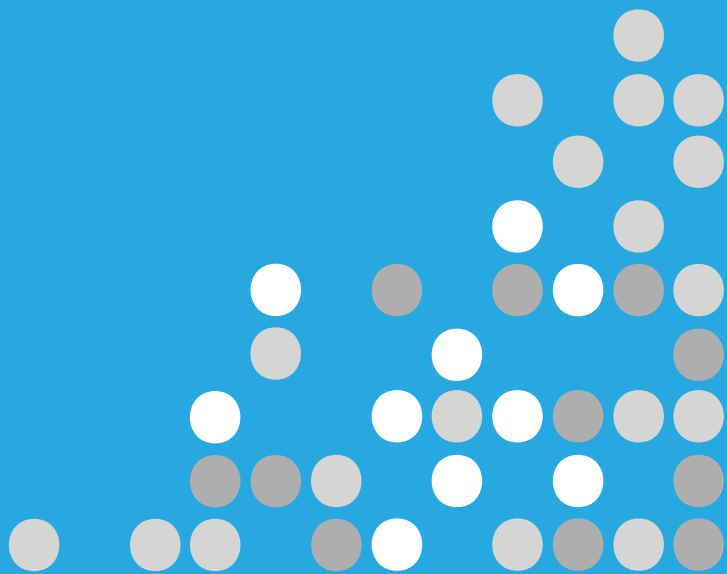


Unlocking the Challenger Within





Challenger brands disrupt categories by better delighting target consumers in ways category incumbents can't. That's why challengers frequently account for the lion's share of innovation and growth in their respective categories. But while the challenger moniker is usually reserved for the "little guys," at Seurat, we believe ANY company can behave like a challenger.

Tillamook County Creamery Association (TCCA), a 114-year-old dairy co-op in Tillamook County, Oregon, has fostered its own challenger mentality and unlocked a way to make its premium, accessible cultured dairy products a must choice among their food-engaged consumer community. As a result, the company has become one of the fastest growing, billion-dollar brands in the consumer products industry — and best kept secrets. We spoke with Patrick Criteser, president & CEO of TCCA, about what it means to be a challenger in the highly competitive dairy industry and how he has infused a challenger mindset into the co-op he affectionately refers to as a "100-year-old startup."

Over the course of our interview, it became clear that Patrick had a firm grip on four key principles to *Unlock The Challenger Within*.



Principle #1: Instill the Challenger Mindset

Acting like a challenger means refusing to accept existing constraints.

“ We have done a great job at adopting a ‘can if’ approach. So often we run into challenges with many barriers in our way— whether that be cost barriers, supply chain barriers or resource barriers. And I don't want the teams to say it's not possible, because we know almost nothing is truly impossible. I challenge teams to move beyond ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and instead have the mindset of: We can accomplish this if we take this approach or if this is able to happen. This forces us to examine the risks and at least have the conversations about what's possible. Embedding this “can if” mindset into our culture has been immensely helpful. It also connects to our general mentality as a ‘100-year-old startup’ and encourages teams to be nimble and scrappy even as we experience tremendous growth.”

Principle #2: Commit to being Consumer-First

Everything Tillamook does starts with the core consumer.

“ What has been so powerful for us has been our ability to be very clear on where we fit in the category and understanding our core consumer. First, we defined our consumer, the ‘Food-thusiast,’ who is someone interested in the quality of the food, the quality of the ingredients and is just generally more engaged as they purchase and use groceries. We knew this consumer definition wouldn't fit everyone but were confident enough to build from that point. Then, we consistently positioned all our offerings as everyday premium, meaning we provide top-quality dairy products that are accessible and affordable enough for daily enjoyment. The commitment to this consumer and positioning showed us the way to create an accessible dairy brand that our fans shop for every time they visit the grocery store.”



Principle #3: Challenge Category Convention

Going against the grain can be risky. Patrick details how TCCA deliberately challenged conventional dairy marketing to break through.

“Challenging convention was an important strategy for us as we looked to reset our brand and the products we marketed. In dairy categories, it would be very common for consumers to see brands market dairy products with images of cows on fields and daisies and all this traditional stuff. We wanted to reset expectations and challenge the conventions of dairy. So, we launched our “Dairy Done Right” campaign in 2014 which had black backgrounds, chainsaws cutting ice cream cartons, and pitchforks coming through cheese. We wanted to be loud enough to grab attention and act in a way that was unexpected for the dairy industry. We aimed to make dairy more culturally relevant, exciting, and interesting. Building off that experience, we continue to ask the question today: Within our brand building, our marketing, our consumer communications, how do we signal there is something different here that is challenging the category?”

Principle #4: Infuse Challengers in Corporate Culture

The most successful organizations strengthen their culture with a constant willingness to continue to grow and learn. Patrick embraces this mentality, from the execution of the company today, to the people they look to hire tomorrow.

“One thing we do is host a ‘Challenger Series’ where I interview folks that I believe are currently challenging convention in their respective fields. We tend to feature generally smaller companies, because that’s where you find that challenger mindset and that entrepreneurial orientation. I interview these people in front of the company and we draw out inspiration that we can leverage internally. So, in that way I try to constantly perpetuate the idea that the inspiration for challenging convention in our space can come from unexpected areas. We have interviewed deputy police chiefs on the concept of community service or different leaders in education on how their space is continuing to transform and you would be shocked just how helpful some of those conversations have been.



Criteser with guest speaker at the Tillamook Challenger Series

This theme of expanding our horizons also applies to our hiring practices. Our values are the ultimate cue for hiring. We also think of ‘culture add’ rather than just ‘culture fit.’ We’re not just looking for someone to show up and fit right in and be like everyone else. We want to bring people in who possess a unique set of experiences, background and diversity of thinking that injects life into our organization. It’s all about creating an environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging and is encouraged to contribute authentically and to their fullest potential. I actually gravitate towards hiring individuals with less conventional track records but a proven record of success in their organization that I think we could leverage as they uniquely contribute with their own voice rather than just conform.”

Summary

Unlocking your own challenger within involves four deliberate strategic choices:

- **Instill the Challenger Mindset**
- **Challenge Category Convention**
- **Commit to being Consumer-First**
- **Infuse Challengers in Corporate Culture**

Patrick’s application of these principles has enabled the co-op’s tremendous success and ensures it is positioned to continue challenging for many years to come.

Are you looking to adopt a Challenger Mentality within your organization? We welcome conversation at info@seuratgroup.com