**A brown building with many windows

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**Forging a Legacy: The Entrepreneurial Journey of Necker's Jewelers**

Starting a business is one thing, but sustaining and evolving it for generations is another challenge entirely. For Dave and DJ Necker, entrepreneurship wasn’t a pre-planned path but rather an opportunity that unfolded through resilience, adaptability, and an unwavering commitment to excellence. Their story is one of legacy, overcoming adversity, and staying ahead in a competitive industry.

**A Family Tradition Begins**

The Necker family’s journey in the jewelry business began in 1952 when their parents took a bold step and purchased a jewelry store that had been in existence since 1893. Their father, a World War II veteran, leveraged the GI Bill to attend watchmaking school, leading him into the world of jewelry. However, starting the business was no easy feat—banks wouldn’t lend money without assets, so their family had to get creative. Their grandmother famously unearthed savings buried under a chicken coop, a relic of distrust in banks after the Great Depression, to help fund the purchase.

Growing up, the Necker siblings lived above the store in a two-bedroom apartment. The business and family were deeply intertwined, instilling early lessons in discipline, sacrifice, and teamwork. Though their father was committed to the business, the path was never guaranteed for the next generation.

**Taking the Leap into Entrepreneurship**

Dave initially pursued work outside of the family business, taking jobs in the oil industry and later in jewelry wholesale. However, during the farm crisis of the early 1980s, their father called with an ultimatum—if Dave had an interest in the jewelry business, they would keep it; if not, they would sell it. Without much hesitation, Dave returned to help, bringing fresh energy and a sales-driven approach.

DJ, the younger brother, had a different trajectory, majoring in finance and considering a career in banking. However, after their father was diagnosed with cancer, he made the decision to return home and join the family business. The two brothers had different strengths—Dave, the gemology expert and visionary, and DJ, the financially savvy strategist—but together, they created a dynamic partnership that propelled Necker's Jewelers forward.

**Navigating Challenges and Reinventing the Business**

Like any entrepreneurial venture, the road to success was anything but smooth. One of their biggest challenges came in the early 2000s when an accounting mistake created financial strain, leading to a difficult conversation with their bank. Rather than crumble under pressure, they saw an opportunity to pivot. Recognizing the limitations of the traditional mall-based jewelry store model, they made a bold decision: close two of their mall locations and invest in a larger, standalone store on 53rd Street in Davenport.

This move was pivotal. By differentiating themselves from mass-market jewelers, they cultivated a more personal, relationship-driven approach to sales. Their new location became a destination, not just a transaction hub, and set them apart in a crowded market.

**Creating an Experience Beyond Jewelry**

One of Necker’s biggest strengths is understanding the emotional weight of jewelry. Buying an engagement ring or a significant gift is an intimate experience, and the brothers knew they needed to create an environment that made customers feel comfortable. They trained their staff extensively, ensuring they could educate customers rather than just sell to them.

Additionally, they focused on making the shopping experience enjoyable—introducing hospitality elements like a fully stocked bar, a lounge-like setting, and personalized service. For Dave and DJ, the goal was not just to sell jewelry but to foster relationships and trust, ensuring customers returned for every milestone in their lives.

**Lessons for Entrepreneurs**

After decades of experience in building and transforming a family business, Dave and DJ have key insights for aspiring entrepreneurs:

1. **Embrace Change** – Markets evolve, and successful businesses must adapt. Moving from mall stores to a freestanding location was a risk that paid off.
2. **Overcome Fear** – Fear holds many back from taking risks. Jumping into the unknown with a commitment to learning is essential.
3. **Find the Right Partner** – Whether a sibling, mentor, or business partner, surrounding yourself with complementary skills is crucial.
4. **Customer Experience Matters** – People don’t just buy products; they buy experiences. Making customers feel special keeps them coming back.
5. **Build Relationships, Not Just Sales** – A business isn’t just about transactions. Long-term relationships with customers and employees create sustainable success.

**A Bright Future**

Today, Necker’s Jewelers stands among the top 1% of jewelry stores in the country. Their recent expansion into an even larger, cutting-edge retail space is a testament to their commitment to growth and innovation. While their initial dream was to build a chain and sell to a major retailer, their vision evolved into something greater—creating a legacy that continues to thrive.

For Dave and DJ, entrepreneurship was never about just making money. It was about building something meaningful, taking risks, and continuously pushing forward. Their story is an inspiration to anyone looking to take the leap into business ownership, proving that with passion, resilience, and a willingness to evolve, success is within reach.