

## **BRAND SECRETS AND STRATEGIES PODCAST #138**

Hello and thank you for joining us today. This is the Brand Secrets and Strategies Podcast #138

Welcome to the Brand Secrets and Strategies podcast where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.

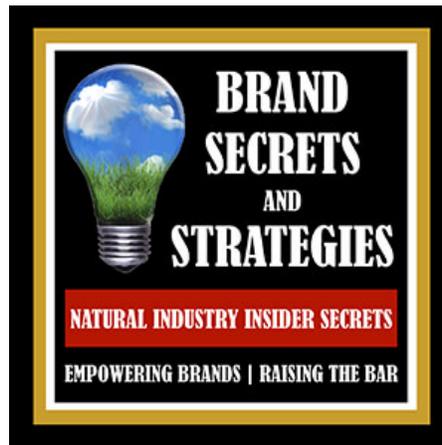
I'm your host Dan Lohman. This weekly show is dedicated to getting your brand on the shelf and keeping it there.

Get ready to learn actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.

**LETS ROLL UP OUR SLEEVES AND GET STARTED!**

Dan: Welcome. Today's story is about you. It's about your future, your future customers, the health of your community, and much more.

Let's face it, parents will do almost anything to ensure that their kids have every opportunity possible. That means feeding them the very best clean label ingredients, ensuring that they get enough rest and that they have all the supplies necessary to be successful in school. While that's the goal of every parent, the sad reality is that not every parent can provide for their children the way that they'd like to.

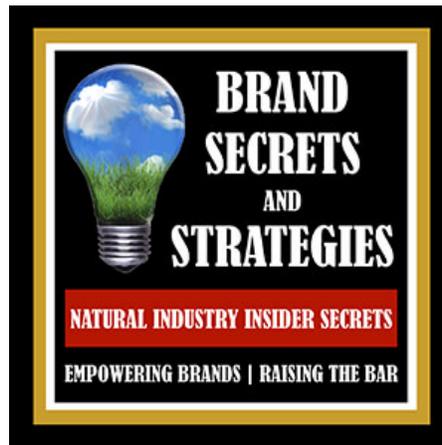


As you'll hear in this podcast episode, you're going to find that a lot of kids rely on school lunches and school breakfast as their primary source for nutritious food, and yet we go out of our way to nickel and dime the school districts, so that some school districts can't provide the nutritional foods that kids need to be successful.

When you hear terms like food poverty, meaning people not having the right food to properly sustain their families, this is where a lot of that conversation begins. This is one of the areas that we can make the biggest impact and yet, gain the greatest rewards. Think about it. These children are our future leaders. They are our legacy. This is where we begin to invest in our future, so why does this matter and why is it important to your brand?

Beyond the ability to give back and help support your community, think about what's important in terms of building a successful brand. If you had an opportunity to choose when you start educating your future customer about your brand, when would you start? Well, obviously as soon as possible when they're young. This is exactly what today's story is about, teaching children about healthy nutrition.

And as you're going to hear on this podcast episode, when you teach children about healthy nutrition, that helps reinforce those habits as they get older, and more importantly, has a deep and lasting impact on the way that their families eat. So not only is it a win win for the community, and feels good to give back, this is an opportunity for you to help change the way that consumers think about food, change the way that your communities think about the products that you sell, and help educate your future



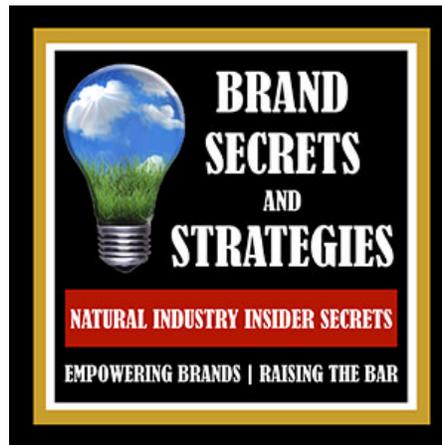
customers about the value that your brand offers to them and to their family.

Before I go any further, I want to leave a quick shout out to someone who left an amazing comment. Carla Vernon says, "Thank you, Dan Lohman. I always appreciate your voice in our industry and here on LinkedIn." Carla, thank you for leaving your comment and congratulations on being named one of the most influential women in corporate America. We rise by helping each other. Remember, this podcast is about you and it's for you. If you want me to read your comments on the podcast, leave a review on iTunes, send me a note, or comment on any of my posts.

I also want to remind you that at the end of every episode there is a free downloadable guide for you, one that you can use to grow sustainable sales. I always include one easy to download, quick to digest strategy that you can instantly adopt and make your own. Remember, the goal here is to get your product onto more store shelves and into the hands of more shoppers.

Also, don't forget to check out my new Brand Secrets and Strategies YouTube channel. I'm continually adding new brand building videos as well as interviews from some of your favorite thought leaders in the industry.

I also want to thank Walter Robb, the former CEO of Whole Foods for recommending today's guests. On the last podcast episode, he said I absolutely needed to get her on. I'm so thrilled that you did. Her story is inspirational and her personality is contagious. Now here is Nona Evans with Whole Kids and Whole Cities.



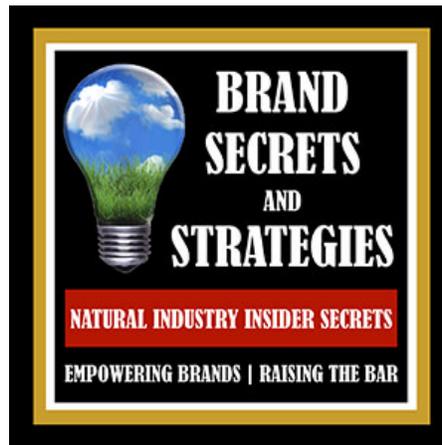
Dan: Nona, thank you for coming on today. Can you please start by telling us a little bit about yourself, and your journey to where you're at today?

Nona: Sure. I always feel funny talking about myself because at my core I'm a foodie, and that's how I came into this business 30 years ago. I've only ever worked at the grocery store. I'm proud to say I love food so much that, that was a perfectly logical choice. I've done a little bit of everything. I've had many of the jobs in stores. I've worked in store operations, both on the conventional side, and for the last almost 20 years, in the Whole Foods Market family. I would have never predicted that I would wind up in the nonprofit space, but when you work for a company like Whole Foods with strong core values, and a culture of empowerment, you really never know what's possible. It's with great joy now that I get to call this amazing journey that we're on, work. That's, you know ...

Dan: What a great way to... Well, thank you for sharing that because what's great is that you're able to find ... if you love what you do then it's not work, it's play, it's giving back. Anyhow, thank you for sharing that. Let's back up a little bit. In retail, what did you do? The reason I want to go here, Nona-

Nona: Sure.

Dan: Is because later as we're discussing, as we're going further into our conversation, I want to be able to understand how your influence in food, understanding retail, understanding grocery, impacted some of the decisions you make today.



Nona: You bet. I literally started in the business back in the 80's. I see it now looking back, but really every single facet of the work that I've done, from my beginnings as a cashier, into store operations where I was leading front ends, or ultimately departments. There was always a component of community connection. Back in the 80's was when food drives were really sort of coming into fashion and onto the scene, and I remember organizing food drives for the store I worked at. I've done ... if it exists in the grocery store, I think I've done that job. I'm still an ace at cleaning a meat grinder, I'm a certified forklift driver.

But, what I learned after years and years in operations is that I think my unique skills and the way I'm wired is better on the support side of things. I moved into public relations, and community relations for a regional company here in Texas called H-E-B. I did that for about 10 years, got to participate in the format called Central Market when it was born, really amazing sort of journey into gourmet food. Then 20 years ago I joined Whole Foods Market, leading marketing for a region of the company back then. I think there were about 120 stores at the time, and my journey at Whole Foods has included regional marketing, I led brand development for the private label group for a couple of years, I led marketing for Whole Foods. It was from that role that we started a cause marketing project that just got out of hand, and that turned into a foundation, and the part of my journey that I'm on today.

Dan: When you say got out of hand, what do you mean by that?

Nona: Yeah, you know so back in 2008 Whole Foods Market Founder John Mackey, really had a moment where he wanted the company to return to our roots of healthy food, and sort of everybody in



the company was looking around figuring out, what is our part of that? From the leadership position in global marketing, it was back to school time. Of course, we wanted to sell healthy lunch meats and healthier snacks for lunch boxes. But, we really saw an opportunity to educate shoppers about the fact that what our kids are eating at school is really, really important, and it's important beyond just what I could pack for my son. What every child in a classroom eats affects education.

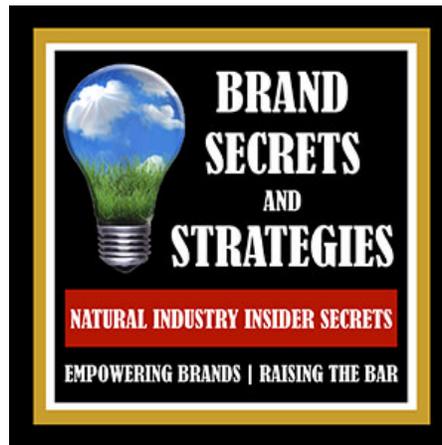
We started some cause marketing on that front. We aimed to raise some money to build a toolbox for schools that wanted to serve healthier food, and the team members, which is what Whole Foods calls our employees, loved the topic. Our customers just went crazy, both in their feedback and in making donations. Over the course of the next couple of years I was leading marketing by day, and running grant programs at night, and had to sort of raise my hand and say, "Ah, we need to make a choice here. Either we need to draw a smaller box around this work so that we can do it really, really well. Or, something else."

At Whole Foods, something else usually wins. The company voted to start a new foundation, to hold the core of that work around children's nutrition.

Dan: That's exciting. Let's talk about ... Actually, let me back up a little bit.

Nona: Sure.

Dan: I wanted to kind of dig more into, so you went into mainstream retail. I'm very familiar with Whole ... Excuse me, very familiar



with H-E-B. I used to work for Kimberly Clark, and Unilever, and before that-

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: I was the grocery manager at Price Club, so kind of similar in terms of our progression, in the sense that we both came from mainstream and went into natural.

Nona: Yeah.

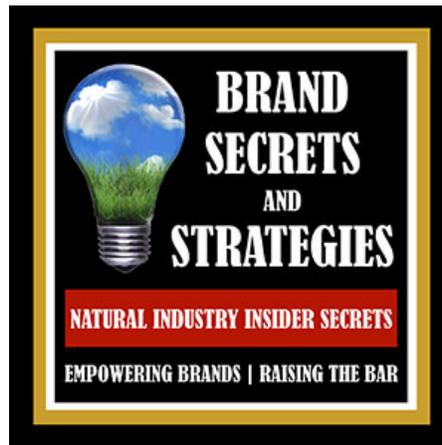
Dan: Can you talk a little bit about what you learned in mainstream in terms of grocery, and how do you apply that to-

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: Natural grocery, and then why does that matter.

Nona: You know, I come from a food family. I had food on both sides of my family. It was just part of who I was. Working in conventional grocery was a great way to learn more about the business. Especially my time with Central market. The mission for that store at the time, it is now many stores, was I always describe it as turning couch potatoes into gourmet cooks. You really got to explore consumer behavior, and what motivates people around food. I loved, that was sort of where I got the bug for creating consumer experiences. Food should be an experience, it should be memorable.

I really had the opportunity in conventional to sort of understand the business, the finances, the operations side, and most importantly, the consumer transaction. You know, how do you motivate a shopper to choose one store over another, one brand



over another? I woke up one day 15 years into a career I never really intended to have and said, "Maybe I should look around and see what else is out there." It was at that point that Whole Foods found me, and I'm so lucky that, that happened. But, I didn't come to the natural food's industry with the kind of knowledge that most people do. I was a good foodie, so I really had to learn about quality standards and about healthy eating. And, having that journey for myself, I hope has made me a valuable player in acknowledging that we have work to do on behalf of every person in the countries that we serve.

Dan: Well said. On that note, that's exactly what I wanted to get to, so thank you. The fact that mainstream does a phenomenal job of giving the skills and the tools necessary to help brands help retailers, et cetera, succeed. But to your point, being a foodie, and I would argue that you do have the skills. I mean if you eat, then you know something about food. If you like good food, and you understand the quality of the food, and if you believe that you are what you eat, then that matters.

I mean, one of the things I did for example at Costco, is I started bringing in a lot of healthy foods, local, natural, et cetera. That was really radically different, et cetera, back at that time. But, when you start transitioning into natural, so taking those skillsets and now that you begin to understand what's on the other end of the equation like you said, the customer transaction, customer ... yeah, customer, consumer transaction. Now you're beginning to see how you impact the shopper. So as you transition into this brand new nonprofit, how are you able to align that consumer transaction to what you're doing?

What I'm getting at here, Nona is-



Nona: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

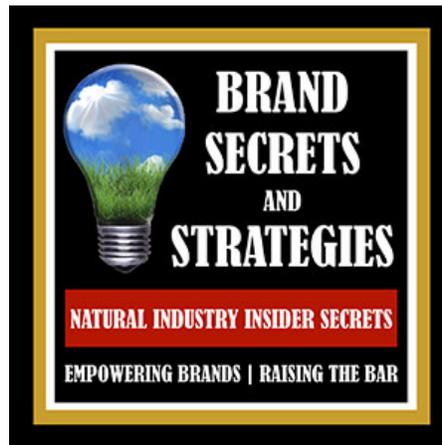
Dan: The value statement around teaching children the value-

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: And the importance of healthy nutrition.

Nona: I think where I would start with that, and it comes with the admission that I am now an evangelist. It's taken me 30 years working in the food business to realize that we must make a fundamental shift. The food industry has to begin to see itself as an important component of healthcare. Think about the upside to an industry that scraps for sales and margin, if the trillions of dollars that people spend today on sick care, became available for restorative health-supportive food. That's where the sales growth can happen.

To your question about why start with kids at an early age, the beautiful part of the work that I get to do with Whole Kids Foundation and Whole Cities Foundation, is that we start with commonsense. It's really commonsense that kids who learn healthy eating habits when they're young, grow into adults who have healthy eating habits. The data is out there now that shows that even prenatal nutrition has an impact on the preferences that our kids have. For us coming from the genesis of Whole Foods Market, the logic was really, really clear. Well-nourished kids are better able to learn, which gives them a shot at reaching their greatest potential, which is what wakes me up every morning.



But, when you connect it back to the business, those healthier kids are our future shoppers, they're our future employees, and they're the future leaders because I'm sure that one day we all want to retire. It's such a good business to do the right thing by our kids in terms of investing in their understanding of what food is.

Dan: Well, thank you for sharing that because I couldn't agree with you more, and that's why I do what I do. Trying to teach brands how to leverage that message with retailers. I have a belief, and my belief is that retailers generically don't make anything. What they do is they sell the real estate that your product takes up on their shelf.

Nona: Yeah.

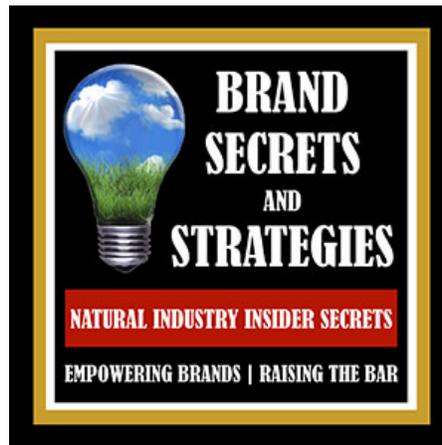
Dan: The goal of every retailer, going back to the operational piece, is they want more traffic in their store, they want a reasonable profit, and they want to have a competitive advantage against their market. The problem is with the old way of thinking from my perspective, is that retailers, back to your margin piece, are constantly trying to reacquire the same customer over and over again-

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: Which is ludicrous. So, focusing on what customers want, instead of selling the stuff that's on their shelves basically.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: Instead of, now focusing or teaching retailers and brands how to work together to sell what customers want, changes that



equation. To your point, when you start talking about healthy nutrition, that fuels the industry. People are willing to pay a premium, as you know, for healthy quality foods that meet the expectations of the consumer, as opposed to stuff that's processed, and ... Anyhow, that's a whole nother conversation. But, being an evangelist, I love that. I think that's so great.

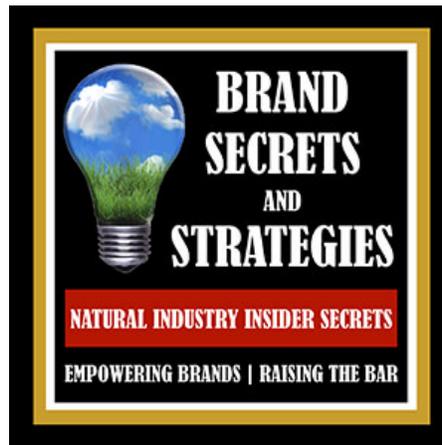
Well first of all, do you have any thoughts around that? Where I'm going here is, what would you recommend brands and retailers do together to help focus around this and drive this mission home? Because people spend more time choosing what they want to watch on TV than they do thinking about their food.

Nona: That's exactly right.

Dan: Or, any other analogy, yeah. How do brands and retailers help align themselves around that? Especially natural.

Nona: I think the first thing that I find myself saying just relentlessly, is that in my business, this world of kids and what they eat now, kids are underestimated as change agents. Now, in the greater landscape of marketing, marketers know that, right? They've been spending millions and billions of dollars to target kids forever. But, I think we as retailers, and brands really have the opportunity to become allies to parents in this journey, because every parent struggles with, "Is my kid eating well enough? Are there things I don't know?" I think that if our brands and our retailers can become allies in that food journey, that's where the secret sauce is.

I go back 15 years ago when I was a new mom, and it's sort of a strange thing, but as parents, kids often won't listen to us. But, if



they discover something in a store from a sample team member, I remember taking my son to the store and he would eat whatever Ms. Faye had because she wasn't me. I think in that way that's what I look for, is how can our brands, and how can our stores be the ally in this conversation about healthy food. Both educating parents, but also really creating an experience. I'm an experienced marketer, and I think that's what our millennials, and certainly gen Z are craving. It's what they're investing their discretionary dollars in, in terms of travel, and those sorts of things. Why can't we provide them everyday experiences when they discover food in our stores, and with our brands?

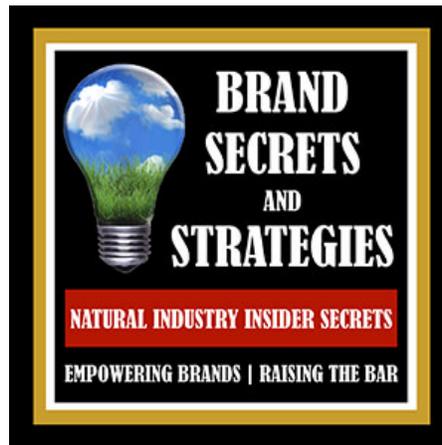
Dan: I love that. In fact, I used to talk about every time my kids would go to see their grandparents or we'd go do something together, it was an adventure. It wasn't a chore-

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: Or, something you had to do. It was an adventure, I'd always try to make fun of it, and have a lot of fun. On that note though, I love what you're talking about because we do need ally. I'm going to say something pretty harsh-

Nona: Sure.

Dan: But, I think it's true. What I'm getting at, what I want to say is that I think what you're alluding to is that marketers were using children as a vehicle to get to their parent's pocketbooks. That's why the sugar cereal was at eye level, et cetera. In other words, they weren't focused on the kids-



Nona: Yeah.

Dan: They were focused on the dollars that they could extract from the parents through the kids. We've got to change our mindset. To your point, we do need to align brands and retailers. Again, that's why I do this, that's why you do that. So, teaching brands and retailers natural brands that have a mission, that are true to what we're talking about, healthy food, et cetera, to work together.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: That's our greatest opportunity. Kind of going back to what we were talking about before, retailers trying to figure out how to get a little squeeze, a little bit of margin out of something. Consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that meet their needs, I said that already. But, when you make the change, that mindset from how do we get margin in the store, more importantly, how do we get a thriving, loyal consumer, evangelist like you to-

Nona: Yeah.

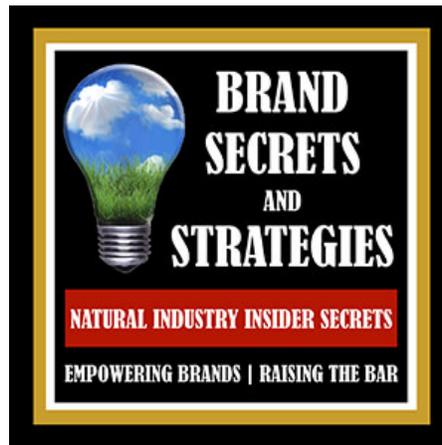
Dan: Come in your .... Yes, to come into the store.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: Oh, and by the way, you're going to spend more money when you come into my store.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: The idea that oh, mainstream retailers have, how can I make an extra penny profit or on a single item? Where here you are,



you're talking about healthy nutrition, and how those items are tied together.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: It's not just the adventure or not just the experience of picking out one specific item. But, how do you put those items together, how do you create something with that? The experience of marketing, I love that. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

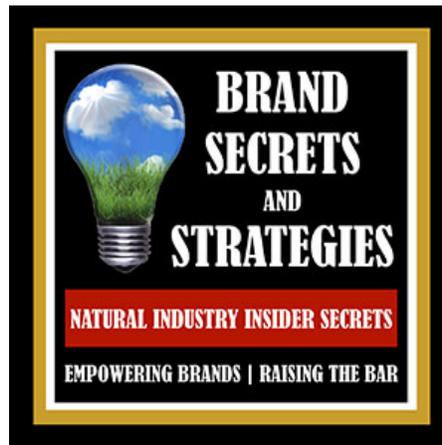
Nona: Yeah.

Dan: Then, how do you leverage that at Whole Kids to support what you're doing?

Nona: I think, you mentioned it earlier. It is so expensive to hire a customer over, and over, and over. It's been almost 10 years since I've led marketing, and we used to ... I think we used to say it was about \$270 to hire a new customer.

Dan: Wow.

Nona: It's got to be lots more than that today. I think in my experience and what I see in the work that I do today, if we shift our focus from hiring a customer over and over to winning their heart, to your point, then you've got them in the right space. Especially when you look at this up and coming set of generations, millennials care deeply about the impact that their choices are making. They're more studied about what brands are committed to, what retailers are committed to, and they're really factoring that into their choice.



I think it's an opportunity that brands have to make room for that piece of their story because our natural brands are doing amazing things. That has always and forever been my challenge with Whole Foods is, the company does so much more good than there is space to talk about it. I think that's where, to your point-

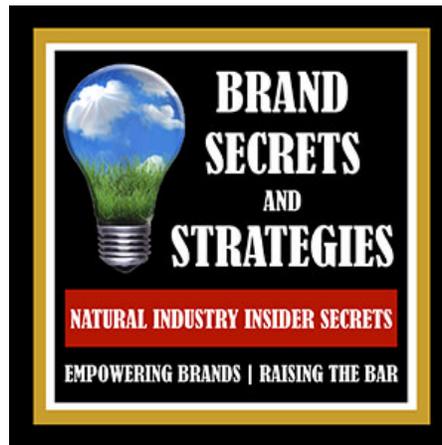
Dan:

Nona: You really just have to dial in and focus and have the discipline and the courage to tell those good stories. Which is where I feel so fortunate, because now telling one set of pretty narrow stories to the world, is my job. If Whole Foods Market reaps benefits from that, or if our brand partners reap benefits from that, that's an additional good that gets created.

What's unique in our work is that we pay such careful attention to making sure that with Whole Kids, that better nutrition at school is available to all kids. That's unique because Whole Foods Market serves a certain set of markets, but through our work, they're really able to expand their impact, and their influence, and the good in the world in places where they don't have stores. It gives us the opportunity to really be inclusive.

There are 31 million kids that eat lunch every day at school. That makes school food the largest restaurant chain in the country. For many of those kids, they get 50% or more of their daily calories through school lunch, and school breakfast. It's both doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do, but also because it really resonates with these next two generations of shoppers.

All the research is out there on millennials and the fact that they're investing their dollars in brands that are having an



impact. The thing that I love, and find myself talking the most about these days is gen Z because since Whole Kids was born, those have been my customers. The elementary school kids that we started working with eight years ago are now the first foodie generation in 50 years. I talk a lot to Whole Foods, and really anybody who will listen, about we need to be getting ready for their purchasing power because if we're not ready, we're going to miss a huge opportunity.

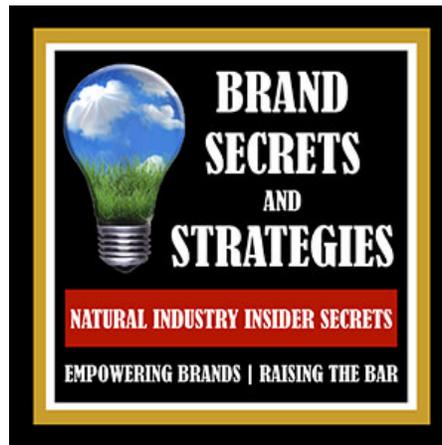
Dan: The numbers actually back that up, we'll talk about that in a minute. But by the way, I love your passion. Thank you for your enthusiasm. No, it's great, it's contagious. I'm anxious to ... This will be great on video as well, so anyway, we're recording the podcast, we'll put out the audio, but later we'll put out the video version.

Nona:

Dan: One of the things you said is you're talking about winning the hearts. One of the other big myths that I want to dispel in mainstream is that customers are loyal to you because you give them a piece of plastic. Wrong.

Nona: Yes.

Dan: I've got a plastic card for every retailer in my market, every airline I fly on, that's a myth. True loyalty is earned, it's not bought. By going back to what you said, if you can give the customers what they want, that's how you turn an occasional customer into a loyal evangelist. That's how you save that 270 plus dollars per customer, and that's how you become relevant



because there are a lot of competitive threats in the market, especially online. If a retailer-

Nona: Yeah.

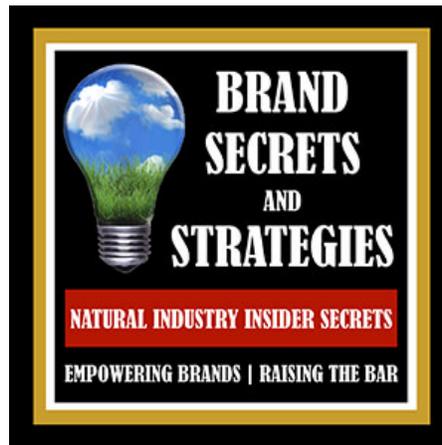
Dan: And a brand can work together to solve this puzzle. Again, this is why I do what I do, why you do what you do. But, if we can help these retailers and these brands work together to solve this equation, and remain relevant in their market, and remain relevant against the competitive threats online and everywhere else, then ... And, focus on what we're giving customers rather than just a margin, I think that's how we solve a lot of that.

One of the things you were talking about, which I think is interesting, you're talking about school lunches. My biggest pet peeve, frustration, whatever, is that they're constantly asking us to put more money into education. But, that money doesn't get to the kids, and it doesn't get to their nutrition.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: We're expecting teachers to do more with less, and we're expecting kids to compete more effectively. I mean, I imagine I'm older than you are but I remember when I was in grade school, we were one of the top-performing countries in math, science, literature, et cetera. I don't even know if we make the list anymore, it's pathetic. But the point is that, if we don't arm our next generation with the skills necessary to support us in the future, to your point, we're screwed.

Nona: Yeah.



Dan: Yeah, we're fighting a losing battle. To your point, nutrition is such a critical component of that. I wish people would pay more attention to that. I love the fact that we're trying to change things from the outside in ... no, from the inside out-

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: You know, rather than going-

Nona: Well, yeah.

Dan: Yeah, and it makes such a big impact. Also, you made the comment about the restaurants and the fact that here we are, we're worried about the price of a school lunch, let's save a penny per kid or whatever. As opposed to again, how do we fuel that kid, inspire that kid, and help that kid reach their greatest potential? Thank you for what you're doing, and I mean that with all sincerity. I think it's so critically important.

As you're doing this, now let's talk about Whole Foods. Whole Kids, excuse me, let's talk about Whole Kids.

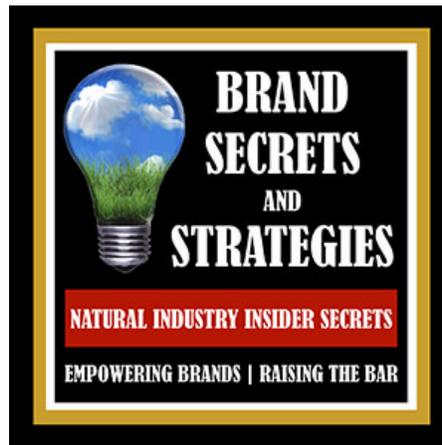
Nona: Sure.

Dan: What is it, why does it matter, how did it start? Some of the things that people wouldn't ordinarily know.

Nona: Yeah. Whole Kids Foundation just celebrated our eighth birthday two days ago.

Dan: Congrats.

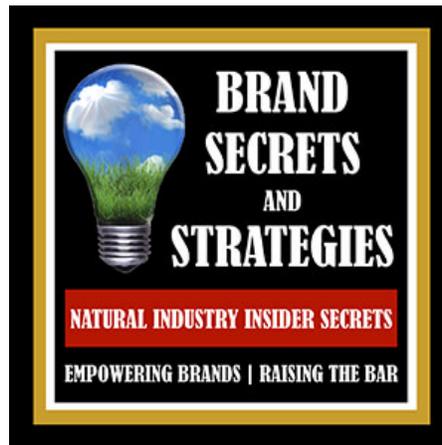
Nona: It's been around for eight years. We are an independent nonprofit organization, dedicating all of our energy to improve children's



nutrition. So, having only ever worked at the grocery store, when this opportunity presented itself I sat down and said, "Okay, what do we really, really know? What do I know? What can we make a difference in?" That was food, and nutrition, and health connected to those things.

I'm a retailer. If somebody's going to give me a dollar, I'm going to be sure I get the highest return on investment possible. That rocked the nonprofit world. They're like, "What? You know the ROI for your grant?" I was like, "Of course." We sat down and really said, "Okay, where can we make the biggest difference?" It's just good old retail math. Kids go to school 175 days a year, there are 500 kids in the average school. I was like, "That's where we can make it happen." And, the fact that they're getting 50% of their calories at school, it's a really effective point of conversation. It is where kids go to learn. So, my marketing and my retailer hat on, we set out to do that. Well, I had no idea how hard it would be to work in public education, so we had to meet people that really understood that, and have taught us how to do that.

Today, Whole Kids has two pieces to our mission. We support schools, and we work to inspire families. Our supporting school work includes a set of primary functions that are providing salad bar grant equipment and training to schools. We don't provide cash in that instance, we send the actual equipment, and we've invested to build the training tools because we know that when we implement a salad bar in a school cafeteria, kids will eat 30% more fresh fruits and vegetables. It's the highest return on investment activity that we can engage in.

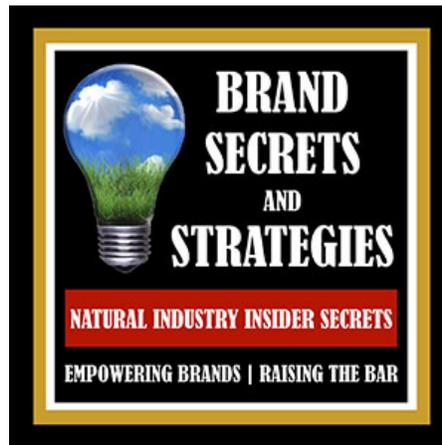


We also support school gardens, because we know through all of the evidence-based research that when kids grow food, they eat food. It's not as you might suspect if I grew that tomato, I'll eat that tomato. It's actually if I grow any food whether it's an herb or a tomato, there's a list of 24 other vegetables kids are more willing to try because they feel connected to where food comes from. It's really expansive.

The last piece of our primary work was we realized that you could have an amazing salad bar in a cafeteria, and a wonderful garden in the courtyard, but if your favorite teacher comes in every day with a candy bar and a soda, your work is neutralized. We teach teachers, and any adult in our education facilities about healthy eating. First, our teachers spend up to 10 hours a day with our kids. They deserve the best health on the planet. But also, they're great role models for our kids when they make healthy choices. We've had so many teachers take our class and say, "You know, I started taking my green smoothie to class with me and a few weeks in a student came up and said, 'I tried one of those at home because I saw you doing it.'" There are these great fringe benefits when we have healthy adults in the environment with our kids.

That's sort of our core work, and after eight years we are also now after the systematic change. We're working with over a dozen school districts to move them from processed foods to scratch cooking because we know that if we can get kids eating more real food at school, it gets easier everywhere else.

Dan: I think that's great. It's so inspiring. Let's talk about this, so you're talking about supporting schools.



Nona: Yeah.

Dan: What is this salad bar, what does it look like, and how does that work within the schools that you work with?

Nona: Sure, so we are both a granting organization and a partner. In the case of our salad bar program, we take on the relationship with that school district. Salad bars, we're working with the foodservice directors for school districts to help them change their purchasing patterns. In many cases, we built a set of tools that live on a website called TheLunchBox.Org, that encompass things like food safety training, and knife skills. Because, if all you had as kitchen equipment was a box cutter and a can crusher, you need to learn how to safely use a knife to cut-up fresh vegetables.

We take schools all the way through that learning journey. I'm a retailer, so there are planograms on that website that seasonally show how to set up a really nutritious salad bar. There are sample RFP's for how to engage local suppliers, so we really try and take care of all the things that can be hard when you're moving from a highly processed food environment to more real food.

In the case of our school garden grants, those are cash grants. What is true of Whole Foods is true of school gardens. There are as many ways to do it as there are schools. We really listen carefully to what our school's goals are, and what their needs are, and try and meet them where they are. We have modest school gardens, we have school farms, we have the first organic school farm in the nation.

Dan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).



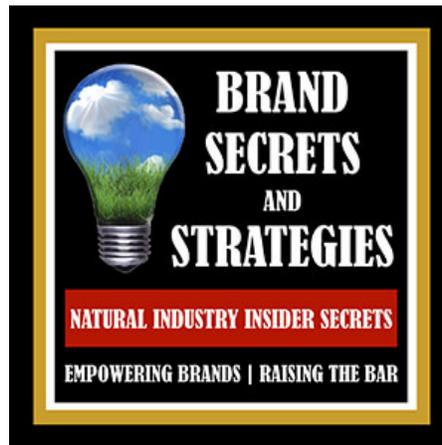
Nona: We have schools that are growing food and moving it into their cafeteria for the kids to eat, we developed a toolkit to help do that. So, lots of flexibility, but also lots of rigor. As you can imagine coming from a retailer, our grant application for a \$2,000 garden grant is the most rigorous in the business, but we get compliments because organizations say, "When we fill out your grant, we're ready for all these other things." We're a grantmaker, but I always say that we like to use our grants as a down payment on a longterm relationship.

Then the education work that we do is just that. From our roots and food, we've got an amazing chef on our team who put together a two hour workshop that aims to inspire people to change one or two simple things in how they eat, and then we hope to continue to support them, and continue to inspire them on a journey of healthy eating.

We work with all sorts of folks. We work with partners that have a geographic interest. We have some brands that want to support schools in New York, and California. We have some brands and supporters that just want to support salad bars. We really, we operate as a retailer. I want to know what your goals are, and then we work to engage and find where those synergies are. And, we're humble. We're always learning. Some of our brand partners have taught us amazing lessons.

Dan: When you say brand partners, what do you mean by that?

Nona: One of the interesting things, and it has been a learning journey for me. When Whole Foods Market starts a foundation, their ongoing commitment is to our administrative budget, so I don't have to raise money for pens, pencil, or people, thank goodness.



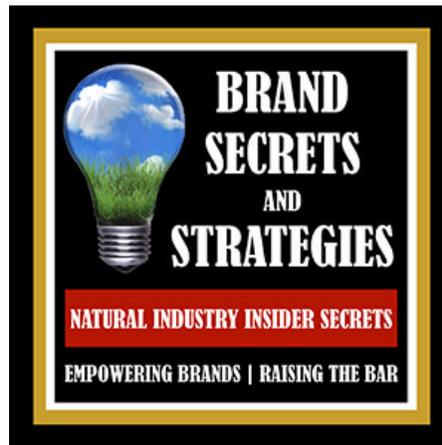
Dan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nona: But, we do have to raise every other dollar that we invest, so I've had to learn to be a fundraiser. We are so fortunate that so many brands in the natural food space have goals that mirror ours. We work with so many wonderful brands, from the folks at Unilever who have gotten into this space and are really making some amazing commitments, to long-time natural brands like Annie's, and Stony Field, who we sit down with and really understand what difference that they want to make, where, what we can do to better support their business goals, whether it's storytelling, or impact, or social media, and we craft each relationship really uniquely. We're very lucky to have that kind of support.

But, we are also working outside of the food space. We have corporate partners that have nothing to do with food, but really value what a healthier next generation brings to the world.

Dan: Thank you for sharing that. One of the things I did, I wanted to mention while you're talking about when kids buy food, the impact that it has on other people. They see an adult doing something, want to mimic that. One of the things that I think is so critically important about what you're talking about is that, when you're teaching someone the value of a fresh something, whether it be an apple, or an orange, or a tomato, or it doesn't matter what it is. It is so very different. The taste profile, it's sweet, it's fun to eat, it's crispy, it's whatever nature has in it.

But my point is, they're not the traditional limp vegetables that you might see at a mainstream store. The fact that you're teaching them not only about how to grow their food-



Nona: Yeah.

Dan: But, the value of the food, et cetera. But, then you're showing them what real food tastes like, and the way you connected that to the other vegetables, et cetera, that go along with it they would eat, love that. When you're talking about, one of the things that caught my ears, you said that when you work with brands, you work with them on the storytelling. What does that mean?

Nona: We really think that from a marketing perspective, personalization is still king. You mentioned earlier that just because you give somebody a piece of plastic does not make them loyal. It's what you do with the data that is behind that plastic. In my view from an old marketer standpoint, it's my job to learn something about you, and then deliver you a little piece of goodness or value that makes your heart grow. My favorite thing to do in this new work that is the foundations, is I challenge people and I say, "Give me a place, and I'll tell you a story."

Dan: Love that.

Nona: You mentioned that you're in Littleton Colorado. We have worked all over the area. I was just up in Louisville two weeks ago, and I got to visit Louisville Elementary, which is one of our garden grant recipient schools. We work with a great organization in Colorado called The Grow Foundation, and it was really amazing. We work with thousands of schools, and I'm a retailer so unannounced visits are in my blood. The school didn't know I was coming, I pull up, and the school is surrounded by a construction fence. Construction is enemy number one of a school garden, so I prepare myself to be disappointed. I get out of the car, and I'm headed into the construction zone, prepared to explain that I'm



not going to be here very long, I don't need a hard hat, just let me in.

I rounded the corner, and there was the most beautiful school garden, well protected from the construction. Because it's important to that school's culture. In fact, the construction team at the school was so knowledgeable about the garden, they even came over and asked if they could borrow the hose. I can talk to you about the fact that the kids at that school, there are 600 kids I think that go to that school, not only know where food comes from because they have this awesome garden. But, in that school they also have a salad bar, so they get to see the full food cycle.

I love to tell those kinds of stories that really connect with someplace that's important to you. I have a dream that with all of this data connected to those little cards, that Whole Foods is going to give me a zip code, and I'm going to give them back a story for that customer that helps them see what a difference the choice of that soy milk made. I think that's a real opportunity, and one of the things that we can do for brands.

We had a great partnership with Vital Farms, who is a brand that started here in Austin. They were doing cage-free farm-raised eggs. Well, we have several schools that have chickens, so we were able to connect stories about kids who have chickens at school, with their brand. Not something you would expect, but really diving down into that depth of personal connection is what I think is so much fun.

Dan: I love it, thank you so much. I'm going to see if we can figure out a way to help amplify and get your dream realized because that's so critically important. Storytelling is one of the most important



things, and actually, it's my first free mini-course, Turnkey Sales Story Strategies. The reason for that is because a lot of brands, they don't know how to tell stories.

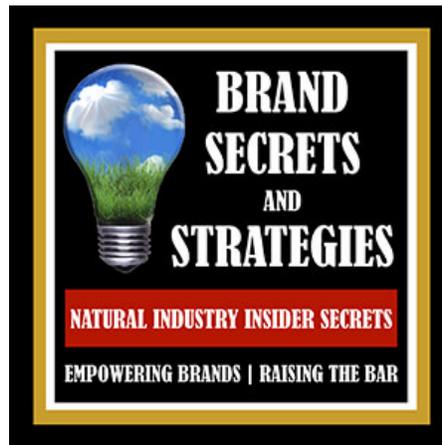
Nona: Yeah.

Dan: When I worked for Unilever, Kimberly Clark it's, "Buy this because we're a big company, and we're great, and you need to have that, we're going to give you this kind of margin." That doesn't work, and back to the loyalty example, that's not enough. The premise that I try to share with people is that if I tell you a story and you tell someone else, and they tell someone else, et cetera. By the time it comes back around to me, it's unrecognizable.

What you just shared should be part of that brands DNA. Part of that brand's story, because going back to the other things we talked about, it's that story that resonates with the consumer, that they're helping to drive into the store. If we can help these brands do more good, then those brands can help you do more good. I mean, it's all tied together, but the storytelling, I love the way you weave that in there. It's so critically important that, for example, those students or those brands supporting that school can say, "Hey, look how important this school garden is to their culture." As opposed to, here's something else ... You know, back to the rigors of your grant. Instead of a handout, it's a hand up.

Nona:

Dan: I love that because it's so critically important. If you think about going back to college, the kids that were given a lot of money, they didn't care about their education.



Nona: Yeah.

Dan: But, the kids like me that had to work really hard, two or three jobs while I'm going to school to try to ... We cared, and it's the same for the kids. It's the same, if I'm going to get my hands in the dirt and I'm going to grow the vegetables, then I'm going to eat those vegetables, et cetera.

When you said you talked about the second thing, looking at my notes, inspiring families. Talk a little bit more about that. I know that when a kid comes home, a child goes home and says, "Look what I did at school today," and when they're at the school ... I mean, when they're at the store they help choose the right kind of vegetables, et cetera. Beyond that, how do you impact the families at home?

Nona: Yeah, so we're called Whole Kids Foundation, but really the toughest part of my job is convincing adults that kids really love vegetables. If I turned my camera you would see that this wall over here says, "Love and veggies." Because those are the two ingredients I think it takes to grow up healthy kids. We spend a great deal of effort really engaging adults, both in the school setting, but also as families. Because, there is just that stereotype that, "Oh, my kid won't eat vegetables. I gave up, I'm not going to waste the money, I'm not going to try."

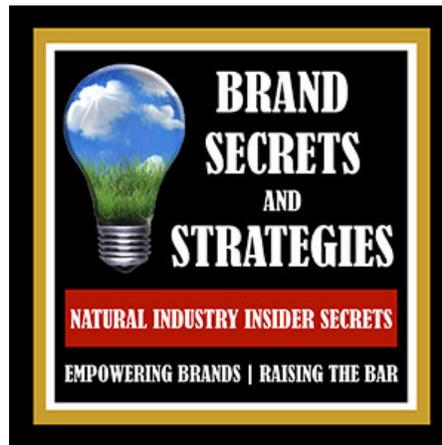
I think that's where what we've learned from food and from retail, comes into play. Our greatest gift is the ability to focus on all families. We acknowledge that very small simple steps can lead to making a big difference. We actually have an approach to this called, Small Bites. It's the idea that improving nutrition one bite at a time, really can add up to better health. That's the



approach that we take. There's sort of three tenants because often I get asked, "Well, you're Whole Kids Foundation, what do you want kids to eat?" We talk about eating a rainbow of natural color, fruits, and vegetables. Eat greens first, because they're the most nutritionally dense food that we can eat, and they're so easy to grow. And, as close to nature as possible. We help people understand that canned veg, and frozen veg, are a great choice because sometimes they're more affordable, or they're more available seasonally.

We really broaden the idea of what a healthy diet can include. The thing that you very rarely hear us say is, "No," or, "Don't eat." We're not about that. People have so much tradition and culture in how they eat. What we do is we say, "Eat more of these things," because those things will eventually lead to better health. That's really our approach to inspiring families, is to start with making the very simple connection between what you eat and health. Believe it or not, our generation of adults, we weren't taught that in school. We came from the generation when health was about fat, or calories, or sort of the labeling. We weren't taught about food.

That's what we work to do. We work to have very simple conversations that acknowledge, that making healthy food choices is difficult in some places, which is why we focus on school because school reaches everyone in a community. On the other side of our foundation work, Whole Cities is really working on food access. Because, it's great to energize kids, but if they go home and their parents can't afford or access healthy food, we haven't really solved the whole problem. We look at both of



those, and it's one very simple bit of knowledge and change at a time.

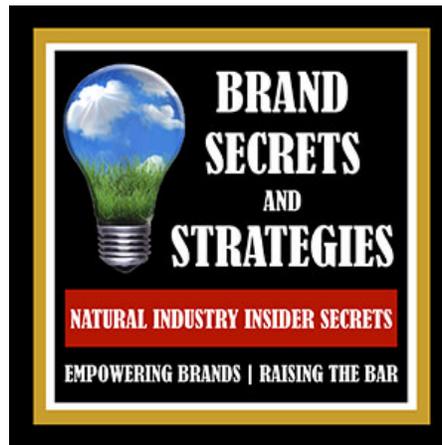
Dan: No, that's so great. I appreciate you sharing that too, and I love that. That, I improve nutrition one bite at a time. That makes so much sense because it's such a simple thing to understand, and to take in. One of the things that I think we need to change in terms of the way people think about food, is that if you are what you eat, what you eat matters. What I'm getting at this, is if you-

Nona: I love that.

Dan: Is, if you ... Well, it's so critically important. In fact, I was actually talking to Gary Hirshberg about exactly this, because we were talking about food is medicine and a lot of the same conversation. You see, the thing we've woven through a lot of the podcast. But, what I was getting at is that if I eat the things, get the proper nutrients, then my body's not as hungry. Let me put it this way.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: I use this example a lot. So you walk up to the retail store, and you're looking at the bread section. You've got the best mainstream bread, and you've got the organic bread next to it. The mainstream bread might be 30 to 50 cents cheaper. Wow, that's a good value, right? Organic's too expensive, you hear those arguments. However, the customer that we're talking about is a customer that understands the difference. If I eat the generic bread, I'm hungry almost before I finish eating it. If I eat the best mainstream bread, then I'll be satiated for a while. But, if I'm eating the organic bread that gives my body the nutrients, et cetera, that it needs, I'll be satiated longer. And, I won't have the



cravings, and, and, and, and, and all the other things that those particular foods are designed to help solve, those are those things my body needs.

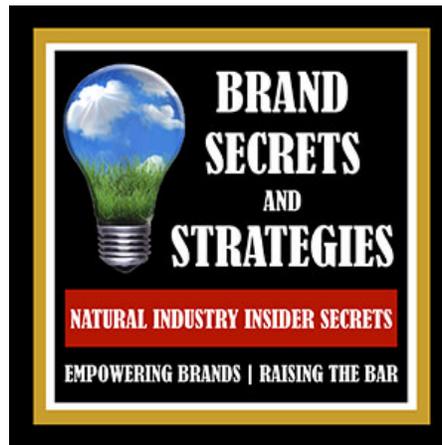
The same holds true, and it's even more important when you're talking about vegetables, or you're talking about processed foods, et cetera. Yeah, to your point, I did grow up in the world where we were starting to explore chemistry, better living through chemistry, not a good thing.

Nona: Right.

Dan: But, my grandparents, they ate organic not because it was cool, but because that's what they ate. I learned how from my grandparents and my parents, how to eat healthy foods, the value of healthy foods. I remember going through my grandfathers garden, and he could make a beet taste amazing. I've never had a beet that I've liked since then, but I loved his, and other vegetables.

Nona:

Dan: Yeah exactly, so it goes back to what you're saying. Teaching people, so eating a rainbow, I love that because a lot of people don't realize that there's more to food than just carbs and calories ... anyhow. Then, eating the greens first. A lot of people don't realize that's a great way to fill yourself up, it's a great way to get fiber. This whole concept and I don't want to go down this path, but vegans versus people that are flexitarians, versus whatever. People are surviving eating just vegetables, and what I was getting at is if you eat the right vegetables, it gives your



body the nutrients to be happy, and smiling, and vibrant like you are.

Nona: There's a great graphic that we use sometimes that is, it's sort of gnarly. It's a picture of a stomach, and it shows how full that stomach is with 100 calories of kale-

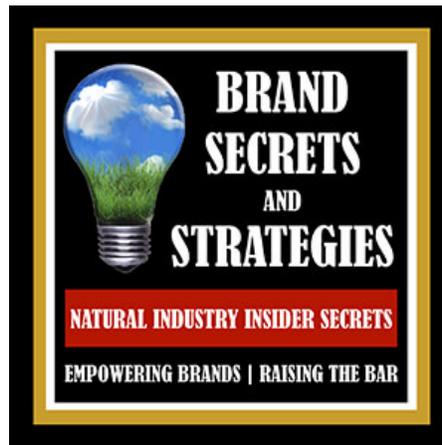
Dan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nona: Versus 100 calories of oil. It just, it really helps people start thinking because we've not taught people to think about calories or food choices in that way. I think sometimes really helping people visualize like, why am I hungry after I have a bagel instead of a big salad?

Dan: Well, and people don't think about that. To your point, we've got to change the way people think. This is a little bit embarrassing, I'm dating myself. But anyhow, when I went to college back in the early 80s, actually 1980, I was super, super skinny, Joe athlete, triathlete, and all that kind of stuff. I went to college and because I stopped working out, and because I stopped doing the things, the physical stuff. But, now I'm eating school meals three times a day, I gained 35 pounds-

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: In about six or seven weeks. It took a long time to lose that. But, my point is exactly what you're saying. They were trying to fill us up with empty calories that did nothing to fuel our body. I felt lethargic, I didn't have the energy, my mind wasn't as clear or crisp as I was before. When I realized what I was doing to myself, I had to take ownership. Wow, what a difference.



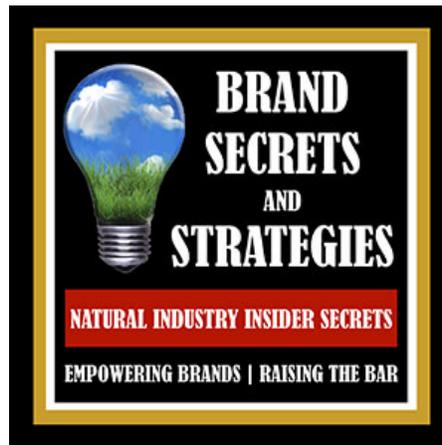
Nona: Yeah.

Dan: I kind of stopped eating it, well I was very careful about what I ate. But, even the processed, even the fresh things weren't that great. Anyhow, to your point. We need to change the culture, we need to change the conversation around food, and it needs to begin with our future, which is the children. Thank you for sharing that. What else have we not talked about that you want to share?

Nona: You know, I think one of the things that is so unique about this work, and it's genesis from Whole Foods Market is, it starts from the core values of real food. One of the things that I'm so proud, is that we are really able to do this work in a way that is in partnership with communities. You mentioned a hand up. We actually like to think of it as a handshake.

Dan: Love that.

Nona: Because we ... neither from the Whole Kids perspective or the Whole Cities perspective, we don't go into a community with of that's what you eat, or here's a project you should deploy. We go in with listening ears to understand, what are the goals of the community, and is there a way that what we do can help? In some places, it's called a self-determined outcome. You know, how can we join with a community to help them realize their dreams? I think that's really special, because in the moment that we're in, in this country for certain, and we're very fortunate that we get to work in Canada and the UK, so we have lots of international perspectives.



But, in this moment in this country, we have the opportunity to ask ourselves, what is it going to take for every person to have a seat at the healthy food table? We're very privileged to get to work with Whole Foods and our natural brands, but we get to take the vantage point of saying, "How does every person get a seat at this table?" Because that's going to really help us realize the change that I think we all would love to see.

Dan: That's perfect. My mission, to make our healthy way of life more accessible-

Nona: Yeah.

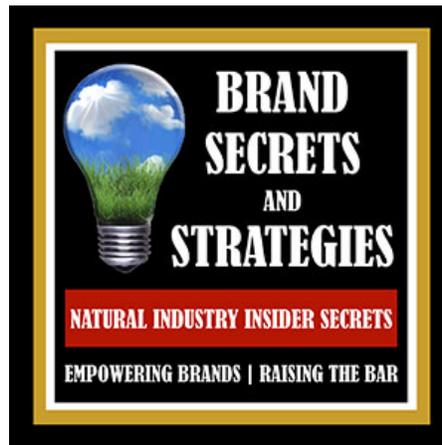
Dan: By getting those products on more store shelves, in the hands of more shoppers. Exactly the same thing. It took me a long time to come up with that.

Nona: Yeah.

Dan: The whole idea is that if we can make healthy food more available, all that nonsense, those myths about cost, et cetera, those go away. By making healthy food more affordable, we clean up a lot of the environment, we do so much good for the planet, and we fix a lot ... going back to what you said earlier-

Nona: Sure.

Dan: A lot of the medical issues that people have. Food is medicine, and we need to start paying more attention, and we need to start respecting the food that we eat. I remember hearing years, and years, and years ago, about your body's your temple. Yet, if it's your temple, then why aren't we paying attention to the things that honor, respect, et cetera, that give back to it, that fuel it?



Thank you so much for sharing that. Any last thoughts, anything else you want to share?

Nona: You know, I think one of the greatest joys in both working in the food business and in this new chapter that I'm in with this nonprofit work is, really in working with kids, understanding that they're so adept at learning to listen to their bodies. They're smaller, so every effect has a deeper impact. But, I think that's something that I would encourage all of us to think about is, how can we listen to our bodies, and learn to adjust and adapt, and if our consumers do that, what does it mean for us as brands and retailers. How can we be supportive? Because there is room in life for all of the goodness. I still love a good piece of chocolate. As you discovered, my Skype name is BakingFool. I'm an obsessed baker. As long as 80% of my choices are great, healthy choices, I can have a really decadent meal when I'm in New York City, or I can have a baked treat.

I think it's that balance that is both so important for us to teach our kids, but for us to remember as adults. That, we have to be gentle and patient with ourselves, and there are no absolutes, especially in food.

Dan: Absolutely, well, well said. Thank you so much for sharing all this. How can brands get involved, where can we go to learn more about you?

Nona: WholeKidsFoundation.Org is the home base for all of our work in children's nutrition, and WholeCitiesFoundation.Org is where the work that we do at the intersection of healthy food access, and nutrition education for community lives.



- Dan: Love that, I'll be certain to put a link to it on the podcast show page, and on the podcast show notes. Thank you so much for sharing your time with us, thank you for your wisdom and insights. More importantly, thanks, Nona, for all you do for the community and for helping improve our healthy way of life. I really appreciate your time.
- Nona: Well, it's a joy to get to speak in this way, in such a blended fashion, you know? I'm a foodie, I'm a marketer, but now I have this amazing platform to blend all of that experience. To get to speak to you, and to speak to brands and retailers is such a privilege. I would just close by saying if there's somebody out there that's learned something that we haven't, we are collaborative to our core. I love when the phone rings, and you answer it, you can still talk to people. I look forward to maybe a question or some new ideas coming our way.
- Dan: That would be great, and I will certainly do everything I can to help support and promote it. Thank you.
- Nona: Daniel, thank you so much. I hope you have a terrific weekend ...
- Dan: I want to thank Nona for coming on today and for sharing her enthusiasm and her passion. What a great mission and I'm so thrilled that I was able to help share her story with you. I'll be certain to put a link to Whole Kids and Whole Cities on the podcast webpage and in the podcast show notes.

Today's free downloadable guide is, How To Get on More Store Shelves. On this episode, we talked a lot about how to become more than just another package on a retailer shelf, how to go above and beyond your competition and how to stand out, why



your product matters, and how the customer that buys your product is far more important to the retailer than anything else. You can download this instantly on the podcast show notes and on the podcast webpage at [brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session138](https://brandsecretsandstrategies.com/session138). Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next episode.

Whole Kids <https://www.wholekidsfoundation.org>

Whole Cities <https://www.wholecitiesfoundation.org>

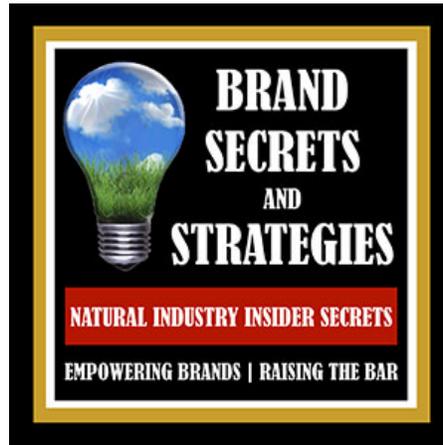
### **This episode's FREE downloadable guide**

Getting your products onto store shelves is critical to your success - even online stores. There is an easier way grow sales and profits that can also save you valuable time and money. Knowing this simple strategy can explode sales and give you a substantial and sustainable competitive advantage.

CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD YOUR FREE STRATEGIC GUIDE: [How To Get On More Store Shelves](#)

Thanks again for joining us today. Make sure to stop over at [brandsecretsandstrategies.com](https://brandsecretsandstrategies.com) for the show notes along with more great brand building articles and resources. Check out my free course Turnkey Sales Story Strategies, your roadmap to success. You can find that on my website or at [TurnkeySalesStoryStrategies.com/growsales](https://TurnkeySalesStoryStrategies.com/growsales). Please subscribe to the podcast, leave a review, and recommend it to your friends and colleagues.

Sign up today on my website so you don't miss out on actionable insights and strategic solutions to grow your brand and save you valuable time and money.



I appreciate all the positive feedback. Keep your suggestions coming.

Until next time, this is Dan Lohman with Brand Secrets and Strategies where the focus is on empowering brands and raising the bar.