

PROFIT

YOUR GUIDE TO BUSINESS SUCCESS

ASK THE LEGENDS



JOHN STANTON

FOUNDER AND CEO
RUNNING ROOM CANADA INC., EDMONTON

The former couch-potato grocery exec turned running magnate talks to PROFIT editor Ian Portsmouth about staff engagement, what works in retail and the importance of passion in entrepreneurship

What was your original goal in opening the Running Room?

I'd gone from being a 238-pound smoker to becoming a runner. I thought I could show other people how to run, too, and also sell shoes and T-shirts. So, I opened a store. It was going to be a hobby business, since I was still working in the grocery business at the time. Originally, we were open only on Thursday nights, Friday nights and Saturdays. That lasted a couple of weeks; customers said, "That's not going to work."

So, I hired a couple of runners who were between jobs at the time, a husband and wife, and they ran the business. We had great success in Edmonton, and then in Calgary, and then in Vancouver—and the rest is history.

Early on, were you a hands-on manager?

I started as a hands-off manager, with the right people in place. I was still working in the grocery industry for a little while, until the Running Room started to take off. Setting it up that way taught me that part of growing anything is being a good manager. You have to find and engage the right people. I think that, early on, we did that.

What do you think makes you such a good pitchman for the Running Room?

I love what I'm doing. My job is to promote running—period. I enjoy talking about who I am and what I do. I think I can relate to the guy who's out there trying to get back into exercise, or the mom whose kids have grown up and finds herself with some time to get in shape. And I'm not the only pitchman; a lot of our pitchmen are successful

Continued on page 73