

GOTHAM GIGS

After a troubled childhood, a high school dropout gets sweet redemption

Roy Castro worked his way from cleaning ice cream freezers to CEO of D.M. Ice Cream Corp.

by Judith Messina



SET IN MOTION: Castro graduated from cleaning out freezers to owning a fleet of ice cream delivery trucks. Photo: Buck Ennis

Roy Castro has a Kennedyesque attitude about business. "I don't go to a meeting asking what you can do for me," said Castro. "I say 'I know how to make you money, and by coincidence I'm going to make a little bit of money myself.'"

The South Bronx native doubled the revenue of D.M. Ice Cream Corp. to \$6 million in his first three years as CEO, making the company the city's biggest ice cream subdistributor by area and revenue—supplying 2,000 grocery stores and bodegas in the five boroughs.

"I didn't go to college," he said. "I'm just a guy that had an idea and somehow managed to make it come to fruition."

Life wasn't always sweet. His father left the family when Castro was an infant, and Castro spent his youth getting in trouble. He dropped out of high school, and landed in federal prison on a drug charge when he was 20. There he hung out with the white-collar prisoners. Intrigued watching them tune in to CNBC and read Barron's, he had his sister send him *Stock Investing for Dummies* and a book of the 400 most-used business words. He earned his GED certificate and helped others get theirs. Most important, he decided: "Enough already. I don't want to sell drugs."

With help from workforce organization Strive, Castro began working three jobs after his 2002 release, including one at Edy's Ice Cream, where he swabbed out freezers. Eventually, he became a manager,

handling Edy's subdistributors. Soon he was able to purchase a house, and in 2013 he jumped at the chance to buy into D.M. in Long Island City, taking out a \$350,000 home-equity loan.

Last year, still frustrated by what he didn't know about managing a business, Castro fished out a card he'd tucked in his wallet six years earlier at a Strive event. It belonged to Dina Powell, then president of the Goldman Sachs Foundation (she is now U.S. deputy national security adviser to President Donald Trump). Within weeks he was in a classroom at LaGuardia Community College with 30 other business owners in the investment firm's *10,000 Small Businesses* program. He learned how to better manage his balance sheet, margins and profit and master analytic tools. D.M.'s revenue was \$7.5 million in 2016. To help bodega customers compete with national chains like 7-Eleven, he's added frozen items such as pizzas to his line.

"I'm always looking for ways to grow the business," he said. Every day he maps out the strategy for his 15 employees and 10 trucks. "Last week my target was stores with high margins where we are only selling a little bit of product," he said. "This week we're concentrating on getting more product to them."

Roy Castro

AGE 42

BORN South Bronx

RESIDES Pelham

EDUCATION GED certificate

PRICELESS ADVICE As part of the *10,000 Small Businesses* program, Castro presented a growth plan to Lloyd Blankfein, who advised him to focus on customers who deliver big margins and scale back on those who don't. His partner was skeptical, but Castro insisted: "If the head of Goldman Sachs is telling me, 'This is the way,' we're doing it." Within two months margins had jumped to 35% from 27%.

THE NEXT GENERATION Castro is married with two small children. He's made sure his nieces and nephews get an education. Five of them are in college. "Nobody in my generation graduated from high school," he said. "Now the next generation is writing college essays on 'my uncle.'"