

esteem

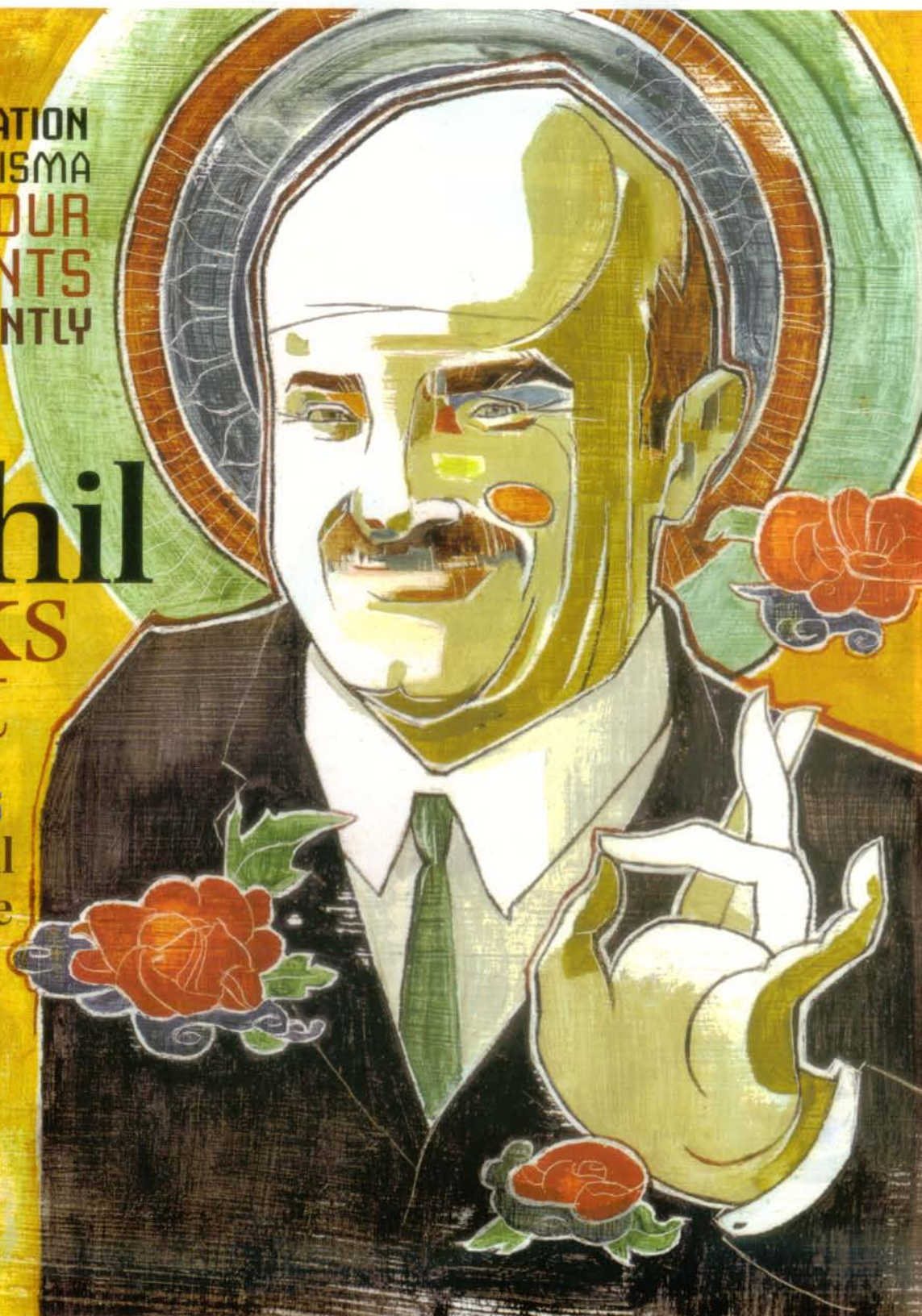
Embracing Success

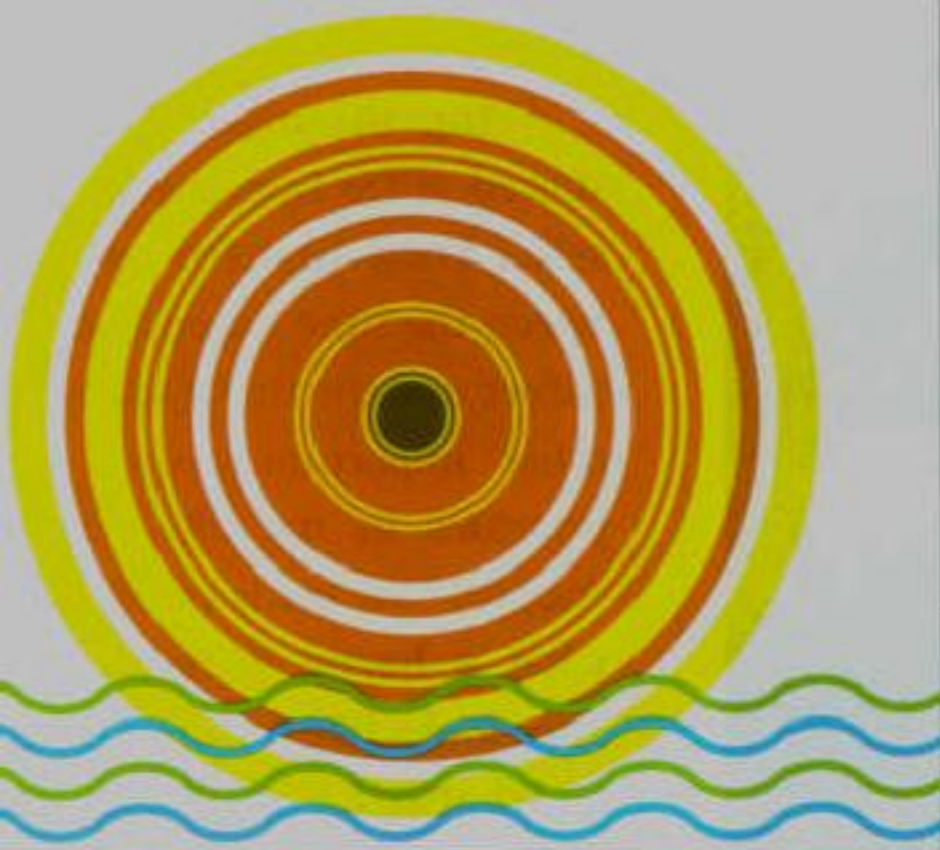
INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
YOUR INNER CHARISMA
CELEBRATE YOUR
ACHIEVEMENTS
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Dr. Phil Speaks Out

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THE SWEET SOUND OF SUCCESS

CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

By Sheila Reesor

FUNNYHOW YOUR PERSPECTIVE CHANGES when you take something apart instead of putting it together."

Chris Griffiths already knew how to build guitars. Youthful experimentation and a formal apprenticeship taught him well. "It's really just a big job that's broken down into little pieces, that you do in a certain order, like most manufacturing," he says, "But it's interesting how your perspective changes when you do the whole process backwards and try to take everything apart."

He still remembers the exact moment his perspective changed. At the age of 21, Griffiths already had two years of guitar building under his belt through his company *Griffiths Guitar Works*. Now he had to disassemble a particularly expensive, vintage guitar. He purposely waited until after hours and then, like a surgeon focused on a patient, he began to take it apart.

Up to 40 pieces of wood are concealed inside any acoustic guitar in order to reinforce it. These "braces" are critical to the structural integrity and playability of the instrument. While staring at the vintage guitars in front of him, Griffiths noticed that the parts interacted differently than expected. Because they all touched each other, he wondered if, instead of making them out of individual pieces, they could be made from one piece. He determined that hollowed out wood wouldn't suffice, but thought injected moulding with the right material might work. "That was it," Griffiths says, "The whole idea flushed out in about six minutes of scratching my head."

He instantly dismissed the idea, but it kept resurfacing. Finally, he accepted his fate and spent the next six years developing the technology. Today, the 'Griffiths Ac-



tive Bracing System™ has not evolved significantly beyond the original idea, but it has become a revolutionary method of construction—simply a more intelligent way to build acoustic guitars. It brings manufacturing efficiency together with structural and acous-

tic benefit. With steadfast perseverance, vision and hard work, Griffiths pursued his dream and finally earned his current title of President/CEO of *Garrison Guitars*—one of the largest acoustic guitar manufacturing companies in North America.



It all started with a curious mind and a willingness to step off the beaten path, qualities that were evident at an early age for Griffiths. At twelve, he received an electric guitar for Christmas, and by Boxing Day it was in pieces. Over time, his interest evolved. Having graduated at the top of his class in High School, he had options for University like his friends, but his dreams led elsewhere. After completing an apprenticeship in Michigan, many told him he was crazy to try building high-end guitars in Newfoundland, considered to be the poorest province in Canada in 1993. With single-minded purpose, he turned to the Y Enterprise Centre to develop a business plan—a process he still endorses today. Six months of research told him he had a business case.

Now in its twelfth year, *Griffiths Guitar Works* is the largest custom guitar store in Atlantic Canada. It is still fully owned by Griffiths, but in 1997, he decided to devote his full attention to *Garrison Guitars*.

Griffiths came up with the idea for the bracing system in 1995. The following two years were spent straddling the two companies, immersed in research and development. During that time he applied the same curiosity and risk-taking enthusiasm that he used to start his first company. He had no knowledge of how guitars were mass-produced, but soon learned to “poke around” for advice anywhere he could. “If I ever caught myself in a conversation with a banker, accountant, lawyer or investor,” says Griffiths, “And if they used terminology

that I didn’t understand, I would stop them mid-sentence and say, ‘I don’t understand. Could you backtrack a little?’” Instance by instance, he accumulated knowledge.

Griffiths didn’t always find open doors and smooth sailing. He hit many roadblocks along the way, yet he creatively overcame each one. At first, he needed money to build a prototype, so he borrowed from his first company. He now admits how dangerous it was to risk “a fine going concern” to fund a new start-up, but it was all he had.

Things started to materialize when he joined forces with a high-end research and development company in Midland, Ontario that specializes in injection moulding. Together, they were making headway, until Griffiths ran out of money. He was so close to realizing his dream, but had now borrowed so much from Griffiths Guitar Works that it faced bankruptcy.

At this point, Griffiths had a choice. He could quit and pour his energy back into *Griffiths Guitar Works*, or forge ahead. He admits that he came to enjoy the challenges. Each one made him even more resourceful. This time he turned to investors and candidly explained that he had nothing completed, but pointed out what he had achieved. He then boldly asked for a quarter of a million dollars to finish what he had started, and test the prototypes at the world’s largest tradeshow for musical instrument manufacturers in Los Angeles. They agreed, and in return he was to provide letters of intent for at least 7,000 guitars per year. “I bet the farm again,” says Griffiths. “This time I really had something to lose and they respected that.”

It didn’t get any easier from there. Griffiths missed the registration deadline for the tradeshow, but squeezed in on a cancellation - in a tiny booth in the basement. Not deterred, he contacted 2200 dealers to make appointments in the dungeon. He then enlisted four others, made five prototypes and five *Garrison* T-shirts, and off they went. In the end they secured letters for 46,000 guitars per year. In February 2001, the team walked into an empty warehouse and were up and running by September of the same year.

That time period is still a blur for Griffiths. He now refers to the process as being similar to having kids. “When your business needs you, you tend to that business. You don’t

question what’s in it for you.” Now, with a sense of wisdom well beyond his years, this innovative 31 year-old executive knows he can handle just about anything. Unexpected problems no longer affect him like they once did. He learned by overcoming one challenge at a time.

There were many times Griffiths felt backed into a corner. He feels grateful towards his co-workers, suppliers and advisors for listening when it counted. He is also thankful for the support of his wife, both of his parents and two brothers, who fuelled his self-esteem to pursue his dreams in the face of all challenges. He also credits his family for instilling in him a sense of objectivity, along with excellent communication skills.

Griffiths’ advice, no matter where you live or what the economic circumstances might be, is to follow your dream, and to complete an airtight business plan. He pursued both businesses initially because he knew they were viable, and more importantly, because his heart was in it. “The fact that I’m living my dream hasn’t worn off—not even a little bit,” Griffiths says. “Success becomes a side effect of choosing to pursue something you really love.”

Contact: www.garrisonguitars.com

