

Clipper Proves One's Weakness Can Become Your Greatest Strength

Clipper's Founder, Lina Hu, grew up in China. Her family was very poor. She remembers them trying to save money by not using electricity. Once grown, she bought a one way ticket to the America using most of her life savings. She tried to find work in a Chinese restaurant; however they wouldn't hire her because she didn't speak English. Using the last of her money, she took English classes and continued to search for a job. She couldn't even find employment as a dish washer.

As she continued to search for work she visited many restaurants. She saw items they used and remembered factories in China that produced them. She thought if they won't let me clean their pans, maybe I can supply them.

She moved in with a friend in California and started calling companies from their apartment. She asked potential customers if they needed her to supply cookware or uniforms. Ironically, her weakness was becoming her strength. She spoke Chinese, so importing products from China was easier for her than her US competitors. She called over 300 companies many times over two years before getting her first appointment. But this wasn't just any appointment; it was with the fast-food giant, Burger King Corporation.

Hu was very nervous when she entered this first meeting. Hers was one of many firms vying to supply the crew hats worn by their employees. The people at Burger King asked Hu to supply a sample. She borrowed money from friends and bought a ticket back to China so she could find a supplier and obtain a sample. Burger King liked the sample and awarded her the business.

She had no money to pay the factory for the first order so she convinced them to give her payment terms which was very uncommon. Once she shipped the first order to Burger King she paid the factory. Over twenty years later, Clipper still works with that factory and Burger King is one of Clipper's largest customers.

Clipper's next big customer was Darden Restaurants. That opportunity came in 1998 after a former Burger King employee began working at Darden and raved about Clipper's products. Denny's was soon to follow. With each new customer, Hu added new employees. They all squeezed into an office space she shared with a friend. In 2002, she moved to Clipper's current headquarters in Carson, California.

Most of Clipper's first customers came from word of mouth. Hu was also able to obtain meetings with several companies because of Clipper's minority woman owned certifications. She was able to work with organizations that would not utilize a company of Clipper's size if it wasn't for their diversity initiatives.

Today Clipper has over 50 employees and two locations and is recognized as a leading global distributor and manufacturer of uniforms and restaurant supplies for national and global chains, including Burger King, Pizza Hut, Dennys, Winn Dixie, Darden Restaurants, among others. Clipper specializes in bringing its customers creative solutions, high quality products and exceptional value.