

LATER LIFE STORIES

BACK IN BUSINESS
Bob Gould, 71

The serial entrepreneur

WITH SEVERAL SUCCESSFUL VENTURES BEHIND HIM, BOB GOULD DOESN'T NEED TO ENDURE THE BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS OF BUILDING UP A NEW BUSINESS, BUT HE CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING HE'D RATHER DO.



As an entrepreneur, the thing that motivates me is the thrill of the chase. I enjoy that more than being successful or making money. I lose interest fairly quickly when a business is over the hump and thoughts turn to structure and management. I like the creative aspect of building something from nothing. I was born in New York, lived in Alaska for 20 years and then 24 years ago moved to the UK part-time as a journalist for the weekly Alaskan business newspaper I owned. I ran various ventures in Alaska, commuting every month or so from London.

Aside from the newspaper, these involved start-ups in advertising, event promotion, document digitisation and the supply of all kinds of different packaged goods to the Alaska tourist industry. Most of my start-ups succeeded, some did not. My new business, Qiviut & Co, is an online store selling luxury apparel made from qiviut ("KIV-ee- uht"), an Inupiat term for the soft undercoat of the arctic musk ox.

It's a remarkable fibre, eight times warmer than wool with a hand-feel softer than cashmere. It outperforms all other natural fibres and feathers. Musk-ox fibre has been

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IT'S EXHILARATING TO OPERATE IN THE ROUGH AND TUMBLE WORLD OF BUSINESS, DOING SOMETHING I THINK HAS GREAT POTENTIAL. IT'S BETTER THAN GOLF!

uncommercialised until now because it's hard to source, just like cashmere and vicuña were a century ago. The idea for this start-up came from my tourist industry business. Our retail customers wanted us to supply apparel, which we did not do, so we decided to try manufacturing a qiviut jacket. We bought 75kg of musk-ox fibre from Canada and created a prototype. However, the gift shops in Alaska said none of their customers would pay the luxury price tag. The idea died on the vine in Alaska, but not with me. In spring 2015, now

living in London permanently and with 75kg of fibre begging to be used, I resurrected the project. I had the time, the inclination, financial means and a head-start since I had already acquired enough raw material to get going. We debuted the qiviut jacket in October 2016 and last November introduced seven new accessory products. With no background in fashion, the production process, design and marketing have all been a huge learning process, but I've enjoyed it tremendously and the people I've met along the way have been wonderful.

Some aspects of business are harder the older you get, but some are easier. Reinventing a new persona in a new industry is not easy. On the other hand, when you don't have the experience of a setback it can feel like the sky is falling when one inevitably occurs; it takes its toll. But when you've been through it a few times you're calmer. That's a big benefit. It's important to look after yourself later in life. I didn't do that as a young man because I was working 24/7, but since the 1980s I've maintained a pretty

good fitness regime. It all started when I ran the London Marathon. Keeping myself active since then has definitely helped. That's one secret to a long career. Another is maintaining your sense of curiosity.

You never want to feel like it's hard work. Of course, there will be times like that, but if what you're doing gets your juices flowing every morning then it's worth it.

For other people, this might mean going back to school, taking up a hobby or writing a book. For me, it's exhilarating to operate in the rough and tumble world of business, doing something I think has great potential. It's better than golf!

We only have so many days on this planet and we need to appreciate every one of them. You should try to make a contribution and do something exciting. I think when my time is over I'll feel like I have.

This is the latest in a series of profiles of individuals who are redefining later life that will appear in FT Weekend Magazine and at laterlifestories.ft.com.

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