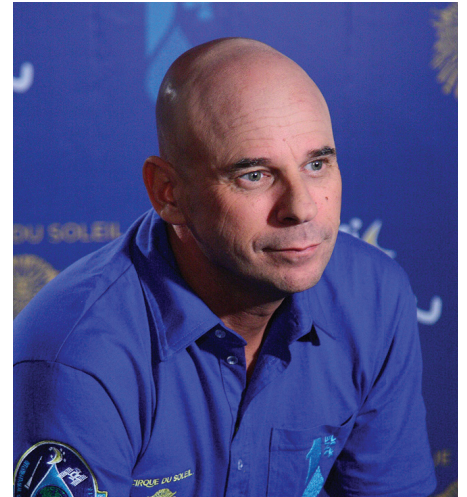


Busker to billionaire



Of all the-rags-to-riches stories ever told, one of the most inspiring is that of busker-turned-billionaire, Guy Laliberté. As the founder of Cirque du Soleil, the world's largest privately held entertainment company, his shows have touched the hearts of more than 100 million people worldwide.



But it all started from very humble beginnings and demonstrates how passion and a drive to succeed can lead to amazing things!

At the age of 18, Guy left his native Canada to hitchhike across Europe as a busker. He spent his first night sleeping on a bench in London's Hyde Park, embracing his backpack, two precious accordions and a harmonica, and less than \$1,000 in his pocket.

He played music, sang and juggled on the street to earn a dollar, before joining a performance troupe of street performers that included acrobats, fire breathers, sword-swallowers and stilt walkers.

Although he didn't become rich with money, he became rich with experience, picking up skills that he would later put to good use.

// It was just an adventure, and I was planning to go back to school and have a regular life. //

He tried a regular life.

After the challenges of living a hand-to-mouth existence in Europe, Guy returned to Canada and in his first week accepted a full time job at a hydro-electric power plant in Quebec.

Three days into his new job, the plant workers went on strike and Guy was fired. He was now unemployed and broke.

It was at that point that Guy made the decision to never work a normal job again and instead devote himself 100 per cent to his undying passion for performance art.

Drawing on his experiences, he joined a street performance group where he met his future business partner, Gilles Ste-Croix.

They organised a summer performing arts fair called Le Fete Foraine ('The Carnival') gaining moderate success over the next few summers.

// The new Cirque du Soleil (meaning 'Circus of the Sun') brought the concept of street performing into a circus show environment. //

Birth of Cirque du Soleil

In 1983, the provincial government of Quebec offered a \$1.5 million arts grant to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Jacques Cartier's discovery of Canada. In order to impress the government and win the grant, Guy's partner Gilles Ste-Croix walked 56 miles ON STILTS!

The stunt worked and the partners used the \$1.5 million to create and launch 'Le Grand Tour du Cirque du Soleil'.

The new Cirque du Soleil (meaning 'Circus of the Sun') brought the concept

of street performing into a circus show environment, and, like many new businesses, it had its fair share of challenges.

"We had every problem starting a big top you could possibly have. The tent fell down on the first day. We had problems getting people into the shows. It was only with the courage and arrogance of youth that we survived."

But survive it did, and although the initial event only returned a modest profit of \$40,000, Guy was already planning bigger things.

No risk, no reward

For the next few years, Cirque du Soleil operated as a six-month a year travelling acrobatic circus in Canada.

In 1987, Guy put everything on the line when he took his entire circus to the Los Angeles Arts Festival, a make or break bid to establish Cirque du Soleil.

He spent every penny both he and the company had to perform in California for several months.

Years later, Guy admitted that had the show been unsuccessful, he would not have had enough money to take his troupe back to Canada.

Fortunately the show was a smash hit and led to \$2 million worth of future contracts.

In 1992 Guy took Cirque du Soleil to a new level when he struck a deal with casino mogul, Steve Wynn, to bring the show to the entertainment mecca of Las Vegas. A key condition was that the deal was not exclusive and Cirque du Soleil could establish productions in other venues and other cities.

The business never looked back

Cirque du Soleil started with 73 people and now has over 5,000 employees including over 1,300 performing artists. It runs 20 different productions around the world in a combination of permanent performance venues and travelling shows that have visited over 300 cities across six continents.

Driven by the vision and creative genius of Guy Laliberté, Cirque du Soleil has continually evolved, staying fresh and maintaining its status as the premier creative acrobatic circus experience.

The combination of music, theatre, dazzling costumes and high-flying acrobatics creates enormous spectacles of human movement and sound, allowing Cirque de Soleil to continually break new ground.

// Our biggest goal is to continue to force ourselves to always start our creative work on a white page and not take advantage of past successes and challenging ourselves. //

"We're not afraid of risking what was our success yesterday in order to explore some new field. We're adventurous. We like the challenge of unknown territory and unknown artistic fields. That's what stimulates us."

Living life to the fullest

Guy Laliberté is testament to someone who enjoys life and lives it to the fullest.

In 2007, he finished fourth in the World Poker Tour, taking home \$700,000 in winnings.

In the same year he launched the One Drop Foundation, a charity that aims to provide clean drinking water to some of the world's poorest people. Guy has donated \$100 million of his personal wealth to the cause.

In 2009, he became Canada's first 'space tourist' when he joined a Russian mission to the International Space Station.

The story of Guy Laliberté is truly awe-inspiring.

Guy is a man who had the courage to walk away from an everyday career and follow his passion, reach for the stars and by going into space, even making it there!

He is a true example of how daring to dream big and taking a risk can pay off with massive rewards.