

“...the best country in the world for an entrepreneur”

That's how Sir Gulam Noon described England during his speech. He also identified some of the factors important in business success:

“Timing is very important... but not enough to ensure success. You need to have the technology, do your market research, make sure you know which products to sell, use intelligence and check all the financial details – but never dilute quality.”

And, more specifically, he gave this advice for retailers here:

“Pay attention to financial details and spend money on research – without these you will be a dead duck.”

The feedback

“Hearing from Sir Noon about the ups and downs of running a small company and how to succeed in a competitive environment was very useful to me.”

Anila Vaghela, Anila's Authentic Sauces

“He gave us an insight of a very successful business man, which I found helpful.”

Amrit Sahota, BetterSpec

We're here to help

At ABi, we provide practical help for SME businesses through innovative solutions and pioneering programmes. Our aim is to successfully enable communities to achieve their full economic potential. Our support can come through networking, training, information, mentoring, providing access to resources and more. And our expertise will always be delivered on time, with passion, understanding and a high level of customer service.

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An Audience with

Sir Gulam Noon MBE

Chairman of Noon Products



Sir Gulam Noon founded Noon Products in 1989 and is now its Chairman. After establishing several successful businesses in India which he still operates, he settled in London in 1972 to set up Bombay Halwa Ltd (Royal Sweets) in Southall.

The company specialises in retail Indian sweets, snack foods and aviation catering. He remains an energetic force at Noon Products and is still passionate about producing even more sophisticated varieties of high quality, authentic ready meals for an ever-increasing market.

“I am not a story-teller, but I do have a remarkable story to tell...”

...I was born in Mumbai (Bombay). My father was from a small town and sadly, he died when I was 6 years old. He left us with a confectionery shop – Royal Sweets.

Each day, after school, I would work in the shop. It was very difficult for my mother and my uncle. At 16, I left school for business. I put a lot of effort into modernising the shops and creating a factory to centralise production.

When the core business started to thrive, I bought property and I became a partner in a paper and printing business, and then in the construction industry. I became well known in India... At 28 I was the youngest Justice of the Peace.

An accountant told me that

“To be successful, you need to know the health of the business”.

That bit of advice stayed with me and, although I did not become a qualified accountant, I can read balance sheets and I can read behind balance sheets.

Even in those days, I had vision. I went and found a partner, a close friend from Mumbai, to go 50/50 with me and Royal Sweets was re-born here. I opened my first shop in Southall – and got off to a very poor start... But the Asian community in the UK grew – and so did Royal Sweets. ...

I went to the United States and I expected to be able to reproduce my success there. I opened a factory, and then nine restaurants – but within two years, it was all gone.

“When I first saw the contract, I thought that there had been a mistake.”

My vision, my ambition, was to make Indian food without diluting the magic... When I tasted Indian food bought from the supermarkets in England, I thought it was insipid and badly packaged.

In 1988, I bought a factory in Southall...and...I went to the largest frozen food distributor. I managed to convince one brand manager that I was more authentic than other food manufacturers and we got a contract.

When I first saw the contract, I thought that there had been a mistake: £2.7 million – and I had only 11 people.

Next, I was invited to Sainsbury. They asked me “What is different about your food?” And I told them. I said,

“Your food is rubbish”.

Then we started to sell to Waitrose, Morrisons, Budgens and M&S...

Hard work with integrity

How was it achieved? I say “Hard work”. But hard work with integrity. There is a social obligation.

In 1994, my factory burned down. Now, my adviser told me that I had to stop paying my 250 people. But we went on paying them. The workforce went out to pray for me...

Adversity brings opportunity

I converted a Royal Sweets factory to produce 40% of the Noon Products output. And then I was offered spare capacity at another factory. Then I bought another factory in 8 months...

Three years ago I built the largest ethnic food factory in the UK. Risky? Certainly, but I calculate my risk...

gold at the price of silver. We do 350,000 meals a day. We tried vegetarian meals – but they did not sell. Chicken sells, other meats a bit, but chicken really sells.

England is the best country in the world for an entrepreneur...

....and I want to plough back something into the country that made me.

I started the Noon Foundation with £4m of my own money. It supports multi-faith and multi-cultural programmes in education, health and welfare.

Then I started another foundation in the country of my birth. There, we have built a dam.

Family...

In family businesses, we must recognise difference of opinion – but don't wait for problems to come up. You must anticipate.

And we learn our moral sense from our family. Moral education helps to form the attitudes that help us to succeed.

An extension of this is civic education. We must become joiners, joiners of organisations

“The easiest way to expand is acquisition. But there have to be synergies...”

The first time I sold the company to WG Foods it was like a reverse merger. Then I bought the shares back, doubled the business and sold it to Kerry Foods and now I am the Chairman.

I bought out my partners at Royal Sweets and have tripled its sales over the last four years.

The market is changing and moving... I now get 40% less than when I started with Birds-Eye. When the multiples fight, the axe can fall on smaller supplier. The plight of farmers is similar.

I do believe that correction will come automatically. But with supermarkets, volume is a necessity. Manufacturers here must be able to compete...

...Respond to your market

We are looking at international markets: we are now looking at a manufacturing plant in Saudi. We must always look out for opportunities...

You must know and respond to your market. You have to be sure that there are people who will buy – even if you are selling

devoted to the civic good. Get involved with charity by contributing time as well as money. This will stop you becoming a social snob interested only in money and the petty trappings of material success.”

For retailers, your personality is important too. You know that you must:

- Know your customer's name, be receptive to criticism and go further by inviting criticism
- Smile at your customer
- Go on the shop floor as much as you can
- Keep the shop clean
- Make sure your shop front is good
- Have an inviting entrance

If you take short-cuts, people will know

And for businesses in general, they should always be diplomatic and friendly with competitors...