



*Doing Business the
Orange County Choppers
Way*

THE RIDE
of a **LIFETIME**

PAUL TEUTUL, SR.
with Mark Yost

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To all the small business owners out there who are struggling
like I once did.

CONTENTS



FOREWORD	ix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xi
INTRODUCTION	xiii
Chapter 1: Choices	1
Chapter 2: No Thanks, Pardner	13
Chapter 3: Passion	27
Chapter 4: Welcome Change	39
Chapter 5: Building a Reputation	51
Chapter 6: Stay Organized	67
Chapter 7: Hire Good People	81
Chapter 8: Learn to Trust Others	93
Chapter 9: Take Care of Your Employees	105
Chapter 10: All in the Family	113
Chapter 11: Learn from Your Mistakes	125
Chapter 12: Giving Back	139
Chapter 13: Never Sell Out	153
Chapter 14: Always Follow Your Dreams	163

FOREWORD



I have seen every episode of *American Chopper*. I have seen the show change, grow, and experiment. I have watched bikes being built for an amusement park, a helicopter company, a truck company, a car company, a snow cone company, a heavy equipment procurement company, a sound system company, a bowling company, Bill Murray, Billy Joel, some magician nobody ever heard of, people who wrote in asking for a bike, the New York Giants, the New York Jets, firemen, veterans wounded in Iraq, a professional golfer, Russell Crowe, Jay Leno, a camping store, some blowhard in Minnesota who builds theme restaurants, weight lifter thugs, the Yankees, the University of Michigan, a widow. You see where this is going. Soon we will all have a custom-built Orange County Chopper chopper. I have ridden three of these bikes—one time with Sylvester Stallone, Bruce Willis, and the Teutuls, through midtown Manhattan in the rain. I have seen the shop change from warehouse to extra-cool 100,000-square-foot World Headquarters. I have seen the staff change. What happened to the first paint guy? Is Nub still around? I was very upset when Vinnie left; I still don't know the full story there. Cody vanished, no word, no trace. That didn't bother me. I grew concerned when, during contract negotiations, Mikey announced he wasn't "cut out for the business." What is he cut out for? I know there is a sister who may be a nurse. I know there is a brother who runs a steel business. I know Senior has a second wife

and two large dogs. One misbehaves (a dog, not the wife). He also has a collection of miniature farm animals. How creepy is that? I was worried the poorly trained dog might go crazy and eat the tiny animals. I am also worried about Senior's glaucoma. I like Junior. I like Rick. I like the bald guy with the big voice. I like Lee the new guy. I like Jim Quinn (I guess) though I'm waiting for him to go nuts and explode. I have, even in a very small almost immeasurable way, started to like Jason. Though believe me it wouldn't break my heart if he went to work in the gift shop with Senior's muscle-bound jughead gym buddy.

I've watched them travel to Europe, South America, South Africa, and Australia. I don't like the producer Craig Piligian. I think the guy is a haircut. But I do like that he brought these people to my life. I get angry when there are no new shows. I love the new 50-billion-ton press. I like the Flow Jet. I don't like the hijinks. It's just a matter of time until someone loses a foot.

So what's the deal? Well, I love watching motorcycles being built. I could watch that all day, all week. They could build the same bike over and over and over. Fine with me. I can't get enough. I'm like a dog staring at the refrigerator door. My girlfriend doesn't seem to get this. I gave up trying to articulate my love for this show. I don't get why she enjoys shopping for purses.

So is it the bikes? Yeah, kind of. But over the years something else has happened. I envy this family. They get to spend their time together, good or bad. They love what they do. They scream and throw things and get their feelings hurt, but they also experience the family structure at its highest functioning purpose. Love and support. Few families grow together in this way. That's why I watch. I want to be in this family. My son and I. I want us to be Teutuls and build motorcycles. There, now you know. I'm insane.

—Dave Letterman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



There's not enough space (or time) to thank all of the people who have helped me over the past 30 years. You'll meet many of them as you read this book, but there are countless others whose advice, guidance, and honesty helped to make me who and what I am today. To the business partners, suppliers, distributors, and employees who have been a friend to Orange County Ironworks and Orange County Choppers, I thank you all for the part you played in the triumph of these businesses. Whether it was a little piece of advice you gave me or a lesson you helped me learn, some of which ended up in this book, it all contributed to my becoming the successful businessman that I am today.

As for the folks who currently work for me, I'd like to say thanks for coming in every day and working so hard to make Orange County Choppers the extraordinary business it is today—especially Steve Moreau, Scott Amann, Ron Salisbury, Michele Paoletta, Joe Puliafico, and Rick Petko. I'd also like to acknowledge Craig Piligian.

I want to thank my publisher, John Wiley & Sons, for believing in this book, and especially Matthew Holt and Shannon Vargo for their outstanding direction and guidance. And to Mark Yost, for helping me to translate my years of experience into something that will provide readers with a way to reach their dreams and goals.

And I have to thank my family—especially my sons Paulie and Michael, who are still involved with Orange County Choppers today.

INTRODUCTION



*M*y name is Paul Teutul Sr. No middle name. My parents couldn't be bothered.

Many of you are probably reading this book because you know me from the television show *American Chopper*, which is about my current business, Orange County Choppers. Yes, we're famous, we're on TV, and people recognize us everywhere we go.

But most everything I am telling you in this book, most everything I learned about running a successful business, I learned from working 28 years in the iron business. Is it applicable to the motorcycle business and did those same principles help Orange County Choppers become a huge success? Certainly. But my point is this: I didn't learn these things in some glamorous business like Orange County Choppers. I learned them in the iron business. It's a tough business. Probably a lot like yours.

I say this for a number of reasons. The business examples and principles in this book can be applied to almost any business. I don't care what it is—software design, corner garage, a mom-and-pop corner convenience store, or a Fortune 500 corporation. Furthermore, I don't want you to be sitting there thinking that because you don't have a show on television, or because people don't recognize you wherever you go, these principles aren't going to work for you. They will.

Wherever you've seen me, I want you to forget what you know about me. The Paul Teutul Sr. you see on television and elsewhere is only a small part of who I am. Yes, I'm that guy, but I'm also a businessman who runs a multimillion-dollar corporation that I built from the ground up with my own two hands.

Over the past two decades, I also beat alcoholism and drug addiction. I defied a lifetime of skeptics who said I'd amount to nothing. And I proved wrong those who said I'd never make it. Along the way, I learned a few things about passion, perseverance, deal making, employee relations, and, yes, the fact that I don't know everything and can't do everything.

That is what this book is all about—how an average guy without much opportunity or resources followed his dreams and clawed his way up the ladder of success. By following my dream and sticking to my principles, I've created one of the most recognized brands in the custom motorcycle market. And I've earned a pretty good living along the way.

How did I do it? By following what I like to call Teutul's Tenets of Doing Business. They're simple, straightforward, and can be applied to almost any business.

Partnerships. I've been in a number of internal business partnerships over the years and it has been my experience that they don't work because you lose control over half the business, which makes you semi-powerless. More importantly, to be successful, partnerships often require you to dilute your vision. No two people are ever going to think exactly alike on every subject. So at some point, you have to compromise your vision.

Passion. This is the main ingredient in being successful. If you don't have a passion for what you're doing, then you shouldn't be doing it.

Perseverance. Perseverance is essential to being successful in anything you do, not just in business. If you fold under pressure, or lack the drive to push your way through the tough times, you're going to lose the challenges you face. And, believe me, there will be a lot of 'em.

Stick to Your Commitments. If you make a commitment to someone, you'd better be able to stand behind it. This goes for your suppliers, your customers, your employees, and anyone else you do business with. One way to ensure that you can deliver on your promises is to always understand what you're getting into and make sure that you can live up to it. If you don't, you're going to be in big trouble.

Welcome Change. No matter how long you've been in business or how successful you've been, you have to believe that you can still teach an old dog new tricks. If you don't adapt to changes, positive changes, you're just hurting yourself.

Never Sell Out. You should be willing to change to make your business better, but never sell out. There's a difference.

Be an Example. If you're going to talk the talk, you'd better walk the walk. I wouldn't ask any of my employees to do anything that I wouldn't do myself. I like to remind guys in the shop from time to time that I used to do this or that.

Surround Yourself with Good People. You're only as good as the people around you. Your employees can make you or break you, and you need your employees not only to be successful, but to expand their knowledge and expertise as well.

Learn to Trust Others. When I first started out in business, I did everything myself. That's because I was always concerned that the job be done right.

But doing everything yourself can work for only so long. **Don't Let Pride Get in the Way.** If you surround yourself with good people, you eventually realize that you're not always the smartest guy in the room. If you make a mistake, be big enough to admit it, even to employees.

Stay Organized. My experience is that if you're organized, you save steps. And every step you take costs you money—so in order to be productive you need to have a plan and you need to be organized.

Be efficient in everything you do.

Take Care of Your Employees. My employees have never been just employees to me. They're part of a family. I'm a big believer in giving credit where credit is due. In order to build morale, you need to pat your employees on the back every once in awhile.

Running a Family Business. Many of the most successful businesses today are family businesses. Unfortunately, they can be both a blessing and a curse, because as hard as you might try, you can never treat family like just another employee.

Never Back Down. When you have a dream and a vision for a business, you have to stick to it, even when others are telling you you're headed in the wrong direction.

Never Stop Halfway or Lower Your Standards. As long as you're in business, those two motivating factors should be, too.

Learn from Your Mistakes. Nobody's perfect; we all make errors in judgment in business and in life. You'll learn more from the experience of making that mistake and suffering its consequences than from hearing about it from someone else.

Be Humble. This is probably hard to believe from someone like me, but you have to be humble; it means being smart enough to learn from people who know more than you.

Give Back. Making money and being successful is great, but it doesn't give you the same satisfaction that you get when you give back to people less fortunate. The return will be far more than what you give.

Always Follow Your Dream. It sounds simple, but you can never lose sight of your dream, no matter how long you have had it or how far off it seems.

So that's basically it. A short list of the principles and ideals that I've followed as I built Orange County Choppers from a hobby in my basement to the brand that it is today. As the title says, it's been *The Ride of a Lifetime*. So hang on.

THE RIDE
of a **LIFETIME**

1



Choices
