



by Luz Maria Martinez and Marianita Villariba

If a woman can decide who should get the last piece of toffee, the 4-year-old or the 6-year-old, she can run a business. We are led to believe that it's a financial science controlled by men. That is a lie. It's about buying and selling. It's about having a product that's so good that people will give you some profit for it with which you do something else." This statement embodies Anita Roddick's business philosophy.

The name Anita Roddick may not ring a bell, but try Body Shop. A 20-year old British business that sells natural beauty oils, creams and cosmetics, Body Shop is now a worldwide business with about 1,400 shops in 12 time zones, covering 46 countries, and with a staff of 1,200 in its distribution center. Anita Roddick, Body Shop's founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was recently in Manila to inaugurate the opening in the city of two more Body Shops and to speak to business people and college students. Anita looked exactly the opposite of the stereotype CEO.

her BODY SHOP

Dressed in a long loosely hung black dress, black crocheted espadrilles and dark rim glasses and wearing no makeup, Anita looked more like an activist with wild long hair.

In fact, that is how Anita describes herself: an activist. She says she takes “experience journeys” where she works with indigenous communities and with women in villages and hears their stories. She claims it is this experience that keeps her whole. “As I get older, I find that travelling is about storytelling. Every group I have visited told stories as part of their educational process.”

Perhaps this is the reason why Anita too decides to tell stories when she’s supposed to be talking about business plans. Anita shows slides of herself with the Maasai in Kenya and this starts her on a roll. “Every tribal group thought I was so ugly. They didn’t like the moles on my skin. They thought my hair was like bird feathers. They told me to start decorating my body a bit more, not to be so plain and dull.”



Anita poses with her equally, if not more famous, Body Shop products

poverty structure. The authorities always put prisons so far away that families could not get there. I spent time in communities outside prisons. I spent time in shacks and I saw a new economy that is [based on] drugs. Everywhere I went, crack and drugs were being made.

"At the end of my journey, I was going to do this huge talk in New Orleans. I just stood up and I shared my experience to 2,000 CEOs. I was trying to get them to undergo these experiences because these move you into action. They

Photos of the Wodaabe of West Africa elicits another tale: "You know quite well I don't like the beauty business but more than anything I hate beauty pageants where every woman has to look like she has been stretched through a conveyer belt, and every woman has to say she wants to save the world and be a brain surgeon. But I completely changed my mind when I went to Africa because this is the only male beauty pageant where women decide if men are beautiful. But you never look at the men straight in the eye because that would be too aggressive. So you cover your eyes and flick your eyelashes up and choose three of the most beautiful men whose beauty depends on how they roll their eyes and how they show their teeth. Then there is a charm competition where the winners are men with the greatest poems about cattle and cows."

But if there's one thing Anita likes talking about is her latest adventure. Travelling with a vagabond through the poor south in the United States, Anita realized that though she "knew poverty in most parts of the world, I don't know poverty in America. I think to be poor in America is hard because it's a land of so much plenty." Anita goes on to point out what she calls the US media's conspiracy of silence." Poverty is not talked about in the press. Racism as part of the poverty structure is not talked about in the press. Money only goes to the hands of the multinationals. It does not go into the hands of people who need it. There is no notion of care."

"The prison system is another element of the

have got to experience poverty and they have to see that people are desperately trying to live good lives despite a system that doesn't protect them."

Travel form part of Anita's most valuable experiences. "Experience," Anita said, "develops values. That is why we make sure that Body Shop's staff members also take on new experiences. In our business, management courses are different. Staff are sent to Romania to work in orphanages with young, dying babies. We work in orphanages and mental institutions in Albania for two to three weeks at a time. Some 400 young people in the Body Shop go there. It is a spiritual education. Your values change when your experience changes."

These same experiences teach people respect for different cultures and traditions. Learning to respect people has led Body Shop to practice "Trade Not Aid" whose goal is to help create livelihoods and explore trade-based approaches to supporting sustainable development by sourcing ingredients and accessories directly from socially and economically marginalized producer communities. Body Shop's Brazil nut oil used for hair conditioner is supplied by the Kayapo village in Brazil and the Mbanayilli and Dalung Women's Shea Nut Cooperative in Ghana. A woman's cooperative in Bangladesh supplies jute containers and clay bowls. General Paper Industries in Nepal recycle paper using traditional skills and an association of the Ñahñu indigenous group in Mexico supply maguey and agave products for body scrub mitts and shampoos.

ACTIVISM AS TRADEMARK

Instead of commercially advertising its products, Body Shop conducts social justice projects and mounts campaigns for human and women's rights, the environment and the protection of animals. As far as Body Shop and Anita are concerned, these campaigns come first, sales second.

Wherever it may be set up, Body Shop is consistent in its activism and uses all commercial avenues to address social issues. Body Shop's recycled bags carry messages. Distribution trucks in England show the faces of and information on missing children. Broadsheets on women's rights are given to customers and are made available at Body Shop stores. The use of mobile billboards with messages around the distribution plant are wheeled in and out every day since the town council does not approve of permanent billboards. Stores are converted into action stations for human rights letter writing campaigns on behalf of prisoners of conscience. Yet, Anita says that the issue of human rights is not always easy. "It's very easy to hug a tree or to save a bunny rabbit. But it is not always easy to talk about human rights."

One other cause Anita is passionate about is women's rights. She says that wherever she goes, she sees that women bear the greatest responsibility but are, at the same time, the least educated. "It's always the women who keep the family together, the community together. It's rarely the men. It's always the women who are part of education. Yet they are

always exhausted with the cycle of births and pregnancies and looking after the men's heirs."

Except perhaps in Guinea where, Anita says, females are celebrated. "There is a wonderful tribe in Guinea and I recommend that everyone go there. When a baby girl is born, it is raised to the heavens and there is a five-week celebration. When a boy is born, they say 'that's nice' and then they go back to work."

Six years ago, Body Shop set up their first child development center. "We train eco-warriors here. These are young kids who are taught about the environment and about caring for different culture groups. Children are encouraged to show their activist projects to their mothers while they are working in the offices." Many of Body Shop's staff, Anita said, feel that the role of business is "to protect the family, to honor the work of women and to work towards human rights." The concept of family, Anita believes, extends beyond its nuclear members. The community, as far as Anita is concerned, is an extension of family.

Of course, such a creative angle in business implies that the founder must have possessed qualities that other business minds do not possess and an hour with Anita Roddick will show anybody that, indeed, she is a special kind of person.

ECCENTRIC BUSINESSWOMAN

In 1976, Anita, wearing jeans and a Bob Dylan T-shirt, walked into a bank to ask for a loan. Apart from her outfit which hardly projected a business image,

ANITA RODDICK, *the extraordinary and "a little" eccentric entrepreneur who used her all-natural, chemical-free cosmetics as propaganda for social issues and, at the same time, made big business out of selling them, took time out to speak with Isis International-Manila while she was in the city to promote her new shop. Excerpts:*

Isis: What keeps you whole?

Anita: Empathy for the human condition. Understanding and living with poverty. The ability to know that you can be a bridge with your position.

Q: What makes you strong?

A: I always go towards people whose visions are stronger than mine. Some of the important influences in my life are Bryan Simms and Matthew Fox, who are people deep into the stories of creation and the universe. I am interested in their spiritual awareness.....I am a grassroots activists. When I see women and especially indigenous tribes work in the fields and I join them in their work, you **cannot not** have reverence. That is my biggest spiritual education.

Q: If you had only one day in your whole life. How would you spend it?

A: One day? Well, it would be in the company of the people I love. My kids, my granddaughter who I am training to be an activist and a revolutionary.

I'll also organize my funeral which would have to be hugely funny. I want only my female friends to carry the coffin and I hope they all fall down and I'll tumble out. I want all the great things, the great love poems, writings, put inside my coffin, things from my kids which they loved. And then I want great music played. I want to be celebrated for having great breasts and short legs. I want a celebration of the body, and all parts of it too. I will not be cremated. If I am smart, I shall be wrapped in wonderful cloth and put on top of a tree where birds can peck at me. ☺

Anita also had two young children in tow. "I wanted £4,000 for this idea I had to sell body cosmetics in little containers. I called the idea the Body Shop. He [the bank manager] went white. He thought it was England's first sex shop! Eventually my husband got the loan from the bank and passed over the money to me," Anita said.

Anita got her idea for Body Shop from all the years of living with "tribal groups, industrial groups, and farmers" while working for the United Nations and living mostly in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean Islands. In Sri Lanka, Anita saw that women did not throw the skin of the pineapple away but cleaned their skin with it. "This was the start of fruit acids." Anita also lived in the Polynesian Islands and the women she met there "had absolutely no teeth because they chewed on sugar cane. But they had skin like velvet because they completely covered their body with coca butter."

Challenge everything.

When Anita opened the Body Shop, she immediately got into trouble because she decided to open the shop near a funeral parlor whose owners became very, very upset. "The coffins would pass my shop with the name 'Body Shop' so people wanted me to close it down. But I said 'no.'

"Then I hired my first saleswoman whom I hired because she had wonderful handwriting and not because she had selling skills. All the labels and everything in the store were handwritten but every label ran so nobody could read the writing. In the shower, the labels ran so you had to smell what you put in the water." She remembers with humor her earliest mistakes. "I did not know at that time that you could lie to people. When we had henna shampoo, we actually put henna in it. Nobody told me that henna smelled like horse manure! So I would write little notices that said: 'Don't worry about the smell, this is what henna really smells like.' Then there was the honey and beeswax cleanser. We had bee hives from where we would take the honey then mix it up with rose water. But there were black bits in the pot. So we had to write a label that said: 'Don't worry about the black bits. Just scoop it up. They are the dirty footprints of bees. They don't wipe their feet when they go into their house.' We also used the cheapest bottles in the world and called them 'urine sample bottles.' They weren't but that's what we called them.

We never filled them to the top because we couldn't afford to do so.

"The second shop was on a street that was so out of the way that even dogs did not know where it was. So I had to paint all these flowers and all these buttons. From where I parked my car, I would spill my perfume all the way to the shop and people would find it by smell. That is what you call guerilla tactics," laughed Anita.

Anita's store was a small shop based on frugality. "My mom said: 'You run a shop like how I ran my house in the second World War.' We refilled everything, recycled everything and used everything." Anita laments that, today, the art of frugality is no longer recognized. "Nobody talks about good management with frugality. Now you get awards if you are the consumer of the year. You don't get awards for being frugal."

Frugality coupled with creativity continue to be the cornerstones of the Body Shop headquarters in England. There, the atmosphere is always animated and fun. Anita says people there are continuously being fascinated, bewitched, dazzled and delighted."

FIGHTING WORDS

Part of the fun comes from spending a "lot of time looking for products and working with communities in need." Anita continues to say that "governments do not know how to do this. Governments do not measure itself on how it treats the weak and the frail. No government is interested in how the poor are doing. Governments are economic governments, whether it's your government, my government or the American government. Everything you do in business has ripple effects and affects millions.

"One of the greatest disasters is this belief that we can dump our businesses and set them up in countries where there are no environmental regulations or where there are no support for human rights. There is a global agenda to look for the cheapest prices and the least environmental regulations. There is one big race to the pit stop, to the bottom and we have to challenge that. Businesses can do more than governments. They [can act] faster than governments. [Businesses are] richer than governments. But if they [businesses] and governments do not have any moral agenda or any sympathy, then God help us all!"

And, to the young audience she faced in Manila, Anita said: "Challenge everything. Challenge everything that you are taught at school. Challenge everything that you read in the papers. Challenge everything because then you have a sense of curiosity, which will give you a sense of creativity, which will make you an astounding individual." ☺