

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

An introduction to interesting industry players



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Q: DID YOU GO TO COLLEGE?

Yes. I received a BS in mechanical engineering from Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA and an MBA from The Wharton School, Philadelphia, PA. My engineering degree helped develop my analytical skills, but most of all, it taught me how to solve problems. At Lehigh, I also took plenty of English and writing courses so I wouldn't be just another illiterate engineer. At Wharton, I really learned a ton about business in general, and of course, that included plenty of courses involving sales-related topics.

Q: How did you get started in the industry?

A: Before Wharton, I worked for Procter & Gamble, and afterwards, I was a management consultant. I got started in promotional products when I moved overseas to Poland in 1991 as a part of a program to assist the newly-freed, ex-Communist countries of Eastern Europe. In 1992, after the program ended, my partner, Anne Kalin and I founded Lynka, which has gone on to become one of Central Europe's leading promotional products companies.

Q: What motto do you try to live by?

A: Always look on the bright side of life.

Q: What's your biggest selling challenge?

A: Convincing sales reps that it is possible to sell on something other than price.

Q: What's so great about a career in sales?

A: No other career gives a person more freedom and at the same time, more opportunity to make it big. In sales, the numbers don't lie. If you're good, it'll show in your results. If the numbers aren't there, you need to change something in your approach.

Q: What's the best advice anyone has given you?

A: Never over-promise. Always over-deliver.

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Q: What makes you successful in sales?

A: Empathy. I understand people. I also feel passionate about my company and our products, and I am sure the client feels that. I have a sixth sense for asking the right questions, to get to the heart of the client's needs.

Q: What was your biggest order screw-up and what did you learn from it?

A: About 10 years ago, we printed 1,000 T-shirts for Duracell, using a cool metallic ink to simulate the copper-top of the battery. After we delivered, the client called and said the ink was washing out. Upon inspection, we found that the "ink" we used wasn't an ink at all, but an additive you were supposed to add to a base. Needless to say, we re-did the whole order at our cost. What we learned was that we needed to laundry-test shirts regularly, especially on large runs. Today we have two washing machines in production, testing random garments all day long, just to make sure. The mistake was never repeated.

Q: What's your best way for dealing with difficult clients?

A: Let them talk. Heck, let 'em scream if they want. Just be a good listener and get the facts. After they are done, tell them "thank you for being so honest with me," and then propose next steps. If you need to buy time, tell them you want to do a little fact-finding in-house, and you'll call back shortly. Then make sure you do.

Q: Best source for creative inspiration?

A: I have my greatest ideas lying in bed, either late at night, or early in the morning. For creative inspiration, there's nothing better than a good, long walk.

Q: Where do you see the industry headed in the future?

A: Well, for me, the "industry" means the European promotional products industry. Therefore, where I see this going is closer to the U.S. model of suppliers who are dedicated to servicing distributors, and who offer a full-service solution. Today, there

are many hybrid suppliers serving distributors and end-customers. And there aren't many who provide a one-stop shop, which includes product and decoration in one place.

Q: What do you do outside of work (family, hobbies, etc)?

A: I love golf and I love travel. For eight years, there was no golf course in Krakow, so I had to travel four hours to the nearest course in the Czech Republic. In 2003, they built a luxurious course right here, and now I am in heaven.

Q: Is there something about you that might surprise us?

A: I have a mission to visit one country for every year of my life. Right now, I am exactly on par. This year, I hope to add to my collection Ukraine and maybe Bulgaria. And I am currently looking at a business trip to Bangladesh.

Q: Favorite Web sites?

A: The two sites I visit most are www.google.com and www.lynka.com.pl

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you think you've got an interesting story yourself, please send me an e-mail and I'll be in touch: khuston@asicentral.com.