



### Last Word

## Zita Cobb

Former CFO of JDS Uniphase. Multimillionaire, entrepreneur and philanthropist. Founder of the Fogo Island Inn in Newfoundland

- **My dad always said**, “I don’t care about what you think or what you feel; I only care about what you do.” What you do shows your true character, and it is also what impacts other people. He also used to say, “Try to be useful.”

- **I was responsible for mergers** and acquisitions at JDS Uniphase, and in a very short time, we acquired dozens of companies valued in the billions. One deal, in particular, was a disaster because we got caught up in a bidding war. We did not want our competitors to get their hands on that particular technology. That fear blinded me to the deeper issues with the company. What it taught me was, if a decision feels rushed and defensive, don’t do it. Walk away.

- **My boss at JDSU**, Jozef Straus, always said, “The most important thing is to keep the most important thing the most important thing.” This was especially relevant in technology, but it’s relevant to all undertakings—personal and professional.

their needs, talents and capacities. There can be a tendency in families to focus on each others’ deficits. We’re all stronger characters because of navigating this complex tangle of love and work together.

- **The hardest lesson of community** development work is to let people do the work—don’t do things to people or, worse, *for* people.

- **In the world of ideas**, the most important thing is enthusiasm. In the world of doing, the most important thing is perseverance. You need to have lots of both to convince people your ideas have merit.

- **I wish someone** had told me to hold my opinions and beliefs lightly, because they can get in the way of understanding. It’s taken a long time to learn that. **/Interview by Maryam Siddiqi**

- **The instinct of the tech beast** is to eat its young and move on. I never felt I could let my guard down when working in tech—the next wave of technological advancement could render our company irrelevant. I always went to work late, because the morning was the only time of the day I had control over, and I always made sure to take three or four consecutive weeks of vacation at a time. Otherwise, you would just die.

- **I think people see me** as having gone from the business world to the philanthropy world, but I’ve actually just gone from the “for-profit” world to the “not-just-for-profit” world. The basics of business are the same. What is different is the purpose.

- **Meaning doesn’t fall out of the sky**—we need to make meaning for ourselves. The more you can deploy your whole self in your work, the easier it is to make meaning.

- **We created a travel destination** in service of the community of Fogo Island, which is where I grew up. So our focus and energies were divided between the outside world and engaging with the local community.

- **I took too much from my old** traditional business life to this community development work. My background in tech conditioned me to go fast. I’ve needed to slow down. Communities go at human speed, which is the speed of trust.

- **Working with my brothers** has been a reminder that I didn’t fully understand

Interview has been edited and condensed. Read more at [tgam.ca/](http://tgam.ca/)