

Profile of Jerry Beckerman

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For over 40 years, Jerry Beckerman has lead a broad variety of activities in the worlds of new products, new venture development, community non-profits, research, strategic planning, marketing, and citizen outreach. With a good dose of creativity, Beckerman has transformed ideas into tangible reality through the management of people and resources. A graduate of UC Berkeley, his career began in 1976 by launching the nation's second chocolate chip cookie bakery store with 12 varieties, Cookies & Milk, which later expanded into shelf-stable packages broadly marketed to supermarkets, creating a million dollar brand at age 23. In the early 1980s he guided new product development for Lawry's Foods, a subsidiary of Lipton/Unilever. In the late 1980s he formed a corporation to develop and market a new snack cracker line, Nutcrackers®, arranged for its manufacture by Safeway Stores' U.S. bakery, and marketed the brand nationally through food distributors and brokers.

In the 1990s Beckerman's focus shifted to socially conscious ventures where, for example, he directed new product efforts to support the environment, such as a reforestation project for the Lacandon Mayan rainforest. In another venture, he developed and patented a resource-efficient tree-starter kit to provide children with a personal learning experience of stewardship. Scholastic Books, AARP, and the U.S. Forest Service, among others, distributed the tree-kit. The kit was also energetically planned for global distribution with Vice President Gore's staff in support of his GLOBE project. Beckerman developed other resource-efficient and zero waste products, such as the GreetingBox and BoxDice Sports Games. With these, consumers re-used the package in order to create the product itself.

Research has been a key component throughout Beckerman's career, often driven by the tried and true concept for commercial success: "Find out what your customers want, and give it to them." He savors the process of identifying marketplace "reality" to drive concept development. In 2000, he developed Community Research, an online survey tool. It enabled clients to conduct their own research and, for research professionals, it served as a useful research tool with crosstab capabilities. The tool also enabled citizen outreach and supported public policy formation and decision-making in the civic/community arena for many clients such as Redondo Beach, Elk Grove, Ventura County Fair Grounds, the U.S. Navy, the League of California Cities, the County of Ventura, SCORE, and universities such as UC Berkeley, Brown University, UC Santa Barbara, and California Lutheran University.

Beckerman's active creativity in Initiating, methodically developing, and managing with integrity have been key components throughout his career. This approach is present in his non-profit work with Segue Career Mentors; and in the social enterprise, Passion Spark Retreats. In a paradigm shift when most schools' primary goal is for students to "make a living," which results in 80+ percent of the workforce being unsatisfied in their careers, Passion Spark guides students to *first* self-discover their true passion and *then* match it to a career that can earn them a good living. Tangibly, Passion Spark increases student competitiveness in college applications, and reduces college costs. Impacting Beckerman's work is his belief in the underlying value of continuous improvement, per the Baldrige Framework. He has also been a leader in cost-effectiveness for nonprofits. Segue has generated substantial success for students with its efficient turnkey system that has proven to operate as a satellite in distant cities using its online scheduling system for live in-class career speakers. The result has already produced nearly 100,000 student exposures to workplace career options, thereby increasing the relevance of, and motivation for, more effort in school. Speakers impart valuable tips on how to succeed in the workplace, as they also share core ideas from their experiences such as the importance of taking initiative, networking, perseverance, and personal responsibility. A Harvard University study of Segue found statistically significant student impacts in areas known to increase academic success and reduce dropout.

Along the way Beckerman has served, or currently serves, on the boards of a number of non-profit organizations, such as: The Sustainability Council of Ventura County, The Martin Luther King Center for Non-violence in Los Angeles, and LIFE (Love is Feeding Everyone). He is a board member of the Ventura County Civic Alliance, serves on the Programs Committee of the Workforce Development Board, and has served the Ventura Community Partnership for Youth, the Ventura County Partnership for Safe Families, and the Ventura County Open Space District Advisory Committee.