



24/7 EXECUTIVES

## When Woody Harrelson called, eco-entrepreneur answered

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*24/7 Executives is a series of stories on high-performing professionals who are as serious at play as they are in the conference room. See the other stories [here](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/management/24-7-executives/article24002629/) [http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/careers/management/24-7-executives/article24002629/].*

Jeff Golfman starts his day with a large glass of lemon water and a half-hour of yoga and meditation. The morning ritual is a must for the 47-year-old eco-entrepreneur.

“It helps ground me because life is crazy, and business is even more hectic with a million things going on,” Mr. Golfman says. “And if you’re not grounded, you’re going to be all over the place.”

Every day has the potential to be frenzied for the president and co-founder of Prairie Paper Inc., the manufacturer of [Step Forward Paper](http://stepforwardpaper.com/) [http://stepforwardpaper.com/].

Founded in the mid-1990s, Prairie Paper has evolved from an ambitious idea to make paper from agricultural wheat waste to a fast-growing success story whose product is now available on the shelves of retailers such as Staples.

Equally notable is one of its founders is Woody Harrelson – actor, marijuana and environmental activist, and venture capitalist.

“He’s been a godsend for us,” Mr. Golfman says, adding Mr. Harrelson cold-called him and co-founders Brent Smith and Clayton Manness, a former Manitoba cabinet minister in Gary Filmon’s Progressive Conservative government of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

“One of his people called and I think he said something like, “Woody would like to talk with you about saving the world,”” Mr. Golfman says.

At the time Mr. Golfman thought a friend “was pulling his leg,” but soon he and Mr. Smith were on an airplane to Boston and within days had signed a deal with Mr. Harrelson.

That was almost two decades ago – and since then it’s been long research and development journey with many challenges to bring a new, eco-friendly product successfully to market. Others had tried but failed to produce paper made from agricultural crop waste that was sustainable, economically viable and of high quality – considered the holy trinity of any successful green product.

Yet after its paper hit store shelves almost three years ago, Mr. Golfman and his partners have since realized even success breeds its own problems. Orders went up 400 per cent in 2014, which was great, he says. But the company was unprepared for a “perfect storm” of high demand, a plummeting Canadian dollar and rising manufacturing and shipping costs. While they’re able to meet demand in the United States, Prairie Paper ran out of stock in Canada and doesn’t expect to have more available until summer.

For Mr. Golfman, however, this is just one setback among many to overcome.

“Part of being successful in business is taking a look at where you’re at and adjusting,” he says, adding the company has since restructured to put the firm’s aforementioned problems behind it.

Setbacks are teachable moments for Mr. Golfman, a graduate of the Ivey Business School in London, Ont., and truly a quintessential entrepreneur. He embraces the challenge. Hustle is in his blood. His dad was an entrepreneur. So were his uncles. Both his grandfathers were, too, one of them right until the end.

“My grandfather lived to be 90 and was running his business literally until a couple of days before he died,” he says. “He was a mentor in business and life, too, exercising all the time: swimming, walking and lifting weights.”

The link between fitness and the stamina to withstand the rigours of running an upstart business is not lost on Mr. Golfman, who lives in Toronto. While some executives play as hard as they work, his lifestyle is a reflection of what he would like to achieve as an entrepreneur: a better tomorrow for the planet and himself.

Mahatma Gandhi famously said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world,” and Mr. Golfman lives by that credo – both at work and play.

“In business, I have spent my whole career working toward sustainability, but I’m also focused on sustainability in my personal life,” he says. “I see them as the same thing.”

Indeed most of his activities outside of work are aimed at personal and environmental sustainability.

A vegan eating mostly a raw diet for the past 15 years, Mr. Golfman runs, walks or bikes every afternoon in addition to his morning yoga ritual.

He also pays careful attention to what goes on inside his body. He gets tested twice a year for vitamin, heavy metal, cortisol (a hormone related to stress), testosterone and iron levels in his blood. He frequently visits his chiropractor, osteopath, massage therapist and naturopath.

Yet even he admits he has taken fitness and health too far. At one point he weighed about 138 pounds. “I felt like I was too light.”

To pack on a little more weight on his 5-foot-9 frame, he cut running from an hour a day to a half-hour. Now he weighs about 150. That’s still lean but he’s maintaining weight rather than shedding it.

Despite the svelte physique, Mr. Golfman says he consumes about 4,000 calories daily. “People look at me and say, ‘There’s no way,’ but my life is go, go, go,” he says. “It requires a lot of energy.”

And while he firmly believes veganism has a smaller environmental footprint than other diets, that’s not the primary reason he grazes on mostly raw vegetables, fruits and nuts.

“I know eating a vegan diet is friendlier for the planet, but for me, that’s not the motivator and I don’t want to pretend that it is,” he says, adding he began eating raw after being turned onto the idea by Mr. Harrelson.

“It’s about fuelling my lifestyle, getting the most out of my body.”

To feed the furnace, he does consume an incredible amount of food by most norms. His breakfast consists of drinking an entire blender jug filled with a fruit and veggie smoothie. He has been known to eat whole cucumbers for a snack, and lunch consists of a “big green juice” – also super-sized like the smoothie – made from spinach, cilantro, cucumber, celery and chard. That’s usually paired with a “big salad” – essentially the contents of a family-sized salad bowl.

The only time he strays from eating raw is at dinner when he might nosh on a large bowl of steamed veggies and quinoa.

Mr. Golfman, who is single but has a girlfriend, says the diet allows him to keep up his hectic pace – one that not only includes nurturing and navigating a growing business through its growing pains. He also runs a popular blog, [The \[http://the/\] Cool Vegetarian \[http://thecoolvegetarian.com/blog/\]](http://the/ Cool Vegetarian), which recently surpassed more than 3.5 million video views.

“I started that because a lot of people asked me questions about my lifestyle,” he says. “Part of the motivation was to challenge that definition of what is cool and to show that someone who eats vegetables is cool.”

Featuring videos about veganism from high-profile individuals such as Olympic athletes Paula Radcliffe and Mo Farah, bodybuilders and wellness gurus, the site is undergoing a redesign and more than anything represents “just a hobby” for Mr. Golfman.

Then there’s Green Kids, an environmentally themed theatre group for children he founded 25 years ago. That was about the same time he pioneered the blue box recycling program in Winnipeg, his hometown.

“The theory there is if we want to change the world, we have to start with the kids.”

After thousands of performances across North America to more than 1.5 million school-aged children, Mr. Golfman says he now meets adults who remember seeing Green Kids as children.

And it has had an effect. He says he often meets individuals working in politics, education and business who have told him that Green Kids had a positive impact.

For Mr. Golfman, all his endeavours underscore the idea that you should give more than you take.

“I really try to live by that principle,” he says. “That’s not to say that we don’t all take, but the key is to be on the positive side of that ledger.”

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