

IF I KNEW THEN...

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In this ongoing series, we ask executives, entrepreneurs and business leaders about mistakes that have shaped their business philosophy.

Ryan Snyder

PRESIDENT, MARTIN NORTH

By **Gina Binole**

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Background:

[Martin North](#) is a family of hotels and restaurants in Cannon Beach, on the North Oregon Coast. Founded in 1979 by hoteliers Steve and Jan Martin, Martin North is now owned and operated by their daughter, Stephanie, and her husband Ryan Snyder.

The Mistake:

We failed to align our personal passions with the business. I'm not unlike many who work in a family business, particularly one that's been successful. You want to stay true to the historical way of doing things, and a tendency not to rock the boat too much.

We are the second generation of this family business that's strong. I didn't want to screw any of that up, and for a while, we stuck to the status quo.

I grew up in hospitality and went to work right out of college for a brewing company in Las Vegas. There, I had a great relationship with the owner, my first mentor. I'd talk about my plans with him, and he was interested in me and my passion for the people and his product. I used to think, "If I could just be this guy."

Fast-forward, and I started working for the Martin family, always thinking that maybe someday, we'd create a brewery. But then it was 2009; there was a recession. There was no lender who was going to give me funding to open a brewery. There was always a reason to not make big changes, or consider the things, like a brewery, that gave me so much joy.

Then, about five years ago, my wife and I made a list of all the things we wanted to do. I said we need to start doing these things, like a brewery and investing in the business, and checking them off our list. And I have never been happier. It's been an upward trajectory ever since. We own and operate six coastal properties: the Stephanie Inn, Stephanie Inn Dining Room, Surfsand Resort, Wayfarer Restaurant & Lounge, Public Coast Brewing Co. and Haystack Garden



All I really needed to do was allow myself to act a bit more passionately.



The Lesson:

I am proud to say from day one, we've made really good beer, and we're going to double in capacity. We continue to think outside the norm, creating pay-to-play experiences, like Stephanie

Inn Sojourns, and creating a music event at Cannon Beach, Stackstock. We had 650 people here, and seven bands over seven hours. We also held a beer festival.

The Wayfarer is a great story, too. It was this old, classic beachfront restaurant. We've operated it since 1983. My in-laws wanted a place where their guests could get a meal for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Cannon Beach, of course, used to shut down.

In 1997, they did a major renovation that was a bit too fancy and refined, and that never really resonated with me. When we purchased the company, we decided to take it back to its roots for its 40th anniversary, with reclaimed wood and other intentionally dated items and décor.

It has been very successful and well-received, and we would not have done that had we not undergone our major realization that making changes is okay. People in the community were like, "Oh, my God, we love what you're doing. Please keep doing it."

And all I really needed to do was allow myself to act a bit more passionately, and to tell myself and the staff that it's okay to make mistakes. If something doesn't quite work out, you can reset. Take a model like the Stephanie Inn. It's iconic. It's been top-rated for many, many years.

I wanted to make sure that people continue to want to experience this amazing place. The last Stephanie Inn Sojourn we did focused on foraging. Guests learned from local foragers and were able to create a meal with the mushrooms they picked.

The staff also is on board. We have a very tenured staff, so anytime you take a right turn, even if it's a soft right turn, it can be tricky. We've been very mindful of that and involving them in transitions and investments.

We're a hotel brand, but we're so much more than that. We're creating coastal experiences, and many people are going back home and sharing their stories. It's not the sleepy little town it's been for so many years. People are really coming here and enjoying it. They are the direct beneficiaries of me taking some chances and introducing some of my passions into a traditional business.

There are more changes and investments on the horizon. We're excited for them, and everyone also knows that if it doesn't work, it's okay, we'll try something else.

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