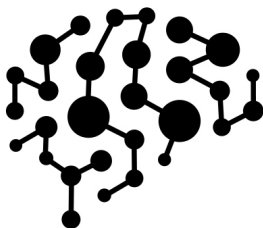


ONE GOLDEN NUGGET



**HOW TO
SURVIVE
AND
THRIVE
VOLUME III**

**JOE FOSTER, FOUNDER OF REEBOK,
RETURNS WITH POWERFUL NEW STORIES OF
RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION, CHANGING THE
WORLD ONE PAGE AT A TIME.**

Joe Foster



MAUREEN HALL

Founder and CEO of COÉGA Sunwear

I rarely meet people who've worked in the same industry I did, so speaking to Maureen about shoemaking was like opening a time capsule. She'd designed a beach shoe for her son, and as she talked through the steps, prototyping, sizing, grading, and choosing materials, I found myself right back at Reebok. It was everything we used to do. What struck me most was her care and quiet pride in the process. It reminded me that shoemaking, at its best, is both craft and engineering. It was a real pleasure to connect with someone who shares that passion, and to be reminded of just how much thought and precision go into making something that is truly fit for purpose.

Maureen grew up as the middle child of nine, dividing her time between the rocky shores of St. John's, Newfoundland, and an Air Force base in Ontario, where her father was stationed. Life at home, she recalls, was one where "all hands were on deck, and everybody chipped in." In a family that size, responsibility came early. While her sisters focused on the housework, Maureen naturally gravitated towards the garden and the workshop, where she'd help repair machinery and do other tasks more often handed to the boys. Even then, she was quietly breaking the mould.

Her father was known in the community as a fixer, someone you turned to when your washing machine gave out or your radio fell silent. From a young age, Maureen was often right there beside him, sleeves pushed up, watching closely as he took things apart. It wasn't just the mechanics she was learning, it was patience, problem-solving, and the quiet satisfaction of restoring something.



“I really liked to work with my hands,” Maureen explains, “and remember when I was about 15 years old, I built a fence around the garden, digging the holes by hand, using the right tools, it was something I enjoyed doing.”

Nevertheless, Maureen struggled at school. “I couldn’t do my times tables, my reading wasn’t very good, and I was unable to spell,” she recalls. At the time, no one offered an explanation, she was simply labelled as slow. It wasn’t until years later, when her son was tested for dyslexia, that the pieces began to fall into place. Looking back, she realised she had likely faced the same challenge, only hers had gone unnoticed and unspoken.

She remembers one teacher in particular who would rap her knuckles on Maureen’s head and snap, “Get this through your thick skull.” That same teacher also once handed Maureen and another little girl a “spelling book with a cartoon of a child in a dunce cap on the cover.” When her mother saw it, she didn’t say much, but the next day, the book was gone. Nothing like that ever appeared again.

It was always clear that Maureen was practically skilled; she thrived when building, fixing, and creating. Her parents never pushed her towards traditional gender roles, and that quiet support gave her the freedom to dream on her own terms. She recalls the school calling her parents in after she told the career advisor she wanted to be a car mechanic. “My mum just said, ‘If my daughter wants to be a mechanic, then I’m sure she’ll make a great one.’” That moment stayed with her. “I learned that I don’t have to be what people expect, I can just be myself and do things differently,” Maureen explains.

After failing to graduate from high school the first time, Maureen took a job at a fast food chain and enrolled in night school, determined to retake her exams. She passed, but the experience had already left its mark. While her siblings moved on to university, Maureen took a different path, one that felt truer to her nature. Following in her father’s footsteps, she joined the Air Force and trained as an aircraft technician. “I excelled during trades training,” she says. “I found a passion there, working with my hands.”



“Laughter is the best medicine.”



As the first woman to join the squadron, Maureen was given her own private tent and, at first, treated as something of a curiosity. But with six brothers, she was no stranger to holding her own. She'd grown up in a household where her gender had never been a barrier; her parents never told her she couldn't do something just because she was a girl. Still, the military was a different world. "You had to be twice as good as the men to be considered," she says. "But when they could see how I could take the flaps off the aircraft, repair them, and put them back on, perfectly aligned, they started looking at me differently."

"The military taught me a lot," she says. "I got to fly around the world, which was quite an experience." It also brought an unexpected gift, her husband. "I was repairing his aircraft, so we started talking. We kept running into each other on exercises, and eventually got married." Maureen loved the work so much she stayed for twelve years, much of it spent servicing the C-130 Hercules transport aircraft and the CH-147 Chinook helicopter. Adapting to military life came naturally, perhaps because, as she puts it, she'd grown up with "a lot of structure, and checklists," habits she still carries into her business today.



Maureen's business couldn't be further from the hydraulics, fuel lines, and flight control systems she once worked on. But in many ways, the mindset remains the same. COEGA, a versatile line of mix-and-match

protective sun wear, grew out of Maureen's love of sewing, paired with her instinct for problem-solving. It was a natural evolution: a hands-on approach, a clear purpose, and a practical solution to a real-world need.

When Maureen was fifteen, she bought herself a sewing machine, which she still uses to this day. Guided by a book of "schematics," she taught herself to make clothes, piecing things together with the same care she'd later apply to aircraft. Her sewing machine followed her from place to place, and over the years, she even made tuxedos for colleagues heading to formal events. For Maureen, the link between tailoring and engineering is clear. "You have to make sure everything is precise, you add the pieces, and it should all fit perfectly together."

Engineering has always been woven into Maureen's world. Her problem-solving instincts naturally kicked in when she moved to Dubai, where summer temperatures regularly climb above 45°C. She set out to design a pair of shoes her young son could wear on the scorching sand. "There was a lot of construction and engineering involved in creating that little beach shoe," she explains. "I had to make sure the upper could support the weight of the sole, and remember, originally when I made them, the toe poked through the fabric because it was so light. I put a toecap on the inside so as not to ruin the look, and that worked." It was a small solution, but one built with the same precision and purpose that defines all her work.



**"The journey is never-ending.
Remember, one foot after the
other. Just keep going."**

The beach shoes sparked Maureen's interest in making swimwear, and the positive feedback she received gave her the confidence to launch her own company, COÉGA, a name she borrowed from a South African port, which means fresh water flowing into the sea. What began as a hobby quickly gathered momentum. When it came time to apply for an import licence, trade licence, and import code, she once again found herself, as she puts it, "among a sea of men." But she pressed on. Once the company was operational, Maureen turned her attention to sourcing fabric. At first, she imported material from the United States, but rising costs prompted a shift, and she soon built a direct supply chain in Europe.

In the early days, Maureen kept things simple. She didn't need an office or full-time staff, which helped keep costs low. "I did everything myself, designing, making prototypes, overseeing production. I picked up the goods and delivered them to the shops," she explains. "My staff would tell me what customers liked, what they were asking for, and what wasn't working." That hands-on approach laid the foundation for steady growth. Today, COÉGA has a team of nineteen across marketing, sales, design, finance, HR, and IT.

While the brand has a small presence in Australia, the UK, and parts of Europe, Maureen says, "our main footprint is in the Middle East — places like Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE. We're also in Singapore, Malaysia,





Indonesia, China, and Saudi Arabia. We're definitely expanding and trying to get into more markets, like the US."

As a leader, Maureen admits she can "be too kind" at times and has had to learn when to be firmer. "I can't think about just one person, I need to think about the entire team, and what's best for the company," she says. Being a team player remains central to her approach, something she's carried with her from her military days. "Being able to roll your sleeves up and have that all-hands-on-deck attitude is really important." Her leadership philosophy is simple: set realistic deadlines, communicate clearly, and lead with mutual respect.

The adoption of software has helped streamline COÉGA's production process. "We now create our patterns digitally, which were once done by hand, and use software for grading, ensuring everything is highly precise," Maureen explains. The shift has brought more than just efficiency; it's reduced fabric waste, lowered costs, and helped minimise the company's environmental impact, with less material ending up in landfills.

Since 2003, when rising import duties pushed much of Dubai's manufacturing industry overseas to countries like India, Maureen faced a new challenge: finding a reliable local factory to produce her garments. It wasn't easy, but with





**“Always keep your goal in mind, don’t
get distracted by the next shiny thing.”**



persistence and a clear vision, she eventually secured a manufacturing facility in Dubai, where she continues to outsource production today. As Dubai is no longer widely seen as a manufacturing hub, people are often surprised to learn that COÉGA is made there. For Maureen, it's a point of pride, proof that it's still possible to produce high-quality, thoughtfully made clothing close to home.

She's also proud of how the journey has shaped her as a person. At school, she remembers being "terrified about public speaking." But over the years, as she's travelled the globe and met people from all walks of life, her confidence has quietly grown. Each new experience has helped her step a little further outside her comfort zone and find her voice.

Raised in a strict Roman Catholic household, Maureen has developed her own sense of spirituality over the years, one that she credits with helping her maintain both mental clarity and inner peace. Through practices like meditation and reflection, she nurtures that connection. "For me, spirituality means having a direct connection with something greater, without needing an intermediary like organised religion or church," she explains. It's a quiet anchor that continues to guide her, both in life and in business.

Her faith is rooted in the belief that we are all born with “something deep inside of us, an innate wisdom or truth, but we lose it as we’re taught to conform to the way things are,” she says. To stay connected to that inner sense of self, she practices meditation, using breathwork to recentre and ground herself. Today, she shares that calm and clarity with others, volunteering as a mentor with the Entrepreneurs’ Organisation Accelerators. “I want to be an inspiration to others,” she says, “and help people find inner peace.”

Maureen learned early on to live life on her own terms, without bending to others’ expectations. The girl who loved to wear pink, did her nails and sewed her own wedding gown also relished the chance to work with chainsaws and, as she puts it, “every other power tool you could think of.” Reflecting on her journey, she says, “It taught me that you may not excel at one thing, but you can always try something else and find what you truly enjoy. And when you enjoy something, you usually excel at it.” That philosophy runs through everything she does. It’s clear she loves her role at COÉGA and is deeply committed to creating well-made garments that stand in quiet defiance of the throwaway culture so common in high fashion.

Looking back at the journey she’s had so far, Maureen credits her parents for supporting her endeavours and encouraging her to explore her true talents, rather than focusing on what teachers saw as her weaknesses. By living life on her own terms, she’s carved out a path uniquely her own.



“Your gut instinct is usually right.”



**“Take every hurdle as a puzzle to solve
and not a problem to overcome.”**



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SURVIVE
AND
THRIVE







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