

BEST FOOT FORWARD!

THE JOURNEY SO FAR – FROM YTS TO BUSINESS SUCCESS.

Talking to shoe repairers about their experiences it has become clear that there are almost as many ways to achieve success as there are individuals in the trade.

It seems that it takes any variety of combinations of ambition, inspiration and often a bit of luck to pull it off. The only common factor seems to be good old-fashioned graft!

So, when we were contacted by a repairer whose shop is far away from the 'organised chaos' of Bernard Kearns' business in West Yorkshire that we featured in our Spring edition - both in set up and geography, we were interested to hear his very different story.

Darren Slater from Perth in Scotland began his career as a teenager having only just started to overcome a difficulty that had blighted his life at school. Instead of us writing about it we thought we'd let Darren tell you in his own words...

"As a young child things can greatly influence your life. For me it was dyslexia, which at the time was dismissed and ridiculed, and as a result of this my school life was extremely negative. Thankfully, I think I've proved that dyslexia doesn't affect intelligence, or the ability to succeed."

My first work experience in this industry was through the YTS scheme which I started in 1986 at the age of



16, with Timpson Shoe Repairs. Fortunately for me one of the employees I was working with had a great influence on me, as he had overcome his own disability. Henry Stuart was one of the most skilled cobblers I have ever known. I will forever be grateful to him for passing on his skills to me."

A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

"Despite being deaf and dumb he was an exceptional, positive role model who showed me that you can succeed no matter what life throws at you. He gave me the drive and determination to achieve things for myself. I was fortunate that because of my dyslexia I had come to rely more on verbal communication rather than the written word.

It soon became clear that this was an advantage when dealing with customers. I was told it made me an excellent sales person although I never felt I was selling because I naturally believe in advising the customer on their individual needs and of offers that could be of interest to them. This has put me in good stead throughout my working life. After two years with Timpson's I became a bench man for Mister Minit. I was glad to get that job as it meant a vast increase in pay compared to my YTS wages. However, it wasn't long before I was back at Timpson's again, having been offered a relief manager position covering the east coast of Scotland. This was a brilliant promotion, with new responsibilities and the chance to work with some fantastic people in the shoe repair trade."

MAKING PROGRESS

"I advanced within Timpson's from relief manager to shop manager in Arbroath. Then John Timpson himself, on one of his area visits,



asked me to work for him in England. So I was soon working in a busier shop in the Manchester area. From then on my career progressed to working directly for James Timpson and helping him to develop the watch repair aspect of his company." Despite his career progressing steadily with Timpson's, Darren decided to take a break from shoe repair and to try his hand at a different type of work. However, the dream of starting his own business was always in his mind and so it comes as no surprise to hear that in 2010 he became self-employed doing what he does best ...shoe repair.



FIRST STEPS

"I opened my first shop 'Sole Saver' on a shoe string budget' (!) in West Mill Street in Perth. Everything was going well until the shop was flooded in December 2010. The period that followed was the most stressful time of my life. I was trying to salvage my business while constantly arguing with the insurance company's loss adjuster. It was a miracle that I kept my sanity during the next few months.

The support that family and friends gave me was vital, not only emotionally but also helping me to keep one of my larger contracts. I would like to thank everyone who supported me throughout that time, especially Bryan of Cobblers Neuk in Lochee, Dundee for giving me the use of his shop to do my contract work and George Lawrence for the use of his machine in his garage. At last I was able to relocate my business to new premises in the High

Street in Perth and I opened the doors of my new shop on the 1st of March 2011. This was the silver lining after the bleak, grey clouds of the set-back with my first shop."

LOOKING FORWARD

"It is now just one year on and I have gone from a sole trader to a Limited Company within the first 10 months. I am trying to model my little business on the lines of Timpson's because nobody can deny their success. I like to think that my own strength and drive to succeed has now overcome the adversity of the first shop. I have learned from the experience and moved on for the better."

Not content with his new shop, Darren has decided to 'diversify' and has recently begun to offer a mobile auto locksmith service based in Perth. "My business partner in this new venture, Colin Cochrane, operates the service throughout Scotland. We realise that the car key industry is moving further away from simply a shop-based service. Manufacturers are installing higher levels of security encryptions in cars today. More and more keys have to be tied in to the car immobilisers on site. Although this service is still in its early stages I'm pleased to say it is growing at a steady pace.

I pride myself on my workmanship and my honesty. Because of this I've been lucky enough to have already established a large loyal customer base. My customers are now recommending my services to their family, friends and colleagues and I also have contract work for other companies and orthopaedic work for the local hospital and independent podiatrists.

I now employ two people in my shop to help with the increasing volume of work and I am hoping to open another shop in the near future. So far my work plan that I dreamed of just a few years ago has exceeded all my expectations..."

Let's hope this continues to be the case. If determination was all it took to achieve success then we might be writing about a nationwide chain of Slater Shoe Repairs in the future!

www.sole-saver.co.uk

