

# START BEFORE YOU'RE READY



The Young Entrepreneur's Guide to  
Extraordinary Success in Work and Life

MICK SPENCER

WILEY



During the ten years I worked for Richard Branson I was fortunate to work with some of the best entrepreneurs in the world. The one characteristic that sums them up is tenacity. To say yes when others say no. To zig when others zag. Mick and his book are founded on this principle and I recommend it to anyone looking for a story to inspire and most importantly to succeed.

—**David Baxby**, Managing Director, Wesfarmers Industrials & Safety, Former CEO Virgin

When looking for success you need the drive and tenacity to overcome all the obstacles that come into your life and your business, and Mick has these in spades. Watch this space...

—**Janine Allis**, founder, Boost Juice

Life is short. In *Start Before You're Ready*, Mick tells us how to make the most of it.

—**Patrick Schmidt**, CEO The Iconic, Co-CEO Global Fashion Group

*Start Before You're Ready* is a book that is full of practical wisdom and a good dose of motivation to get you going on your next adventure, challenge or goal. Mick's story of turning from a boy with many challenges to a man with many successes is both enjoyable and engaging.

—**Stuart Cook**, former CEO, Zambreno Restaurants

Most entrepreneurial journeys are full of twists and turns—but when you keep a clear focus on why and where you intend to be then they become distant memories fast. How good of Mick to share his journey so we can learn from his twists and turns.

—**Naomi Simson**, founder, Red Balloon, co-founder, Big Red Group, Shark on *Shark Tank*

Mick takes us on his own journey and shares great insights on how he personally overcame challenges to create, innovate and make his business viable. The result is an authentic road map to gaining greater self-confidence and some great reminders on how to handle set backs!

— **Andrew Banks**, founder, Morgan & Banks and Talent2 International, Shark on *Shark Tank*

Mick has a never-give-up attitude and in my opinion, loves to solve problems that others may struggle with. He was born to be an entrepreneur and it was this creative attitude that helped us sell 4 seasons of DundasFit in David Jones. Working alongside Mick taught me that any problem or situation I get into in business can be solved one step at a time. Mick has a natural ability to stay calm and composed and not let big decisions cloud his judgment and he is always sharp no matter the time of day or the pressure of a decision. Mick won't stop, so listen to his advice and hold on!

— **Jason Dundas**, Australian TV host and entrepreneur

Mick wears his heart on his sleeve, and his passion and commitment shine through, in his new book on how he has overcome significant challenges, both personal and business related. In *Start Before Your'e Ready*, Mick summarises his lessons learned in an easy-to-read manner that will be certain to add value to any inspiring entrepreneur."

— **Clifford Rosenberg**, Managing Director S.E. Asia & Australia NZ, LinkedIn (2011-2017)

When Mick Spencer started out in business he started an entirely new business model for apparel. Why? He just didn't know the old model. Normally, clothing has a 6-12 month cycle. Design a lot of clothing you think your customer wants, go out and make it in advance using lots of your own money

and then put it in multiple stores and try to sell it to them and hope someone buys it. Repeat. It's been done like that for about a hundred years. When Mick Spencer started he didn't know this model. He was too young! So he just started his own model that made a lot more sense. Let the customer, whether a big corporate client or a small sports club, use technology to upload and customise exactly what they want, use the same digital technology to print the fabrics and make it within weeks or even days, and deliver it overnight wherever they are—and the client has paid for it in advance. Brilliant! This book shows how the old business models can and should be challenged, especially if you have the drive to succeed like Mick Spencer.

— **Derek O'Neill**, CEO, Billabong (2003-2011)

There's no doubt any business, large or small, can benefit from Mick's 'start before you're ready' approach. I know ours has, and I'm looking forward to our continued partnership and entrepreneurial approach together.

— **Doug Swan**, CEO, Workwear Group (Wesfarmers)

What a great read! Mick's engaging story is full of actions, steps and tips for life and business success as we read about his experiences in pursuing his goals, getting out of his comfort zone and 'making the most of life.'

— **Glen Richards**, founder and CEO,  
Greencross, Shark, *Shark Tank*

Micky Spencer is the definition of a dream-achiever. For anyone, diving into the deep end is a risk but this man is proof that when you persevere and work hard, you get there. I'm sure in his eyes he's only just getting started.

— **Adam Hyde & Rueban Styles**, Peking Duk — 13x ARIA  
Platinum Recording Artists

Mick's personal account of his journey to date demonstrates the passion, imagination and drive that can encourage young entrepreneurs to think about their future world in a different way.

—**Kate Driver**, Deputy Director and General Manager,  
Questacon, Australia's National science and  
technology centre

Each year, you meet people that stand out from others. Then you meet people who stand out from those that stand out. Mick is one of those people. His energy, enthusiasm and positivity is hard to contain. Having him put some of that energy, enthusiasm and positivity into his book makes for a fascinating—and thought provoking—read.

—**Fraser Henderson**, co-founder, Propel Funeral Partners,  
founder, Millbank Advisory, former partner,  
Minter Ellison

*Start Before You're Ready* is a well written motivational book full of stories and ideas for those who want to succeed in life.

—**Graham (Skroo) Turner**, founder and CEO,  
Flight Centre

**START  
BEFORE  
YOU'RE  
READY**

A vertical strip of four grayscale images is positioned behind the text. The top image shows a man's face, the second shows a smiling man's face, the third shows a man's hands, and the bottom shows a man's hands. A large, light gray upward-pointing arrow is superimposed over the strip, pointing from the bottom image towards the top image.







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**MICK SPENCER**

**WILEY**

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# **FOREWORD BY HAP KLOPP**

## **FOUNDER OF THE NORTH FACE**

Throughout my life as an entrepreneur, adventurer, father, friend, leader, and philanthropist, I have repeatedly started my endeavours before I was ready. I have ventured into the unknown, taking The North Face from a dream of getting people further into the forests to what is globally known as the most popular adventure brand, grossing well over \$2.5B USD per annum. I've ventured into the unknown, I've employed many thousands of staff and many went on to run major outdoor companies of their own. And I had the good fortune to share all these adventures with two amazing children, three grandchildren and a loving, supportive wife.

I had a real purpose in my career—to create a 'triple bottom line business.' One committed equally to the goals of profits, environment and society. Central to my vision was to preserve and protect the wilderness that surrounds us. I knew that if people went deep into the wilderness, they'd see the world

in a really truly amazing way and understand the need for wilderness. As Eliot Porter once wrote, 'In Wilderness is the preservation of Earth.' I fervently believe that being a purpose-based business was the essential ingredient that allowed us to take The North Face from an idea for technical outdoor products to becoming a global fashion statement.

Through all my myriad of experiences, I learned there is no textbook for life. There is no one formula for success. You'll often find yourself in situations where you need to let intuition and gut feelings guide your direction. And, that's OK. Whether in the unknown mountain ranges of Patagonia, or the board room of New York, we as people grow when we're out of our comfort zone. And I believe that is where all the truly, valuable and disruptive ideas come from.

I met Mick a few years back. He reached out to me and I couldn't help but be drawn to his energy in creating something that I had always been passionate about—building something truly great. Because his vision encompassed using technology to disrupt the apparel industry which I knew so well it was especially intriguing. By the time we talked through his outline for offering customers a fantastic design delivery service, something that no big brand had yet been able to master, I was hooked.

I remember our first chat on Skype from his tiny attic office. I was energized by the OTG concept and its all-encompassing purpose, mission and execution. I did ask myself, how could a 21-year-old kid with no apparel background and only \$150 figure out this concept? But his enthusiasm, his attention to

detail and his lack of fear convinced me that he might just be one of those magical people who really could dent the universe, so I offered to contribute if he needed me. Over the years, I've mentored Mick, helped guide some grand, and difficult, decisions, and seen his journey. What a great pleasure it's been to see that growth in him as a person, and in OTG, which will be a major global brand that we'll all know and enjoy in the not too distant future.

When organisations get large, they slow. They stop innovating. They get too comfortable and they lose their nimbleness. They become risk averse and atrophy. They are afraid of failure but learn that the biggest failure of all is doing nothing. *Start Before You're Ready* is the ultimate ethos for life, and a reminder to kick ourselves in the backside and get going—because one can't wait until things are perfect; they rarely ever are. With the accelerating pace of society there is no longer time for perfect information. Mick's ethos, outlined in this book, provides the courage to take risks and gives a road map to help us as we throw ourselves into situations head first and learn on the go.

Despite incredible adversity, Mick has prospered. He's built a highly scaleable company, a stellar team, and an incredible consumer product. He didn't graduate with multiple degrees. He was not an expert in his field. Nor did he have the capital that most businesses do. Mick and his team have succeeded against all odds. They've started before they were ready, connecting vision and purpose. As you will read, Mick learned and learned well—by doing. The real way to live life.

With Mick's debut book, you will understand how to start right now, no matter what the odds. He shows how to get your mind and purpose aligned. How to paint the picture on where you want to be and how to get there. As Mick and I both believe: we can all be much more than we are today. Life is about adventuring beyond the unknown, and starting before you're truly ready.

**Hap Klopp**

Founder and 20-Year CEO, THE NORTH FACE

Author of *Almost—12 electric years chasing a  
Silicon Valley dream*

Hult University Lecturer on Entrepreneurship  
and Innovation



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My partner Alicia—You are my waking inspiration every single day of our lives. You're my constant inspiration and I cannot wait for our future. The times we've shared are just the start of the journey ahead.

My father Greg, for telling me to never let fear stand in the way of anything and to give life my best shot.

My mother Cathy, for supporting every single step and motion of my life to date.

My brother Nathan, who has inspired me daily to give life my all, no matter what the circumstance. You've guided the light for me on too many occasions.

My sister Alicia, who has inspired me, showed me what is possible and reminds me why family is so important.

My mentors over the years—Chris, Hap, Chris & Bob, Derek, Paul, Baxby, Rainbow, Patrick and all those in between—you have been my real-life university and I wouldn't be here without your help in understanding the journey and what it all means.

My staff and suppliers, past and present; you know who you are. Thank you. For backing me, for every day guiding my vision of a different breed of business, and for putting up with my antics, obsession and curiosity.

Finally, I'd like to thank the naysayers, the teachers and the bullies for their constant reinforcement that I was not worthy of success because I was so different! You have been my underlying motivation to succeed.



# INTRODUCTION

In November 2015 I was selected to pitch on *Shark Tank* Australia, a TV show millions of Australians watch. On the show, business owners pitch to five multimillionaires (the ‘sharks’), hoping to impress them enough that they will invest their own money into the person’s business.

Janine Allis (founder of the \$400 million company Boost Juice) was mentoring me at the time, and recommended I apply. When they called to say they wanted me to audition I was thrilled, but unsure. How much time would this take? I was in the middle of a crushing workload closing our first investors into the company and travelling to China to see our suppliers, while still doing all my other tasks as CEO. But I knew I had to give it a shot.

I arrived at the audition feeling nervous. I wasn’t used to the awkward, ‘remember your pitch, word for word, in two minutes’-style presentations. I dug deep and made it happen, nailing my memorised pitch. Two weeks later they called to say they wanted me to come and pitch to the sharks on the show!

I worked long hours refining my pitch so it would have the desired impact. The morning of filming I had to arrive in Sydney at 4.30 to prepare the set. I was lucky to have Kris, one of my original teammates at ONTHEGO®, help me set up before the sharks arrived. Then I had to get makeup done and iron my clothes while reviewing my pitch again and again. It was nerve-racking.

‘Mick Spencer—OTG—you have five minutes.’

My heart was beating at 150 beats per minute! ‘Dig deep, Mick. Let’s do this!’ I thought to myself. The five minutes ticked by and then I was walking down the tunnel, greeted by the big timber doors and oriental carpet at the end. I walked through, and there were the five lurking sharks.

This is the pitch I gave to the sharks on 6 May 2016.

Hi sharks. My name is Mick Spencer and I’m the founder and managing director of ONTHEGO sports.

Four years ago a sports event came to me with a big problem. They had presold 400 cycling jerseys and needed them in under four weeks. The problem was that a staff member had left without ordering the jerseys, so they were stuck. No-one in the world could manufacture them in less than 10 weeks. I promised them I’d do it, and I found a way. And when I did, I uncovered an even bigger problem: thousands of retailers, teams and schools all had the same problem. There’s a growing need for custom-made sportswear delivered fast, but it was always a challenging process.

So with \$150 to my name, in 2012 I backed myself and founded ONTHEGO to combine the things I was passionate about: building a global sports brand and giving back to those in need through our one4one initiative.

Today we allow customers globally to design their own sportswear beyond what they ever thought was possible. Clients such as Ironman, David Jones, GoPro and over 3500 organisations use ONTHEGO. Just in the last year, we shipped over 25000 products across 10 countries.

We have the likes of Richard Branson, Ironman athletes, professional sports teams and clubs use ONTHEGO. We're also now extremely proud to have a line exclusively stocked in David Jones retailers in collaboration with TV celebrity Jason Dundas.

Further to our online customisation and e-commerce, we've now developed the revolutionary OTG customised station: an innovative kiosk that will allow customers to go into a store, design their own product, while still maintaining a physical experience. A multichannel retailer that doesn't hold stock.

We created unique technology and a vertical supply chain that encompasses everything from start to finish. So customers can have a seamless design experience—anywhere and from any device.

With growth of over 80 per cent this year we expect to exceed sales of \$1.5 million.

With these growth rates and reorders, contracts and a big pipeline, we expect to be doing over \$20 million in sales in 2020.

To demonstrate how the brand works, just two weeks ago, when I discovered I'd be on your show, I jumped on our website and designed each and every one of you a custom product based on your product. So I'll let you come up and have a look...

There was silence, making my heart lurch. Then the sharks launched into questions, followed by negotiations. I walked out with a \$600 000 investment! I'd done it! I'd negotiated the biggest deal of the season on *Shark Tank*! But would it be what I thought?

## TAKE A MOMENT

Throughout the book you'll notice plenty of pages like this that ask you to stop, take a moment and write some things down.

But if you're not the type who writes in books, you can download the PDFs for all of these at:



**[onthegosports.com.au/book](http://onthegosports.com.au/book)**

# PART I MY STORY



**IF YOU CAN  
FALL IN LOVE WITH  
THE THRILL OF NERVES**

**IF YOU CAN FALL IN  
LOVE WITH BEING  
OUTSIDE OF YOUR  
COMFORT ZONE**

**YOU CAN DO  
ANYTHING**





## CHAPTER 1

# *CONQUERING CHALLENGES FROM AN EARLY AGE*

I was born with significant short-sightedness. I couldn't see anything for the first six months of my life, though it wasn't until several instances of bumping into walls, corners and terracotta pots that my parents realised something was definitely not right. I was diagnosed with short-sighted eyesight at -17, two points away from being completely blind.

I needed coke-bottle-thick glasses, and to bullies at school I was an easy target. When I was in Grade 3 my family moved from the suburbs to the inner city of Canberra, which meant I had to change schools. I was short and fat as a kid, nervously pushing my thick glasses up to keep them on my nose. I quickly became 'four eyes fatty'. I felt alone and scared, rejected by society and rejected by myself. I only had one friend, Tom, who knew me from my previous school. He was a cool kid and his acceptance of me helped. However, the kids in the years above still threw things at me as I walked home. And at lunchtime they always chose me to knock over on the oval; one would kneel down behind me and another would shove

me so I would trip backwards and fall over his friend. I was the laughing-stock. I tried to act like it was funny and like it didn't get to me.

From early on I realised that school wasn't a place where I would succeed. My -17 eyesight meant I struggled to see the board, and I had problems concentrating and difficulty reading. Dyslexia and a big dose of ADHD provided a difficult learning curve.

What I did learn from school was to distrust details, and the system: the educational system, the lessons, the standardisation, even some of my teachers. I felt boxed in, asked to conform to something I knew I could never live up to. School was teaching me to see the world from inside a box—a box that everything had to fit in. But the real world isn't like that. Everybody is an individual. Everyone has interests and intellect and motivations, yet we're taught by a system that tries to jam us into its box.

Come high school I had to catch the public bus, and the public school kids spat on me and threw rubbish at me. Every day I would cop it, occasionally bursting into tears once I was home. I tried a lot of things, like keeping to myself and trying to blend in, but I didn't have much luck. My confidence was destroyed, and it tore up my parents. Dad always said: 'Be the bigger man; it's all part of the journey. Remember, Mick: every dog has its day'. However, it reached a point that made Dad change tack. 'It's time you turned around and insulted them back. Let them know they can't go on saying and doing these things.' I agreed. I was so fed up. The next time they picked on me I fired a highly insulting remark at the biggest bully on the bus, and he never had a go at me again. However, my confidence was still totally knocked.