

INTRODUCTION Thank you, John.

Hi everyone, I'm Joe D'Onofrio and I've witnessed firsthand the growth of My Own Meals since its beginning. This is my first R&DA meeting with many more to come!

Now if there are any of you in the audience who don't already know Mary Anne Jackson, I would be shocked since she hasn't been able to walk down the halls at R&DA without stopping to say hi to every single person!

Many of you refer to her as MOM and she is the MOM of My Own Meals. Today, we'll explore some little-known stories and lessons from how she built her business around religious shelf stable meals.

And with that, I'd like to welcome to the podium, your post-shrimp and grits, light-lunch speaker, Mary Anne Jackson.

Thank you, Joe



FIRST to get into the right spirit, I ask you: **Everyone please smile** – just take a moment – no matter how silly it seems. Thank you.

I'd like to share with you some stories about the pivots we made over the years:

- starting with children's meals,
- then pivoting to kosher & halal,
- institutions, military and
- international.
- You at R&DA are all a part of it.
- I hope some make you laugh and others surprise you!



A. Children's Meals

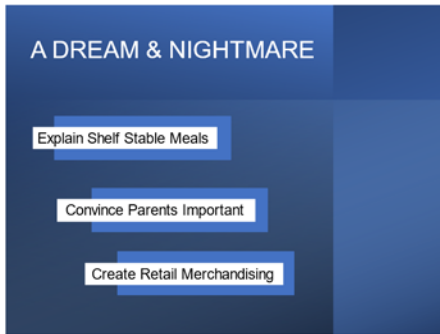
1. Now, I'm going to take you back to 1986, a time when **fax machines** were considered high tech! Before some of you were even born.

- Let's say **You** find yourself looking for a job after your company gets bought out.



Forget corporate America, you're going to start your own line

- of shelf stable, **healthy** meals
- for children ages 2-10
- all packaged in plastic retort pouches



2. **PICTURE THIS:** This is a business that's **both** a marketer's dream and a nightmare combined.

3. You have to:

- a. EXPLAIN to everyone that shelf stable meals are good and safe – basically create a product category
- b. CONVINCED parents about why healthy children's meals are important
- c. And WORK with stores to merchandise the new shelf stable meals
 - i. because there is no category at retail yet.



5. You plunge into PR to directly explain to consumers the importance of healthy meals and what retort pouches are all about.

6. Retailers struggle with the new category.

a. Where to put it,

b. what to keep,

c. what to delete.

7. Retailers question if they should even keep it at all.

a. For example, one buyer said he was going to discontinue your line ... and maybe the entire category.

b. He struggled with how to merchandize it successfully.

c. but with **that high tech fax machine** at hand:

i. you fax him all day long to try to change his mind – one fax after another

- ii. to the fax machine you know is next to his desk.
- iii. until he **finally** calls you and agrees 3 of your items could stay.
- iv. You hope he keeps other items!
- v. If your meals are the only ones on the shelf, it will fail. You can't be alone.



8. How about a shoutout to Hollywood for producing a movie called “Baby Boom”.

- a. It helps parents see that **healthy IS** important for their children.

9. Next you convince SoPakCo that this is a good line for them to produce for you.

10. You have slotting allowances, couponing, promotions, advertising, all marketing booked for a national rollout until....

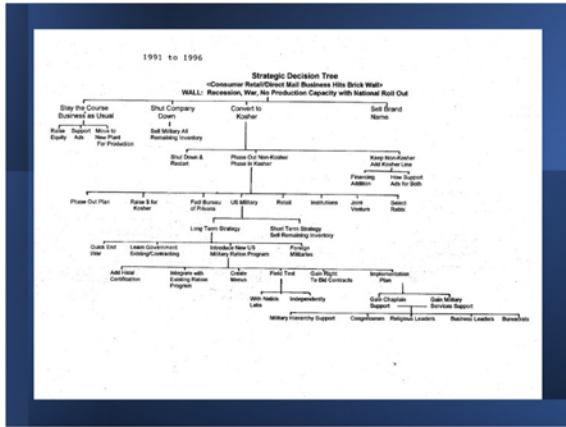
11. **BOOM**, the first Gulf War hits in 1990 and the Military takes all production capacity ... for who knows how long.

- DLA even calls you to see if any of your meals could be used for the surging demand.
- No, they couldn't because they were in plastic pouches.
- In the meantime, you cancel as much marketing and advertising as you can to slowdown sales.

12. But then another **OPPORTUNITY arrives** in the form of another DLA call

- a. This time they ask you to supply kosher meals.
- b. The MRE producers were busy making standard MREs, so they couldn't do it.

- What the heck, why not? If you can't beat them, then join them, right?



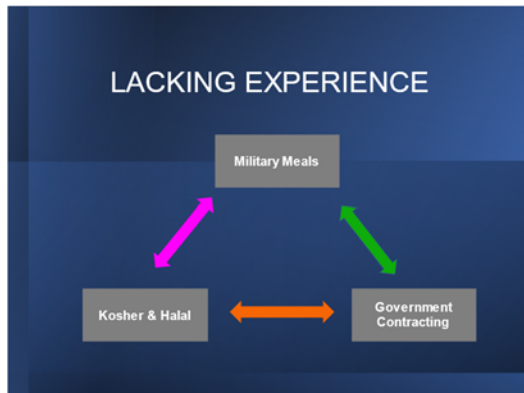
- So, it's back to the strategy board.
- You plan and begin to **PIVOT** the entire business.
- But when the war ends quickly in 1991, DLA says "Oh never mind".
- But you are already moving down that path to do kosher.
- So, you develop and pack meals in **trays** for the commercial market, still seeking the military business.
- Together with SoPakCo, you are both learning how to produce kosher meals.
- Someday to be also be in MRE pouches.

- Fast forward ... you eventually move on to Truitt and produced there for the next 25 years.
 - making both commercial and military meals, while meeting all surges in military demand.

Sounds easy, huh?

WOAH!! It was not that easy and certainly not that flawless.

B. Let's look at that first Pivot to Religious Meals



B1. To start with, when DLA called about kosher, YOU lack experience in 3 key areas:

- (a) In Military meals,
- (b) In Government contracting, and
- (c) In both kosher and halal production.

B2. Now YOU might have done things differently, but this is what we did:



1. We worked with almost everyone in here to create the commercial kosher and halal MRE program
 - a. The chaplains agreed to help us field test them in Korea and Somalia.
 - b. This photo is from Somalia
2. We wanted to learn all we could about the military. So...
 - a. SoPakCo introduced us to R&DA which we joined in 1991.
 - b. I later became a board member and then its chairman.

3. We also joined AUSA (Assoc of the US Army)

4. To repeat, we wanted to learn everything MILITARY ---
to do it right.



1. We already had our own warehouse space in Chicago.

2. Then we added some Assembly.

3. To learn government contracting we bid on commodity contracts.

a. For a time, we were the biggest contractors to the VA for mustard and pasta.

B3. But it was learning about religious meal production that proved most interesting.

- First, I'm Catholic, not Jewish or Muslim.

- Plus, there was nothing to copy.
- This was all new territory!
- So, we got working.
- We had a lot to learn!



1. First we convinced the highly respected Rabbi Aaron Soloveichik and his son to certify our products.

- From them we learned kosher production and ingredient requirements.

2. Then, some unexpected help arrived.

- We attracted the attention of Kedem, an influential kosher company in New York.

1. They played an important role in our kosher education

2. Two managers from Kedem came to Chicago to see what we were doing.
3. They invited me back to New York and took me on an education tour throughout the City.
4. They wanted me to learn culture and life of a kosher consumer.
5. They wanted us to do it right.



6. I even stayed as a guest at their homes for a week, to learn about living in a kosher household
7. They wanted me to learn about taste preferences and dishes when developing meals.
8. Their wives did all the work cooking them!



3. Next We had to find kosher suppliers for all of our ingredients.

4. Let's pick an ingredient. How about kosher **chicken**?

a) That turned out to be bit more difficult than you might think.

b) Because **ALL** the kosher chicken processors collectively decided NOT to sell us any chicken.

c) They thought that would keep us out of the market!

d) We had to buy chicken from Israel at first, just to field test kosher formulas,

a. And to do focus group testing.

b. But for the military we still needed US-sourced chicken, of course.

e) **So, what would you do if faced with this challenge?**

f) Of being closed out from buying A KEY ingredient – in this case chicken?

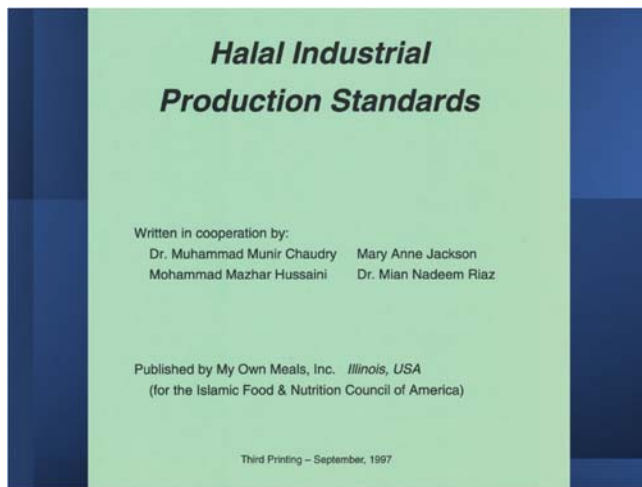
- **We** set up a kosher slaughtering, processing and cooking **contract** facility.
- We converted a non-kosher chicken processor to run kosher for us.
- **No one** expected us to do that!
- We brought in the best slaughtermen from New York.
- We invited all to come observe the processing.
- We proved that we were not going away.
- The chicken suppliers thought that they created a new competitor.
- **ONLY THEN**, did they agreed to sell to us.

- I have to admit the chicken we produced was the MOST expensive chicken we ever bought.



B4. Next, on to Halal. We added our J&M brand under a new separate halal division to the Company

1. The halal ingredient supplier network presented its own challenges.
2. **Most notably: There was NO halal supplier network!**
3. Companies believed if they did not use pork ingredients, everything they sold was halal.
4. They often mislabeled their products as halal, with no independent oversight – no certification.
5. Even meat labeled as halal was usually questionable.



B5. So, with no rules for suppliers to follow, we wrote the very **first** book on the subject entitled, **Halal Industrial Production Standards**.

1. We needed to educate **customers** about halal, and
2. Had to create a halal supplier network ... just so we could actually buy ingredients to produce meals.
3. They could not do this without knowing the rules and how to follow them, so we documented the rules.
4. The Department of Justice used the book to train its food service personnel.
5. And it has been distributed throughout the world.

1. **All the while**, for 5 years, we continued to work with

- the Pentagon,
- DLA,
- Natick Labs,
- ACES,
- the chaplaincy,
- R&DA,
- producers,
- suppliers,
- and the Jewish and Islamic communities.



- And more importantly, no matter what the military demands might be in the future, we continued to develop our retail and institutional businesses,
 - because as we all know, the military volume comes and goes,
 - but the main business should always stay.



B6. We continued to work with the military chaplains

- For the Jewish Chaplain's support for the program, we had to promise them that we would NEVER give up, even when it got difficult
- As they knew it would.

To help gain support from the non-Jewish chaplains, we have an interesting story.

1. One Jewish chaplain once told me of an upcoming meeting of all the chaplains.

a. He asked me, “Wouldn’t it be good if you just happened to be in Washington that day ...

b. staying at that same hotel where the meeting would be held, and ...

c. happened to bring meals and information to put on a table?”

d. A table he would conveniently leave outside the entrance to the meeting?

.....

e. Funny – I **was** in DC that day with our Islamic agency President

- f. And we did utilize both the table and all the available time before the meeting started to explain the religious rations to any chaplains who would listen.



2. Then in January 1996, the DLA wanted me to meet with a General at the Pentagon ...
 - a. to explain the religious MREs.
 - b. but there was a horrible snowstorm that January day
 - c. and flights were all cancelled.
 - d. We rescheduled for the next day, but again, the airport was still closed.

- e. When I called a second time I asked, “General, no one is in the office today, so what are you doing now? Couldn’t we just talk on the phone?”
- f. He thought for a moment.
- g. Then he agreed.
- h. Eventually, a solicitation came out and we were one of the bidders, and then became contractors.
- i. Over the years, we shipped 30 million religious MREs to the military. That’s over 2000 truckloads.



- Our ration components came from many of you in here today

- Those of you in the commercial industrial base.
 - We did not have traditional MRE delivery contracts or delivery periods.
 - We had to create our own component purchasing and delivery schedules with your support.
 - The likes of Truitt, Kellogg's, General Mills, Azar, Boghosian, Sysco and others.
 - You all worked with us to make this happen.
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- **WE DID HAVE ONE INTERESTING CRITIC over the years**: According to his prison guards, Saddam Hussein was not a fan of Froot Loops when they were in our MREs.



C. Then another pivot -- and on to the final frontier –

... oh yes, NASA has put them in space a few times, but not to that frontier. –



And not going to the top of Kilimanjaro, which one customer took with him on his climb.



No, we mean International.

With about 1.9 billion Muslims in world and a big market in Israel, why not?

I'm sure you've all had that thought.

C1. We too wanted to capture a chunk of that huge international market.



1. So, we created an international marketing alliance with Wornick in Texas, even creating a brochure – translated into five languages.
2. Wornick’s team headed to South America and I headed to the Middle East.



3. Yes, in the late 1990’s early 2000’s, I was a woman traveling alone, meeting our agents in the Middle East:

- Manning trade shows and
- Meeting with Arab military officers and government leaders.

C2. IDEX (International Defense Exhibition)

1) **IMAGINE:** In 1999, we were the first food company to set up a booth at IDEX in the AUSA Pavilion in Abu Dhabi – and continued doing this for many years.

2) **NOW, ENVISION this:**



- 3) Here, we are - a little American food company completely surrounded by huge military defense contractors displaying – weapons, tanks, bombs, aircraft ... and so on.
- a) While we are there, serving up food samples.
 - b) Journalists saw the dichotomy as interesting!!
 - i) We were so different – it made a good story for them.

C3. Strange as it may sound ...

- 1) There is at least ONE advantage being a **business woman** travelling in the Middle East.
- a) In the day we meet with men for business, and
 - b) in the evening we hang out with the women to talk to those who really get things done & to learn the culture!



c) That's a huge advantage over our male counterparts.

d) With this knowledge, we can do a much better job later when presenting our products to their husbands.



2) Okay, there are some down sides.

a) Like the night I arrived at the Riyadh airport,

- b) Fully dressed in my Abaya and documents in hand.
 - c) **Oh ... NO THAT IS NOT ME!**
 - d) I was put on house arrest.
 - e) Security said I lacked yet another one of the many documents required from my husband giving me permission to travel in Saudi Arabia, unescorted by him.
 - f) I was released the next day when the Embassy opened.
- 3) Another time, in Riyadh, the Saudi Defense Department agreed to let me enter the **government** building for a meeting, which was a big thing for women to be allowed to do.
- 4) Of course, there **was one** condition -
- a) The deal was that as soon as I entered the building, all men inside would have to leave.
 - b) So instead, we met the Generals and Colonels at a private home of the sheik representing us.

5) **Israel:** Let's not exclude the Israelis from this mix.

a) Years ago, they told all the MRE producers they wanted MREs from the US.

b) At first, the word was that they wanted 50,000 to test with at least another 1 million more to come.

c) As more and more intermediaries called us, the bigger the number became; 5 million finally resting at 12 million

d) In this process an IDF delegation came to Chicago to meet with us – one of many meetings we had with them.

e) My husband joined that meeting and later told me he would not have believed me if I summarized what happened at the meeting to him.

f) I specifically asked if they wanted **millions** or the 50,000.

g) Turns out, they admitted they really wanted less than 50,000 to test.

h) And then after the field tests, have an Israeli producer copy the best ones for future orders.

i) They explained that the big numbers were only to get the attention of the Americans to provide the test materials.



D. On the flip side of all this fun, international competition does come with some peril.

- It is **nothing** like competing with Kraft or Dial for Retail space and consumer voice as we did with the children's meals.
- It is **nothing** like competing with you here for MREs.

D1.

1) **At that first IDEX**, a Kuwaiti competitor running a trading company called Themar, stopped by our booth to purposely disrupt my local TV interview.

a) He learned we would win a Kuwaiti MRE contract under FMS, together with Truitt and Wornick.

b) A contract that **he** previously controlled with MREs sourced from an unsuspecting Star Foods.

2) Later, at a meeting in Kuwait...

a) The Undersecretary of Defense told me we would not actually be getting the contract.

b) I asked WHY NOT?? I **knew** our prices were really good and the product rated very highly vs competitors in all the field tests.

c) He explained it was because the Kuwaiti government was using our pricing, offer terms and structure to weed out some corruption in its own procurement processes.

D2.



3) A year later, that same competitor, Themar, was in a front-page Wall Street Journal article explaining how they were funding terrorist camps in Sudan.

4) Using that article together with some other documentation we accumulated over the years,

a) we put together a report of individuals and organizations we believed were involved ...

b) In a theory we had of how and where money might have flowed to fund terrorist activities.

D3.



5) We presented our report to the FBI.

a) And also shared it with my cousin who returned from his retirement to head the CIA's terrorism investigation after 9/11.

6) After this report, as you can probably understand, I stopped going to IDEX myself.

7) We started hiring ex-pats living in Abu Dhabi to man our booth for future IDEX events.

a) Years later, that Kuwaiti from Themar left me a message with someone from our IDEX booth team.

i) The Message??? “Tell Mary Anne that I am still around”



D4.

1. Then, 15 years later on **Saturday April 23, 2016**, when the Libyans took back Benghazi, they found our MREs there in an ISIS stronghold.
2. They wanted to know why we would sell to ISIS.

3. The Arabic, we have been told says “Special Forces Investigation”.
4. Via Twitter, email, Facebook, we got nasty messages – like accusing me of sleeping with ISIS, among others.
5. NOW, it became our turn for the FBI to come find **me**.
6. Three weeks later on **May 13, 2016** two men were standing at our office door:
 - a. One Very Special FBI Agent, and
 - b. One Agent from the Anti-Terrorism Task Force.
7. That FBI report we did those 15 years earlier on our funding flow theory ... the Special Agent had read it.
8. He told me that because of
 - a. that report and
 - b. because we also do kosher,
 - c. I was only under a low-level investigation as a terrorist threat.

- d. We did NOT sell to ISIS and never shipped to Libya.
- e. They were most likely MREs we sold to the military 4 years earlier.
- f. How they got there? We don't know.

E. CONCLUSION:

1. Over the years, we did export some MREs, **and still do.**
 - a. mostly for refugee relief through Saudi Arabia and Jordan,
 - b. the Red Crescent,
 - c. the International Organization of Migration,
 - d. UAE special forces
 - e. The Canadian military for the past 20 years.
2. We also sold our meals at retail in Oman, Qatar and Japan.

There are hundreds of articles, books and textbooks on our website PR page if you care to see them. And a thousand more stories.

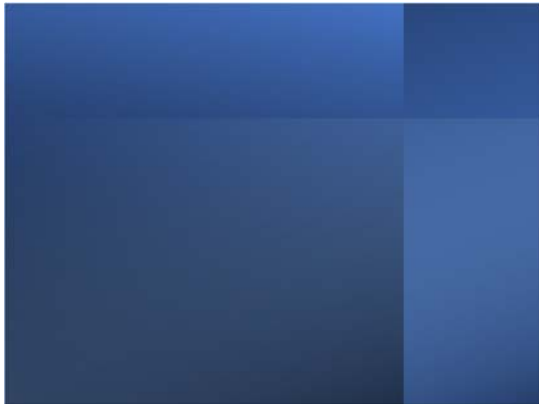


In recent years our focus has been on kosher & halal for institutions and consumers. We've spent decades

- growing and evolving with an ever-changing market
- creating new product categories
- standardizing religious meals
- and supporting multiple war efforts.

We are excited for what the future holds ...

- we look forward to growing in the decades to come
- because we have YOU, our R&DA partners with us for that journey.



END
