

# Leadership Unleashed

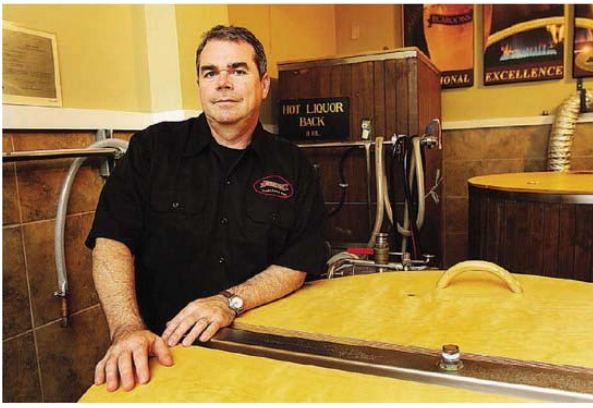
Interviews with Leaders...Learn what Leaders like you are doing to lead effectively

## Staying true to who you are ~ Sean Dunbar of Picaroons

**Posted:** July 19, 2013 | **Author:** Dave Veale | **Filed under:** Uncategorized | **Tags:** authenticity, beer, Dave Veale, Leadership Unleashed, New Brunswick, Picaroons, Sean Dunbar | [Leave a comment »](#)

In Dave Veale's most recent Leadership Unleashed interview he talks to Sean Dunbar of Picaroons about authenticity and the small business owner. The full interview with Sean was published in the Telegraph-Journal on Saturday, July 20th, 2013. Here it is...

**IF YOU'RE NOT LEADING, YOU HAVE TO WONDER WHO IS**  
**Dave Veale's interview with Sean Dunbar ~ Picaroons**



*Sean Dunbar, owner-operator of Picaroons, is shown at his Brewtique in Fredericton.*

PHOTO: STEPHEN MACGILLIVRAY/THE DAILY GLEANER

My time with Sean Dunbar, owner of Northhampton Brewing Company, which brews the popular Picaroons Traditional Ales, was the longest interview I've done to date. Sean, a passionate beer lover and New Brunswick cheerleader, weaved an interesting story from every question I asked. He described the inception of his company as the accidental discovery of a born entrepreneur.

The road from starting the company in 1994 to today has not been a smooth ride. Risk-taking, rebellious attitudes and a handful of defining moments led to today's award-winning brewing company. Through it all, the passion for brewing beer stayed alive, and Sean experienced a shift that has fuelled the growth and direction of his company.

I began our conversation by asking Sean about the early days of brewing beer.

**A:** The brewery idea got going in 1994. As far as I remember, it was somebody else's idea. Three of us from law school got talking about a brewpub. We initially investigated becoming a brewpub.

**Q:** How did the brewpub concept go?

**A:** We identified an existing pub in Fredericton that we thought would benefit from having a brewery next door. We would run a brewpub with somebody else doing the hard work of selling the beer and we would just brew.

We were beside each other but not physically connected. We ran the beer lines from the brewery through the ceiling and the outside wall back down into the pub.

**Q:** How did that go?

**A:** It was fun, but it didn't go all that well. The idea worked, but there was a pricing issue with the pub. We eventually yanked the beer lines out of the pub and were without a customer.

**Q:** What did you do next?

**A:** Next, we found our own spot – opened a place and hired a manager. We said, "You've got to turn this place into a bar." We had no money. We had four walls, and all we were going to do was serve beer. It was going to be very simple. It was going to be a taproom. We bought furniture at auction and then we begged and borrowed.

**Q:** It sounds like this was a defining moment in your business. What was the attitude that was emerging for the company?

**A:** "Do it our way" became our mantra. That's the way we had to do it. I'm pretty sure if everything had been smooth sailing from Day 1 and we were overcapitalized instead of undercapitalized, it would have looked a lot different. We weren't experienced business people.

**Q:** Were you following a business plan or using your intuition at this point?

**A:** We had a cracking-good business plan. It was professionally done. We worked hard to follow it, but none of it worked. It was all speculative – you learn from desperation. It feels a lot different when your back is against the wall.

The small brewery continued along. It did so well that we knew we needed to expand it. We expanded it badly. We ran out of money, and the brewery went out of business in four years – it was 1999.

**Q:** That must have been disheartening.

**A:** Actually, the really heartening part was when the business community figuratively and literally walked up and put their arm around our shoulders and said, “Hey, boys, welcome to the club.” It was like we proved we were true entrepreneurs by taking it to the edge and over. I think the business world understands that some people fall off the edge and some people go the other way, but you don’t know until you get there. That was really kind of comforting.

**Q:** How did you respond to going bankrupt?

**A:** I thought, for some reason, about going back to being a lawyer. The ideas kept coming, different things, and I knew that I didn’t really want to sit in a box and be a lawyer. After an interview for a job at a data centre for McCain Foods, I sat in my car and called my wife and said, “I don’t know how, but I’m going to make beer again.” I was not counting on anything at this point and I thought I wanted this to be all me. I really just wanted to make as much beer as I could make. My business plan was essentially to make keg beer, sell it to local pubs and just make a living. It was more a lifestyle than a business.

**Q:** So you threw out the business plan?

**A:** As it turned out, yeah. There was no scheme. It was never written down. We went where the beer and the people that drink the beer took us.

**Q:** So you go through this period of bankruptcy and then decide to just brew beer. Did success come quickly?

**A:** No, but it flowed along quite nicely. More and more people wanted the beer. We just kept making it in this little garage and kept growing and growing. People kept digging the beer. It’s always been about the product. We just followed the product.

**Q:** How does the ‘follow the product’ philosophy work?

**A:** We always believed in the product and we believed that the product had the lead. You trust the people that drink your beer, trust that they’re drinking it for the right reasons. We still don’t have massive marketing budget. As a matter of fact, all of our marketing dollars go into community work.

**Q:** Tell me about your company’s mission.

**A:** It’s to make the world a better place one beer at a time. That’s our corporate mission.

**Q:** How does your corporate mission push you to grow your company?

**A:** I wanted to start growing the company as an example that you can do this, that people from here can do this. I’d like to make beer one of the identifiable things about New Brunswick. It makes sense. We have such a head start with Moosehead. When people think New Brunswick, I want them to think beer.

**Q:** What advice would you give to someone who is considering entrepreneurship and may be sitting on the fence?

**A:** The usual advice is just get on with it. Start doing something. Figure it out. You can really only figure it out by being up to your ankles in the stuff. It’s never going to be perfect. It’s not going to follow your plan. We’re human beings – life does not allow us to follow the plan.

**Q:** How do you finish the following sentence? “A leader’s job is to” **A:** A leader’s job is ultimately to lead, not push, not necessarily inspire, but to get out there whichever way they have to do it and be in the lead. Leadership is an essential part of every single enterprise, and if you’re not leading, you’ve got to sit there and wonder who is.

Dave Veale is a leadership coach and founder of Vision Coaching Inc. in Saint John. He can be reached by email at [Dave@VisionCoachingInc.com](mailto:Dave@VisionCoachingInc.com) or via Twitter @Dave\_Veale. To read past columns and watch videos go to [LeadershipUnleashed.ca](http://LeadershipUnleashed.ca).

Powered by TECNAVIA	Copyright © 2013 Brunswick News Inc. All rights reserved. 07/20/2013

---

---

**Blog at WordPress.com. Customized Clean Home Theme.**

Follow

Follow “Leadership Unleashed”

Powered by WordPress.com