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Terry Lemerond

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health matters

Terry Lemerond: *Consistently Changing Natural Health*

Survey the leaders of any industry about the challenges of running a business, and one thing they are bound to agree on is that the only constant that you can rely on today is change.

Terry Lemerond, founder of the EuroPharma USA supplement company and the Terry Naturally brand, has built a career out of change—and as with many in the arena of natural products, his first change involved himself.

BY CRAIG GUSTAFSON

In 1955, Lemerond was an overweight teen with a bad attitude. "I lived a very unhealthy lifestyle," he says. "I was never really taught, nor did we live a lifestyle at home that was healthy."

Standing five feet, seven inches tall, Lemerond had grown to 250 pounds and was headed in the wrong direction. "I had severe hypoglycemia and very severe depression," he says. "When you're unhealthy and you feel that way … you're not a very happy person, or a very nice person. I was obnoxious, belligerent, and angry. I would fight more than I would talk."

Lemerond attributes the seeds for his own transformation being planted by a sympathetic priest at the Catholic high school he attended in Green Bay, Wisconsin. The priest took the troubled youth under his wing, delivering a blunt warning: "You know, you'd better settle down. You are going to go to jail if you keep this up!"

Between the priest's mentorship and the influence of others that Lemerond trusted, he eventually got the message and came to the same conclusion. "I joined the Marine Corps to get out of town and maybe have some change of life."

While enlisted, he found another mentor who also encouraged significant change: "I met a captain—which is very unusual for a captain to associate with a private. He also took me under his wing and he got me on a good diet. I started lifting weights with him and he introduced me to a health-food store in Oceanside, California, outside of Camp Pendleton, where I was stationed at the time."

To Lemerond, the entire concept of a health-food store was foreign. "I had never heard of a health-food store in Green Bay. We didn't even have a health-food store that I was aware of. Long story short, my life started changing. I started feeling better. The Marine Corps was really good for me. I became a changed man."

Armed with a new perspective on life, Lemerond left the Marines in 1962. One of the first things he did was try to locate a place where he could get the food and vitamins he had become accustomed to in California. "Lo and behold, while I was in the Marine Corps, someone had started a health-food store in Green Bay," he says.

The little shop became so dear to him that he worked there for nothing in his off time just to be sure the place survived. "She didn't pay me because she couldn't afford it—it was just a tiny store, about 400 square feet. I helped out and did things that she couldn't manage on her own."

The time and effort he invested was well spent, however. In 1969, change was in the air again and the shop's owner approached him about buying the business. "She knew I loved the store and she wanted to retire, but at the time, I couldn't afford to buy the store. I was married and had two little kids."

Change, however, is sometimes unstoppable and this was one of those instances. She then specified her conditions: "She said, 'Here's the price for the store. I am going to give it to you today and you can pay me when you can.' So I did," says Lemerond. "I paid her, eventually, for the full amount and she worked for me, part time, because she didn't want to get out of the business entirely."

This arrangement worked well for many years, but eventually, Lemerond got restless. It was time for another change.

"I had [taken advantage of] a really good opportunity to learn from my customers," says Lemerond. "I would listen to their complaints. I would listen to them [describe] what they were looking for. I would listen to what they wished they could find in a health-food store."

"In those days, all we sold in the health-food store were vitamins and multivitamins," he says. "Nobody was making combination formulations that would support a specific indication." Lemerond had 12 years of listening to this extremely large focus group composed of his customer base, so in 1981 he set out to do just that and

founded Enzymatic Therapy to provide these nutritional and herbal combinations.

At the time, significant research on vitamins, herbs, and nutritional factors was coming out of Europe. In fact, European formulators considered the herbal formulations to be medicinal in nature and approached them from that perspective. This meant that an attempt was made to identify the active substance in a supplement or herb, and then the medicine was measured and analyzed to provide a standard dose of that substance.

American pharmaceutical companies were too focused on patent drugs to develop the market for nutritional and herbal supplements, while American companies that did manufacture them often lacked either the resources or expertise to replicate what was happening in Europe.

This time, when Lemerond set out to make a change, it was on an industry-wide scale. He went to Germany and talked to the manufacturers that produced raw materials for Europe's herbal medicine industry. He thoroughly reviewed scientific research for evidence of effectiveness that matched herbs and nutrients with support for systems in the human body. His was the first US company to target supplement formulations to support specific needs for optimal health, and the first to introduce supplements that are now commonly known, such as glucosamine sulfate, ginkgo biloba, saw palmetto berry, and bilberry extract.

"We brought standardization into the United States," says Lemerond. "We brought complex formulations into the United States. We started a whole new revolution in the United States with Enzymatic Therapy."

Lemerond acknowledges that the business was tough at first. He had an entirely new concept in an industry that was unknown to many people—and of those who were aware of it, many were skeptical. On top of all this, the scientific approach that he championed necessarily caused his products to sit at the premium end of the price spectrum.

Directly educating the consumer on the differences between his line and the other products out there was beyond the capabilities of a small startup, such as his. So, in a move that was ahead of his time, he focused his educational efforts on the influencers in the market: the retailers.

Emphasizing his own continuing experience in the retail market, he informed retailers of the impact they could have on their own business by engaging their customers on a one-to-one basis in the aisles of their own stores. At the same time, he discussed the aspects of his products that made them consistent and effective. He discussed the research behind his formulations and made sure they knew about his money-back guarantee.

These strategies paid off. The company grew at a fantastic rate, and many of the supplements he introduced became familiar terms across the country. In 2000, the company was operating on a national level and his business advisers pushed for him to sell to a more established business entity. An offer came in and initially, he found the idea of retiring to be alluring.

"After I sold everything, I regretted it," says Lemerond. "I was too young and I have a passion for this industry. I loved the people I worked with. The health-food industry is a fantastic industry. We can make some huge gains by helping people—changing their lives and getting them back to having a healthy diet and the right lifestyle choices. We may be able to help—with the approval of their doctor—the need for certain drugs or avoid them altogether."

In 2007, after the conditions of the sale were complete, he re-entered the industry by founding EuroPharma USA, and he is back to doing what he does best: talking to consumers, finding out what they need, and tailoring formulations to support those needs. This time, however, he has the power of the Internet behind his education efforts, and he is looked at as one of the industry's biggest influences, rather than an upstart trying to change the world.

Through radio, newsletters, webinars, and conferences, Lemerond continues to be highly visible, discussing the many virtues of the natural approach to health and the mountains of scientific evidence that support it.

You could say that change has come naturally to Terry. ns