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Tim Roupell

Founder of Daily Bread

Attached to Tim Roupell's computer is a scrap of paper that says: 'To avoid seasickness look to the horizon.' He has read it many times since quitting his job as a City commodities trader to start his own business making sandwiches. He says: 'The idea is that instead of worrying about unimportant things you should look at where you are going and not let the small stuff get in the way.'

Born in Wimbledon, Roupell spent his childhood divided between boarding school and foreign postings in Germany, Aden in the Middle East and Hong Kong where his father was serving with the British Army. He left school at 18 and got a job in the City, largely because his older brother already worked there and a position came up in the same firm. Roupell admits: 'It was a real cop-out. I wanted to do something different but there I was wearing a suit and going into the City every day. The money was a big lure. I was completely mercenary and desperate to be independent. Then very quickly I had a mortgage and got used to skiing holidays and found myself staying there.'



But after working as a trader for 10 years he realised he hated his job and really wanted to work for himself. 'I started off enjoying it, but it became soul-destroying. I couldn't bear it. The trouble was I never really cared what the price of sugar or coffee was. I got to the point where I had to do something with my life.'

Having entered the City straight from school, however, he had no experience of doing anything else. He says: 'That limited my options quite a lot.' Inspiration was close at hand however. 'It was very hard to buy a good sandwich near where I worked in Victoria so I thought that if I could make good-quality sandwiches and deliver them to offices there would be a market.' In the end the decision to take the plunge was made for him when he was asked to leave his job. He invested £800 in a meat-slicing machine and a couple of baskets and begged a friend who owned a delicatessen to let him use his basement.

He says: 'I literally got up at 4.30 am the next morning and started making sandwiches, and then went round offices flogging them. It was a pretty humbling thing to do. The

traders I used to work with thought I was mad.' But on the first day he sold 35 sandwiches and Daily Bread was born.

As sales grew, Roupell recruited people to help him and also started supplying sandwich platters. But it was hard work. 'It was a logistical nightmare trying to get students or out-of-work actors to do basket rounds every day', he says. 'Sometimes they didn't turn up or they'd have a bad day and sell only half the sandwiches.' After a year, Roupell had taken on five full-time staff and was able to move Daily Bread into its own premises. But in 1996, 10 years after he began the business, crisis struck. Daily Bread lost two big clients, sales slumped and for the first time the business started losing money.

In a desperate attempt to revive sales Roupell decided to open a small outlet in Brixton. It was a big mistake. He says: 'It was such a disaster that I pulled the plug after a month and a half. We almost couldn't give the sandwiches away. And it was at a time when we could least afford to take a punt like that.' It was a tough test of his philosophy of keeping his eye on the horizon. He admits: 'I got incredibly close to throwing in the towel. It would have been a lot of hard work to get nowhere and it was a pretty galling thought. I was 40 years old with three children and I knew I never wanted to work for other people again, but I began to realise I might have to. It was not a good place to be.'

He was saved at the last minute by a large order from a contract caterer. Roupell says: 'That was our turning point. We started taking a regular order and then we realised that the way forward was to sell sandwiches wholesale. The margin was much lower, but dropping off 300 sandwiches was so much easier than delivering batches of 20 sandwiches here and 15 there.'

When that order led to others, Roupell took the bold decision to ditch the basket rounds and the platters altogether

and focus entirely on wholesale deliveries. He says: 'It was a big step. At the time platters accounted for nearly half our sales so it was quite a punchy thing to do. But I realised that if we offered the best quality and service, then people would use us. And that is what has driven us ever since.'

It worked. In 2002 Daily Bread was awarded a royal warrant to supply sandwiches to the Queen and by 2007 the business had a turnover of £13 million. In 2008 Roupell sold the business to a large American organic and natural food producer for a substantial undisclosed sum. He has stayed on to run the business and aims to turn Daily Bread into a major wholesale sandwich brand with national distribution.

Roupell, 54, is in no doubt about the secret of his success: 'They say that fear and greed are the two main drivers. Well, I am totally driven by fear. Nobody likes to fail and sometimes there is a thin line between success and failure. You have to be careful not to become complacent.'

He is also a firm believer in playing fair. He says: 'I have always been very straight in my dealings with people and that is very important to me. I haven't trodden on anyone to get here. That's a nice feeling.'

Fact File

Date of birth: 6 January 1955

Marital status: married with three children

Highest level of education achieved: boarding school

Qualifications: seven O levels, one A level

Interests: playing tennis, skiing, playing the guitar, blues and rock music

Personal Philosophy: 'What goes around comes around. Treat as you are treated.'