

PEOPLE TO KNOW | PLACES TO GO | THINGS TO SEE AND DO

UP FRONT

Q&A

In 1989, **Oded Gur-Arie** introduced American fast food to Israel as the founder of GA Pizza, which owned the Israeli franchising rights for Domino's. Now he's using his business acumen to prepare Adrian College students for success as he heads up the college's new Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies.

Why an institute for entrepreneurship?

The traditional business education model is [that] students go to college and take business courses and they study accounting and they study marketing and finance and so on. And then they join some large corporation as a career path. They go to work for Chrysler or IBM or Intel, and spend the next 20 years or whatever at some large corporation. In the last few years, that model has been changing. Going to work for a large corporation is not necessarily a viable career path for many people these days, with layoffs and the economy and so on. So a lot more people are looking at other options. And other options include starting your own business, or going to work for a family business, or joining a startup.

Now, even if you join a startup, you need to think like an entrepreneur. It's not like a corporate-type environment. It's creative, it requires the kind of skills and tools that will make an entrepreneur successful. The environment has changed. We need to provide the students with a new set of skills that have become more and more important.

You cannot teach someone to be an entrepreneur. It's impossible. But ... you can prepare them for the pitfalls, the issues, the environment in which they'll need to operate. ►

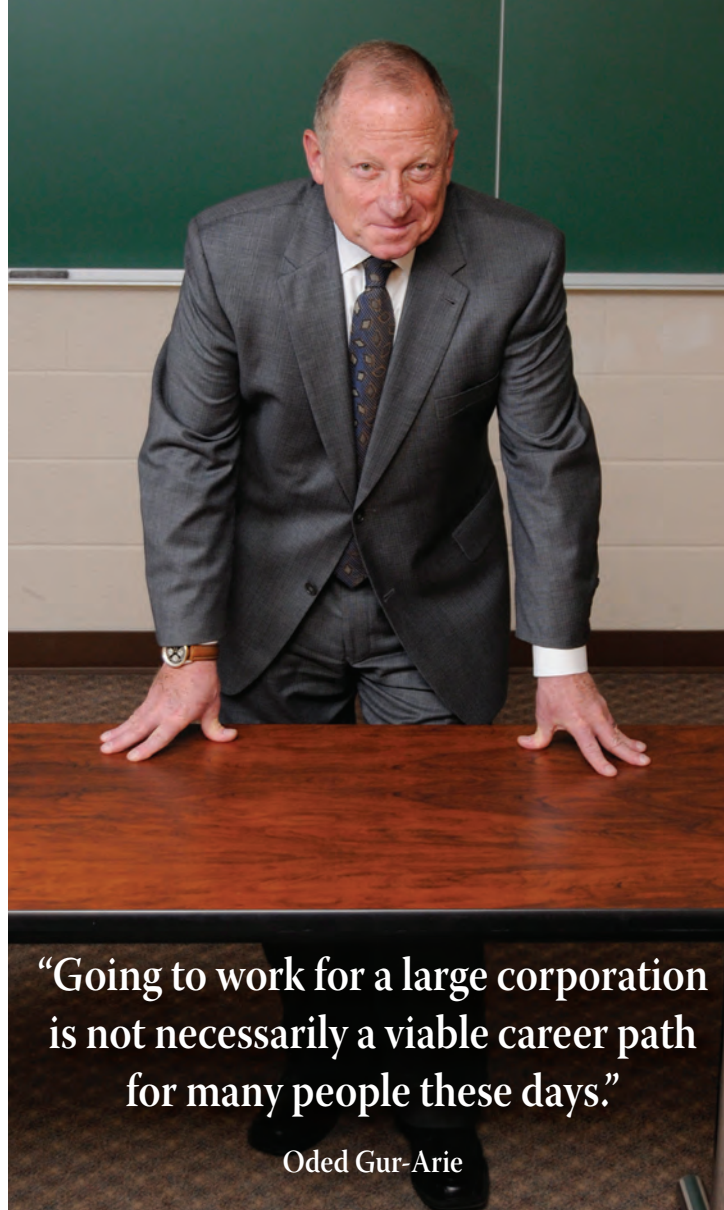
What's the most challenging task you've faced in your career?

When you're an entrepreneur and you start a business, you don't necessarily realize that you're taking on huge responsibilities beyond the responsibilities just for yourself. So you put your own capital at risk, your reputation and career, but then ... people start working for you, and you've got to come up with the payroll every two weeks. And when you launch, you don't really internalize the responsibility that that is. But the first time when it's like Wednesday, and you know that Friday is payroll and you don't have enough money, and you start to scramble — that's when a true entrepreneur realizes for the first time what it really entails to be an entrepreneur.

Of course every entrepreneur hopes for success, but have you ever had a project end in failure?

Of course. Of course. I told you about the pizza business — in Israel, it was a huge success. Huge success. Far beyond what we were expecting. In Belgium ... it was a failure.

We had students on scooters delivering pizza, and because of some weird labor laws in Belgium, those employees of ours were classified as hotel/restaurant employees and that determined a certain pay scale that we had to pay them. We were a big national chain ... we couldn't do any hanky-panky and so on. We had to play by the rules, and by the book. Our competitors were mostly mom-and-pop kind of pizza places and they just paid their delivery people under the table and consequently they had like a 40 percent cost advantage over us. There was nothing we could do to compete with that.



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Oded Gur-Arie

LAD STRAYER/LENAWEE MAGAZINE

What did you learn from that experience?

Well, one thing you learn as entrepreneurs [is] you get into a business where you think you've done your homework and you have a model that works ... and then you go into a new environment and there's something that — you had no idea.

Most people in business, and this is a key sentence, do not know what it is they do not know. This is critical: You don't know what it is you don't know. And when you're in business, there's always going to be something there, some hurdle. So you need to be able to recognize it, identify it, understand it and then react.

If you could leave your students with just one lesson about business and entrepreneurship, what would it be?

Be creative. Creativity is the most important part of being an entrepreneur. Creativity not necessarily in the artistic sense, but you've got to think, you've got to look at things in a creative way, identify angles that others don't see.

Be creative in your critical analysis; be creative in your approach to putting financing together. The key at the end of the day is you've got to be creative in every facet of the business.

Is there anything we haven't asked about that you'd like to cover?

The institute's long-term objective here is not just to work with students but also to help local businesses, and hopefully get our students prepared so maybe they'll stay in the community and start businesses and the propensity for job creation.

We can and we would like to help local businesses and local institutions fare better, create jobs and be successful. ... It would be good for everyone. It would be an opportunity for our students to get involved and work with local businesses and try to help them develop a business plan, or a marketing plan, or an advertising campaign, or help them with marketing materials, brochures, whatever. So it would be a good experience, and it would be great for local businesses to have some trained resources to bring in enthusiasm and creativity and try to help them.

— Erik Gable

Paratrooper, pilot, businessman, movie star: 4 things to know about Oded Gur-Arie

He's a licensed pilot. Gur-Arie says he's always had a passion for flying. As a paratrooper in the Israeli Defense Forces, he remembers being envious of the pilots who would drop him off and then get to go home. Now he's a pilot himself, with a twin-engine Beechcraft that he flies on business trips and to the family cottage in northern Michigan.

He's been in a movie. Gur-Arie's father worked for the Mossad, Israel's intelligence service, and Gur-Arie himself appears in a 2007 film about his father's life titled "The Champagne Spy." He describes the film's premise this way: "What if James Bond had a family?" The movie will be shown at 8 p.m. May 5 at the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor, and Gur-Arie will be on hand to answer questions.

A chance connection led him to Adrian. One of Gur-Arie's consulting clients was Kevin O'Mara, an Adrian College graduate who owns chemical labs in Ferndale and a restaurant in Berkley. After inviting Gur-Arie to visit the college with him, O'Mara commented that he'd be the perfect person to lead the entrepreneurship program that college president Jeffrey Docking was developing.

He's a father of four. Gur-Arie lives in Ann Arbor with his wife, Cynthia. Three of their children live at home; the eldest is serving in the Israeli Defense Forces.