

Lorenzo Zurino: “I’m not one to show off, I like to work”

Letizia Airos Soria (April 26, 2019)



Lorenzo Zurino, founder and CEO of The One Company, specializing in the promotion of Italian businesses abroad, recently received the NIAF (an important Italian American association) award for Young Entrepreneur of the Year. We met with him in our editorial office. He is one of the main figures involved in the promotion of Italian food products in the world and with ‘The One’ is a point of reference not only for big Italian food companies. Zurino also caters to medium and small businesses, which in Italy constitute a significant reality, one potentially important for the country’s economy yet too often overlooked.



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He was born and raised in Sorrento, went to school in Amalfi, but now lives mostly between New York and Milan.

Lorenzo Zurino is born in a family of important traders in Campania, but decides to move to America. Very young, he is ready to realize his American dream.

"The first time I came to America on holiday, I was 17 and I fell in love with the country. My father deals in food distribution across Costiera Amalfitana, Costiera Sorrentina and Capri. I come from a family that's been doing that for 104 years, so 4 generations."

He remembers how his great-grandfather used 'chiatte' (barges) to go to Sorrento. "There were no cars back then!"

But Zurino decides not to take on his father's business. "There certainly has been some tension in the family. I shared my desire to study to become a lawyer...my father went mad!"

But I had been a 'daddy's boy' and I didn't want to follow in his footsteps, it felt like a limitation of my freedom. I'm a Romantic: I wanted to test myself."

He interrupts his studies, however, and his path goes in a different direction, ultimately not far from that of his father. At 22 he founds his first company and calls it '[The One](#) [3].'

"I chose this name because it was my first business. I wanted to live in America and so I created it here. So, 11 years ago, at age 23, I came to the US."

And he gets started: "I managed to sell 700 bottles of my father's white wine over the phone, using his contacts. Then, when I got to New York, I met Gianfranco Sorrentino, the President of [Gruppo Italiano Ristoratori e Distributori](#) [4]. He has been fundamental, he taught me so much."

But what does Zurino do today?

"Essentially, in some cases I trade products, I buy and I sell.

Other products, I bring to distributors across 11 states. So I present and bring Italian products to the



US. I handle logistics.

My job has evolved over the years. When I first arrived, I used to go around with my suitcase telling people 'my product is good.' I let the product do the talking.

Now, if I want to push a company, I go directly to supermarket chains. I follow the product. I'm a sort of 'pillow' between those selling the product and the final retailers.

Essentially, I 'create' the company for America, for the American market. For example 'Caffe Motta' didn't exist here and I brought it."

He doesn't like to speak of internationalization though...

"I find that it's a word that gets overused. Everyone 'does internationalization', yet nobody sells a grain of rice.

I was lucky because, if on the one hand there are many companies that focus on internationalization and market analysis, on the other hand, it also happens that big businesses who have gone to them and spent at least 100 thousand dollars, didn't achieve anything.

That's how, little by little, they started coming to me, 'He may be young but he'll probably sell that sack of rice!' Italy is a small country, it spread by word of mouth. I've always been very low profile, I let the big companies speak. But when NIAF gave me that award, for the first time, I looked back and thought 'Ok, I've accomplished a few things.'"

For the past two years, he's been closely following small and medium businesses as well. The heart of Italian entrepreneurship, full of potential but still getting very little attention.

"Sure, I had to start with large businesses because I had to create some flow, but Gianfranco Sorrentino always told me 'Lorenzino, quality pays back in the long run,' and it's true.

So I started with rice from Sardinia. Nobody knows that they have rice fields in Sardinia, which produce high-quality rice.

Then I went to Pachino in Sicily (Pachino tomatoes have had a boom but very few people know that it's also the name of a town) and I met with the main local producer of fresh Pachino and I asked him to put it in a jar. We called it 'Bottega di Sicilia' and we sell it, at a price, but it's the real thing."



A niche market but a great start for those small to medium-sized businesses that have potential abroad.

"In these cases, we sell to restaurants, we're not doing large-scale distribution for now. I see if something sells or if it doesn't. If I don't know, I ask my 70 distributors located across 11 states."

And he has to say no to those who can't make it into the American market...

"I make some enemies, sure, but if I do my research and realize that something won't work, I don't take it on. I like to sleep soundly, especially in the last 2 years since I became a father..."

And you can see the profound emotion in his eyes when he says the word 'papà' (father), which is much more important than any professional achievement. He talks business, sure, but behind every success story there are men and women with regular lives and feelings.

To conclude our interview, I ask him about his next steps.

"I'm currently selling in 11 states, the US has 50... I'm not one to show off, I like to work."

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