



FROM THE CITY TO THE SHARK TANK

Hear Entrepreneur Daymond John's Best Pitch

By Matt Ottinger

Widely known as a fashion pioneer who launched the streetwear company FUBU, Daymond John is also a branding guru and is familiar to millions as an investor on ABC's hit show, *Shark Tank*. He has starred on all 16 seasons on the acclaimed series and made the most famous and successful deal in the program's history with Bombas socks – an endeavor that combines an affinity for producing high-quality clothing with a passion for using its profits to help those in need.

John is slated as the Indiana Chamber of Commerce's 36th Annual Awards Dinner keynote speaker on November 5 at the JW Marriott Indianapolis. *BizVoice*® asked the entrepreneur key questions about his beginnings, motivations and passion for his work.

BizVoice®: When did you first feel the urge toward entrepreneurship – and did you have mentors inspiring you?

Daymond John: “You could say my entrepreneurial drive came from my mom and dad. They both motivated me in different ways. They divorced when I was 12 years old. My dad left, and I haven't spoken to him since. I watched my mom go from working one job to working two and three jobs in order to manage the household alone.

“It hurt to see her have to work so hard. I figured that if I learned to make a little money for myself, she wouldn't have to. I shoveled snow in the winter and raked leaves in the fall; I sold used bicycles that I would assemble from junked parts I found around my neighborhood; I was a bike messenger; I swept the floor in my neighborhood corner store; I did whatever I could and worked hard at it – just like my first mentor: mom.”

BV: You started FUBU in 1992 while

working other jobs (Red Lobster, etc.). How difficult was it to keep going, producing clothes and sticking with your vision for the brand during that time?

DJ: “I don't think it was as difficult as it would have been if I had quit my day job before FUBU took off. A lot of people seem to think you have to take some kind of giant leap into entrepreneurship. You don't.

“The truth is: The key is in learning how to take small, affordable steps. I didn't make a lot of money at Red Lobster, but I used what little I had to fund FUBU in the early days. In fact, going back to the question, I didn't keep going – I stopped.

“I closed FUBU three times because I kept running out of money or inventory or both. I was figuring things out. But I would keep going back to slinging biscuits at Red Lobster, saving my money and putting it back into FUBU – again and again and again. I didn't leap into entrepreneurship – I walked.

Reserve your tickets or table to see Daymond John at the Indiana Chamber's Annual Awards Dinner on November 5: www.indianachamber.com/ad.

Be our guest bank with the best!



#1 for Retail Banking Customer Satisfaction in the North Central Region in the U.S.

For J.D. Power 2025 award information, visit [jdpower.com/awards](https://www.jdpower.com/awards) | Member FDIC

1-888-CENTIER | [Centier.com](https://www.centier.com)

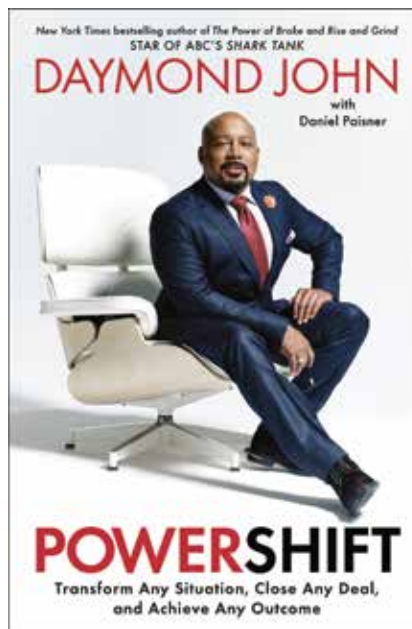
But I just wouldn't stop. As they say, 'Direction is more important than speed.' ”

BV: When did you first start to realize FUBU had potential for success?

DJ: “Depends on what you mean by ‘success.’ In a sense, FUBU was a success from the start, when I stood outside the Colosseum Mall in Jamaica, Queens and sold \$800 worth of hats. It wasn't about the money as much as it was about the mindset shift. That day, my mind opened up. I was convinced that I had the ability to shape my own destiny. I realized I could create value for myself and others. That mindset shift led to everything else that happened afterwards. Entrepreneurship is about action, not overthinking or just talking. However, it all starts with what you believe is possible.”

BV: You started on *Shark Tank* in 2009. What has been your favorite part(s) – people, products, etc. – and what's surprised you most about the experience?

DJ: “Easy: Bombas socks. Not only is Bombas the most financially successful product ever invested in on *Shark Tank*, (but) it reminded me of a lesson that's even more valuable than money: Don't be a slave to a dollar. Work on things you care about – aside from the money.”



“The founders of Bombas socks decided early on that for every pair of socks they sold, they would give away a pair to the homeless. While most startups spend a lot of time and energy managing inventory, they were giving away half of theirs! From the start, they wanted their company to create economic as well as social value.

“I used to use this quote: ‘Make it. Master it. Matter.’ It meant, when you blow up and hit it big, don't forget to give back. What the Bombas founders reminded me is that you could sew that ‘give back’ – that positive social component – right into the fabric of your brand at the start. In fact, it could be the thing that differentiates you from your competitors. With Bombas and FUBU, what the brands stand for became just as – if not more – valuable as the physical products!”

BV: What's the most important piece of advice you'd offer to an entrepreneur

trying to make it today?

DJ: “Look at everything you have, even problems and challenges, as potential building blocks.

“If an uneducated brown boy from Hollis, Queens can flip the pain of his parents' divorce into a globally recognized brand, imagine what's possible for you.”