to work out in my favour," says Marc.

So he abruptly ended his school career in 1987, taking up a retail job selling televisions and home electronics. It was there he learned his first lesson in business at age 18: When dealing with customers, keep things simple and easy. It would be a lesson that he would embrace throughout his career.

In 1989, keeping a promise he made to his parents, Marc



Marc at 18, working his first full time job selling home electronics.

returned to school and enrolled in the business program at Seneca College in Toronto. Seeking to boost his confidence, he also joined a gym. It was there Marc was inspired by the gym fashion and soon became a distributor of colourful pajama-style workout pants. “All the guys were wearing these brightly coloured baggy workout pants. But the price of them were outrageous for something that was not much beyond pajamas. I believed I could come out with something better and less expensive,” says Marc.

Through hard work, his clothing line found its way into dozens of retailers and health clubs. Eventually he was approached by a chain of clothing stores who ordered more product than all his other clients combined. Accepting their terms of needing 30 days to pay, Marc filled the order.

Three weeks later the entire chain filed for bankruptcy, closing before Marc could get paid, leaving him in debt to the manufacturer. To pay off his debt, he was introduced to an L.A.-based lingerie line that turned Marc into a salesman without any customers – or product knowledge.

Seeking out the only market he could find, he sold fancy lace and faux leather lingerie to brothels, exotic dance clubs, and escort agencies.

“I was in school during the day, and selling lingerie to strippers at night,” says Marc. “I was making over \$1000 a night. Considerably more than my teachers.”

It was a good business until his personal and professional priorities shifted. “Within that industry, I found myself associating with people who were involved in organized crime. I realized that this was not a path I wanted to continue down.”

A new direction

Always an adventurous soul, Marc then took up acting and stand-up comedy at Yuk Yuk’s and The Laugh Resort, and other comedy clubs in Toronto, while still in college. But it was not to become a new career. “The grind of auditions and working the clubs at night was impacting my education. I found myself driving an hour away on a Tuesday night for a 15 minute gig, getting nothing but a free drink, then having to drive back home. I had to eventually make a choice. And school won out,” says Marc.

Upon graduating with honours, Marc received a contract as Marketing Director for The Life Seminars. Based on the teachings of his professor, Dr. Michael Rock, the seminars were designed to enlighten people about work-life balance – something Marc learned from his father growing up.

Six months later, the contract ended and Marc found

himself unemployed and with no prospects. A brief stint as a dishwasher at a local diner and then a cook for a popular casual dining chain reminded him how much he needed to be his own boss.

After attending a business opportunity show, Marc purchased a machine that gold plated emblems for cars. In 1993, he started GoldPro and embarked on the “backbreaking” but lucrative business of travelling to car dealers plating emblems. “It was one of the worst jobs I ever had,” says Marc. “Beyond the physical aspect of travelling around with all this equipment, the dealers showed no loyalty and were slow to pay. If I was going to succeed, I knew my business model had to change.”



Marc with his company's first product, a portable gold plating machine. This would become the first of many product lines.

By switching from being a service provider to a product supplier, he was now able to grow his company using skills he had honed from his previous business ventures.

By 1999 GoldPro had six product lines and supplied over 2,400 new car dealers across Canada. Marc had supplier agreements with numerous auto glass retailers, was endorsed by a number of industry associations, and was in talks with Mr. Lube, Walmart and Costco. In six years, GoldPro had become the largest automotive aftermarket supplier in Canada.

But product sales nose-dived between 2000 and 2002. Competition, a recession, and a lull in the auto industry brought his company to a screeching halt. Never one to be beaten down, he then developed a protection film for cars in cooperation with 3M that he called Protection One. “I hedged all my bets on this saving the company,” says Marc, who moved GoldPro to a larger facility to accommodate the manufacturing and training associated with the new line.

Despite the success of Protection One, the automotive market continued to slow, as did Marc's business. By 2003, daily stress began to take its toll on his health and marriage. After a lot of thought, long talks with his wife, and seeking advice from his father, Marc knew what needed to be done. With one phone call to a national window tint supplier looking to enter the automotive market, GoldPro was sold.

After taking time off to be with his wife and baby daughter, Marc decided to re-enter the business world. But this time his motivation had changed. "I decided I wanted to be there for business owners. To provide them the ideas and expertise that I wished I had available to me," says Marc.

Finding his stride

In 2004, Marc started Fourword Marketing. It was his opportunity to share his business-building marketing strategies with others. Given his own professional highs and lows and a personal desire to give more, it was a natural fit for Marc to form a company that provided marketing solutions to help businesses grow. It was also a path to becoming an author, speaker, and consultant, and further sealed his reputation as not just another talker, but a hard-core doer.



Marc on stage at the World Management Forum in Tehran, Iran.

Over the last number of years, Marc has become a beacon for executives, entrepreneurs, and organizations who want to learn how to create real relationships with customers. And more than 30 years later, he still refers to that first piece of advice he learned. "It's really not that hard," says Marc. "It starts with keeping things simple and easy."

Today, Marc can often be seen and heard on television and radio providing insights and commentary on current business events. His articles have appeared on over 200

trade and business publications. And he has become a sought after podcast guest.

Marc has spoken at events across North America and Europe. In 2018, he became the first customer experience professional to speak at the World Management Forum in Tehran, Iran.

With a teenaged son and daughter, he proudly carries on his father's mantra of taking care of family first.

And not one to forget his roots, Marc sits on the Professional Advisory Committee at Seneca College, helping shape the business programs for new students.

Learn more about Marc and how he helps organizations delivery experiences that attract customers and increase sales by visiting marcgordon.ca