The FORUM
Renaissance EXECUTIVE FORUMS

Renaissance **EXECUTIVE FORUMS** FALL 2002

Business Principles for Good Times and Bad

by Ken Keller

Many businesses are facing troubled times. As some are battling to stay alive, still others are trying to avoid slipping backwards by holding on to what they have.The temptation to cut corners appeals to far too many, and many have tarnished their businesses as a result.

While it is true that the overriding principle of business is to make a profit, this does not mean that it is the only principle in business. In these challenging times, I want to provide employees and owners in businesses, government agencies and nonprofits with some principles that will create organizations of character. These principles will enable you to keep your head in the game when others may be losing theirs!

The first principle is to focus on the mission. Every successful organization has a mission statement that is simple and focused. Furthermore, the entire staff knows and executes the mission, whether it is in the little tasks or the big decisions they make daily. Larger organizations even have departmental mission statements. Unfortunately, most small businesses don't know what a mission statement is, and that is one of the reasons that they struggle, as the employees think that they work to make the owner wealthy!

The second principle is to have a vision or destination. For far too many businesses, the vision lasts until the end of the day, week, maybe the month or even the year. But for businesses who are going somewhere, their destination moves towards that vision in both the good times and bad. The process of creating a vision isn't a difficult one. People do it all the time, whether it is on their birthdays, at New Year's, or the start of a new school year. Creating a vision is important, too, so that the organization can move forward towards accomplishing those goals.

The third principle is to treat people with dignity. This includes your customers, clients, vendors and employees. Being kind to people costs nothing and pays dividends far beyond what you could imagine. Remember the little people in the organization who perform the basics and are never recognized for the valuable work that they do. Security guards, cleaning

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What's Inside

What's Your Company's Growth Potential?

by Chris Risey

Could you double, triple or quadruple your company's revenues over the next five years? A study published by The National Commission on Entrepreneurship (NCOE)[1] found that less than 5% of all companies generate annual growth of greater than 15% per year over a five-year period. The study also states "flying in the face of conventional wisdom . . . high-growth companies are found in high-technology sectors . . . fast-growing, entrepreneurial companies are widely distributed across all industries." This means that all industries including non-technology segments like retail, business services and manufacturing provide high growth opportunities but few companies actually generate substantial revenue growth. A key reason is that very few companies develop growth plans that effectively tap their real growth potential.

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Jim Fontanella, President
Renaissance
EXECUTIVE FORUMS, INC.

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President's Message

by Jim Fontanella

I've recently been thinking about the "Theory of Evolution" and how it applies to all of us as fellow business owners/leaders of companies. No one would argue with the fact that to be competitive these days, we all must be able to adapt to a continually shifting and rapidly changing business environment. You, through your participation in *Renaissance* EXECUTIVE FORUMS, have positioned yourself as someone interested in getting input with an openness to adapt. The lead article in this issue of "*The* FORUM" has been written by one of our business partners, Ken Keller, who runs *Renaissance* EXECUTIVE FORUMS in Northern Los Angeles. Ken highlights eight key principles that should be resident in our organizations, or that should be considered. One of the other articles, "Customer Satisfaction - Do You Ask, Share, Act?" by Eileen Miller, focuses on getting customer input so that appropriate adaptation can be made to your organization . . . a key to survival and continued participation in the process of evolution. It's an excellent read.

In keeping with the message contained in this article, we will be once again asking you for your input via a **Member Survey** that will be provided to you this fall. We would greatly appreciate your input so that we can continue to adapt *Renaissance* EXECUTIVE FORUMS to best meet your needs. Check with your Chairperson over the next few months to ensure you are included in this important feedback mechanism.

Business Principles for Good Times and Bad *continued from page 1*

crews, receptionists, secretaries, and accounting clerks are all very critical to the success of the business, so be kind to them.

The fourth principle is that businesses and the people who work in them should be honest in their dealings with other people and organizations. In the movie "Wall Street," Gordon Gecko states that "Greed, for lack of a better term, is good." Greed may be good, but it will not help you or your company in the long term. Greed has taken down many an organization (Enron, for example). If the leaders of Enron had been looking at the long term, the state of California would not have a near $25 Billion debt, and thousands of hard-working employees at Enron would still be employed today.

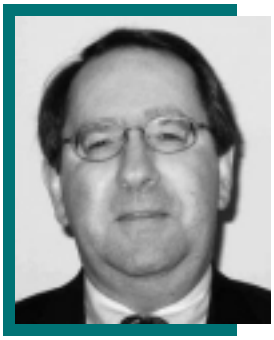
The fifth principle to understand is that in order to survive and prosper, you must treasure the ideals of innovation, adaptation, and overcoming obstacles. If you allow this to happen in your business, you will make continuous improvements in the way you lead and manage your organization. This can be accomplished by first developing and prioritizing a list of business issues that need to be addressed. Brainstorming with others will then enable the best possible solution to be brought to the forefront.

The sixth principle is that you must have a "customer first" attitude. This is hard to adopt, as the natural inclination of most business people is to think that "the business is first." It may take time, but the shift in outlook will be well worth the long term future for your organization. Make sure that all of the people that work with you know who the customer is. The more they know about your customers, the better they can serve them.

The seventh principle is that you must know when to stop doing something that no longer works. Don't spend good money on bad ideas. Be willing to cut your losses and take a turn in another direction. It is perfectly fine to make mistakes, as successful organizations and people make them all the time, but just make sure you learn from them.

The eighth principle is to remember that no matter what business you think you are in, your organization exists to provide a service to customers. Far too many people believe that the customer doesn't come first, and that the almighty dollar is the only thing that counts. Nothing can be further from the truth. If you take care of customers, they will take care of you.

In times like these, it is easy to lose track of the objective. Many, including executives at Enron and Global Crossing, surely did just that. Adhering to these principles, even when all those around you are neglecting theirs, is something that is very critical to the success of your business. It sets the individual and business apart in a way that can only bring improvement to both our society and the world we live in.



Kenneth W. Keller is President of Renaissance EXECUTIVE FORUMS *of San Fernando/Simi/Santa Clarita Valleys. He can be reached by e-mail: KKeller@ExecutiveForums.com.*

Customer Satisfaction - Do You ASK, SHARE, ACT?

by Eileen Miller

Look at any company's web site. Invariably, you'll find some statement like, *"Customers are our focus."* As the owner of ***They Tell Me***, a web-based customer satisfaction survey service, I make a lot of business contacts to extend awareness about the survey service, and to learn about companies' strategies for gathering and leveraging customer feedback. So often I hear, "We should do that . . . we've done some surveys . . . it's not consistent . . . we don't really have any formal strategy." One wonders how customers can be the focus of a company that doesn't even have a way to assess if customers are satisfied with its product/service offerings. Is it enough to claim, "Our customers are satisfied," or do you need to explain how you know that?

Actually, it's not that customers are NOT the focus; each company's intentions really are well meant and sincere. It's just that most companies haven't yet developed a business practice to support the good intentions. And intuitively they know their customers are generally satisfied - they just don't have a means to validate that declaration.

Knowing what your customers appreciate most (and least) with your relationship guides strategies needed for the entire business operation. Individually, customers have limited impact because their issues are identified and managed *individually*. COLLECTIVELY, customers' input is powerful, trends are obvious, and the business can adjust policies or procedures to improve customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction, defined as a business performance metric, drives strategic business decisions. Most importantly, customer satisfaction INCREASES REVENUE, as loyal customers buy more and refer new business. Superb references additionally expedite the sales cycle, reducing the cost of new sales.

Performance objectives for customer satisfaction can be measured and monitored, for both departmental and business unit assessments - one of several "dashboard" or "balanced scorecard" metrics that report business results to stakeholders. There is much discussion about customer satisfaction vs. customer loyalty, how to measure each, and the pros and cons of various strategies. The simple facts are:

* If you don't measure it, you can't prudently change it.
* Many strategies will work, as long as the one you choose is applied consistently.
* Using the information to effect business change is more important than the data itself.

Measuring and monitoring customer satisfaction is a process, not an event. Doing a survey and having tabulated results is the first step. To continuously enhance customer satisfaction, information gleaned from the survey must be assessed, determined to be at acceptable thresholds or not, and business initiatives implemented to maintain or improve results.

Basic principles of the process include:

* **ASK.** The really good news is that just asking customers for their opinions elevates overall satisfaction. Customers want to be important to your business; they want to feel they have some influence in your business decisions. By asking them for input, you acknowledge them and their desire to participate in your business. This is gratifying by itself.

* **SHARE.** When you ask people for their time and opinions, it is critically important to share the results with them. They contributed their piece of the puzzle; not only are they curious about how others responded, they want to know what the complete picture looks like. Warning: if you opt not to share, they won't play next time.

* **ACT.** Use it or lose it. Take action on the information. Even if you wind up taking one step backwards, you will be better positioned to stride toward the increased revenue and profit that comes from satisfied customers.

Once you have the demonstrable metrics, leverage your customer satisfaction by communicating it to:

* Customers via newsletters & web site
* Prospects via sales & marketing collateral
* Colleagues via conferences & seminars
* Associates via employee newsletter & intranet
* Industry via press releases & trade shows.

P.S. More good news! Happy customers and happy employees are highly correlated.

By what yardstick do YOU measure customer satisfaction?

Eileen Miller can be reached in Coronado, CA at (619) 435-4152, or by e-mail: eileen.miller@theytellme.com.

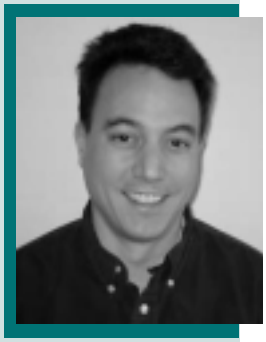
Members in the News

John Axelberg

John Axelberg, Vice President and COO of General Sheet Metal of South Bend, Indiana, reports that his company has been working with students from Ivy Tech State College to construct a memorial for 9/11. A 400-pound section of steel I-beam from one of the twin World Trade Center towers is being used to fashion a 12-foot memorial called "Standing Tall" that will be dedicated to the 3,000 people who died on September 11 when the towers collapsed. Dedication of the memorial will be conducted in the spring at St. Patrick's County Park.

Norm Hall

The R.L. Deppmann Company was spotlighted in the July 2002 issue of CAM Magazine. With headquarters in Southfield, Michigan and branch offices in Saginaw, Grand Rapids, and Cleveland, Ohio, the company celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. President **Norm Hall** started working part time with the company 28 years ago while he was an engineering student at Wayne State University. He had only planned on staying about two years. "I stuck around because I was constantly challenged as an employee," says Hall. "The company let me grow as much as I wanted to grow." After three generations of leadership, the company is one of the largest manufacturers' representatives of plumbing, heating, cooling, industrial pumps, heat exchanger, tanks and valves in the U.S.

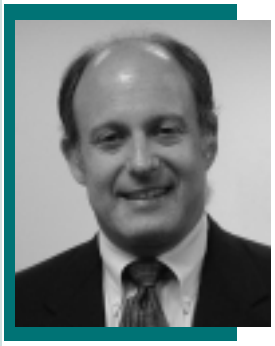


Bob Neveu

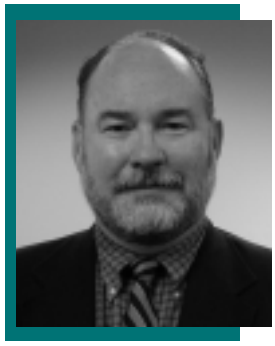
A feature story on **Bob Neveu**'s company, Recruiternet, was published in The Portland (Maine) Press Herald in June. With an MBA and seven years of marketing experience - credentials that could have landed him a lucrative job - Bob moved back to Maine from San Francisco in 1998 to use his savings to start a long-shot software business. Today Recruiternet is selling applicant tracking software to corporate giants such as FleetBank Boston, Daimler Chrysler and CVS. Recruiternet's signature product, Projectix, is software which allows companies to store resumes in a database and then mine the data for the most qualified candidates. Neveu says, "My wife was telling me every day, 'Take that job,' but I've always wanted to be an entrepreneur . . . There's a sense of satisfaction on my part. I don't hear anybody saying I'm crazy any more. Now they want to know how they can get involved with the business."

Renaissance Executive Forums Announces Additions

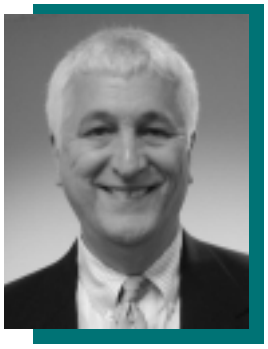
Renaissance Executive Forums continues growth across the country with two more offices opening in late summer. **Steve Brookstein** will operate Forums in the San Francisco/Marin Counties area, and **Jim Bennett** is opening an office in Northern Chicago. In addition, **Bill Janner** has joined us as Pete Crosby's new business partner in Oregon. It is indeed a pleasure to welcome our new partners!



Steve Brookstein



Jim Bennett



Bill Janner

Stretch Your Marketing Muscle

by Philip Krone

Sometimes exciting opportunities become available if you stretch your creative process and rethink how your product or service is sold. Recently, I've watched some of my clients benefit from "re-imagining" how their product or service might be sold.

I asked my clients the following question: "Could you reposition your product/service offering as a direct response item?" Selling something in a new channel, such as e-Bay, is an example. Selling through direct mail or direct advertising would be another example. QVC is yet another example.

"Even if you sell million-dollar machinery, could you envision using a pricing/advertising/promotion program that would sell such machines in response to direct marketing?" I posed this question to clients because there is a new channel available that will enable advertisers to reach the one million MBAs in this country with the highest disposable family income. These people may own their own small businesses or run divisions of Fortune 1000 companies. This new channel offers companies several options: pay for advertising space, pay on the basis of leads generated by the advertising, or pay on the basis of success (sales made from leads generated by the advertising).

If the options of paying based on leads or on success are selected, the company owning the channel has the opportunity to earn a bonus above the amount it would earn from simply selling ad space. To participate in this offer on a contingency basis, a company has to be willing to pay the advertising channel 35% of the first $100,000 in revenue generated from the ad, and 10% above $100,000 for sales that resulted from the ad within one year of publication.

Remember, companies that sell on a direct marketing basis are usually substituting direct marketing costs for traditional distribution costs. They take some portion of the price usually reserved for intermediaries (who supply value in their particular channel) and spend that money marketing directly to the end user or consumer.

Golf pros often advise that to practice one type of shot, you should hit the opposite shot (to give you a feel for the difference) - hit the fade to practice the hook; hit the hook to practice the fade. Back to marketing your product: Would it help you to sell your product in traditional channels if you considered how you would sell your product in a new channel, as a direct response item?

Phil Krone is President of Productive Strategies, Inc., a firm of marketing and management consultants based in Northfield, IL. You can reach Phil via e-mail: pkrone@Productive Strategies.com or by phone at (847) 446-0008.

Providing for a Seamless Transition to the Next Generation

by Cary Silverstein

The key thinkers in the area of succession planning have recognized that there is a relationship between strategic planning and a successful transfer of a family business to the next generation. Let me begin with a number of quotes from the industry pundits.

"Planning the transition and continuity of succession is the single most courageous act a leader can do."

"Succession planning really confronts the founder with his / her own mortality. It requires getting with the kids and talking about when you will no longer be around. A lot of families don't want to do that."

"According to a survey conducted by the Mass Mutual Life Insurance Co., 74% of small business owners intending to pass on a family business to a relative don't have a written succession plan."

Owners can be divided into two distinct groups as regards succession planning, those who absolutely refuse to recognize the need for succession planning and those who are attuned to the need for planning. Most business owners put off doing their plan simply because they refuse to contemplate their mortality. They see succession planning equivalent to planning their own wake and funeral. This perception generates a number of emotional responses including denial, anger, depression - and can appear at different times in the planning process.

Owners also place a high value on control, which generates an emotional resistance to turning over that control to the next generation. In addition, business owners have two problems regarding professional advice: one, they do not want to pay for the help they need; and two, they get advice from the professional and then tend to ignore it.

A well-conceived succession plan can actually spell freedom and a new type of control for the senior generation. The founder can now transition from the day-to-day management role to insuring that the business is heading in the right direction.

In order to begin the succession planning process, the following steps need to be taken:

1. Set a date for review of the written draft by key family and management
2. Make the necessary revisions based on the feedback
3. Include non-family members in the consultation process, e.g., an attorney, insurance agent, accountant and management consultant. This can be accomplished by forming a Family Advisory Council.
4. The family may also elect to form a Board of Directors to guide them through the process of succession planning

This process needs to begin with the first step, the development of a written draft.

There are a number of important lessons that can be learned from companies that have implemented successful succession plans.

1. Succession plans should be customized
2. They should be driven by top management

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Cary Silverstein, President of Strategic Management Associates, LLC, has been a resource expert for our forum groups in Wisconsin. He helps small businesses prepare for challenges that come with rapid growth through strategic planning. You can reach Cary in Fox Point at CSilve1013@aol.com, by phone at (414) 352-5140, or visit his website at www.yourstrategicmanager.com.

Finding More Profit: Look Inside

by Herb Shields

In today's economy, the ability to remain competitive is becoming more difficult. Many companies miss or underestimate the profit and cash flow impact of two areas within their internal operations - Purchasing and Inventory.

Most manufacturing companies spend over 50% of their total revenues on purchased materials and services. They have a significant part of their total assets invested in purchased material inventory, work-in-process, and finished goods. However, management attention and resources are more often focused on increasing sales and reducing labor costs. Both are worthy objectives, but there are a lot of dollars that can be dropped to the bottom line by using the leverage that already exists in lowering purchased prices and improving inventory turnover.

PURCHASING

Modern purchasing techniques have moved beyond getting three quotes and buying from the lowest-priced supplier. Computerization has enabled purchasing to become less of a paper mill and more a value-added function staffed by professional negotiators. Purchasing strategies have evolved from adversarial relationships to partnering with suppliers to maximize supply chain efficiencies. Understanding the industries that comprise your supply base and analyzing the cost structure of key materials are just two actions that can lead to dramatic cost savings. Many companies are forced to compete in a world market, but still concentrate their purchasing locally - another missed opportunity. If you have a person responsible for purchasing, have you had a discussion about cost savings, stocking programs, and other opportunities? If your purchasing activity is not centralized, the people handling your dollars may lack proper training and skills.

In today's economy, leveraging your purchasing spending can increase profitability quickly, without investment in new equipment or systems.

INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

We are all used to seeing inventory listed as an asset on the balance sheet. It really needs to be thought of as a liability. Less is truly better than more; and yet, the first law of inventory is that it will expand to fill the available space. Every dollar that we can eliminate from inventory is cash that can be used to increase sales, reduce debt, or fund improvements. Has your management team examined your internal processes that create inventory from the other perspective - using those processes to reduce inventory and improve turnover? Management should be aware of the decisions that are made by planners and schedulers that impact the firm's inventory level. Is the planning and execution process documented and understood by all the functional areas involved? Measurements, such as inventory turns, record accuracy and bill-of-material accuracy, are critical to maintaining the right levels of inventory throughout your system.

Doing an ABC stratification is a simple first step in focusing attention on the different segments of inventory. Inventory decisions are made at the item

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Providing for a Seamless Transition to the Next Generation

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3. They should be focused on shared responsibility among the family members
4. They should be focused on future strategy and culture
5. They should be focused on objective multi-rater assessments [360 vs. 90 degree]
6. They should be focused on development of a leadership cadre
7. They should be part of the overall multi-year strategic plan.

These lessons should be a guide to the development of a succession plan. The most current research indicates that it is critical that succession planning and strategic planning should be linked. The succession plan should be incorporated into the strategic plan and follow a parallel timeline. It is especially difficult for family companies because of the difficulties associated with getting everyone in the family to believe and support the process. Planning has to become part of every day, not something that is done once a year.

It is important to realize that the family issues and the business issues cannot be totally separated. The basic needs and desires of the family are a very powerful driver in directing the future of the business. For example, the founder may be concerned that there will not be a continuous income flow to support his retirement from an active role in the business. It would be the role of the Family Advisory Council to isolate these financial, legal and tax issues and develop effective strategies to deal with them. The business owner is often too close to a problem to deal with it objectively.

Once the owner has made a decision as to the timing of the succession, they need to inform the entire organization, especially the key employees and managers. This step will reduce concern and confusion and have a positive impact on employee morale. The succession planning team, which would be composed of the key family and management members, could then concentrate on a smooth transition of responsibilities from one generation to another. Each member should have clearly defined roles that will support a smooth transition of leadership.

Many family-owned firms have moved from the entrepreneurial stage to the *managerial stage* and need to enter into the *professional stage* where strategic planning and goal setting begin to drive the organization. It is in this stage that the business can carry on without the founder and eventually without the siblings. The benefits of combining the succession and strategic planning processes are easier decision making, stimulated and challenged employees and a business that continues to flourish from generation to generation.

What's Your Company's Growth Protential *continued from page 1*

The typical planning mindset. The most common business planning approach for companies (particularly those in non-growth industries) is to develop a growth strategy under the following guiding questions: (1) "How much capital do we have?" (2) "What needs to be done?" and (3) "How do we allocate that capital across the different opportunities?" From the outset, this approach limits the company's growth strategies to only those initiatives suited for the company's current capital structure. That limitation can be significant especially for small and middle market private companies that have limited access to additional capital.

High growth planning. To plan like a high growth company, take a deep breath and ask your management team, ***"What would we do if we had all the money necessary to grow our business to its full potential?"*** From this exercise management should uncover a whole list of new and exciting growth initiatives. New strategies not previously identified may include: (1) horizontal or vertical company acquisitions, (2) new product/service launches, and/or (3) broader, (possibly exclusive) supplier or customer relationships. During this part of the planning process any initiative that increases top-line revenues and profitability are fair game.

Prioritizing strategies. Once the brainstorming is complete and some very exciting, plausible growth opportunities have been identified, management should develop more detailed growth scenarios that quantify the anticipated revenue potential and resources required to launch these initiatives. In choosing its strategies management should also identify the long-term strategic advantage of each initiative. Ideally management should develop strategies that help to further differentiate the company's product or service as well as improve the company's defensible market position against competitors.

Planning reduces company risk. After identifying different scenarios management should then develop financial projections to determine if any additional financing is required to implement the growth plan. Many companies mistakenly believe it is less risky to use internal resources to implement their strategies. However, if the growth plan goes off track once launched, management could put the entire company at risk and find it very difficult to seek additional financing at favorable terms. By doing thorough up-front planning and seeking outside partners prior to launching the growth plan, management can effectively reduce the company's overall business risk while also pursuing specific growth initiatives.

Outside financing. As stated at the outset, high growth companies exist in all businesses, not just select high growth industries. Recent financing transactions show that institutional investors and investments banks also support growth in diverse industries. Thus, despite the doldrums for traditional venture capitalists, the current capital markets for established businesses in even basic industries like business services and manufacturing are significantly more robust. Further, to provide attractive financing alternatives to these companies, professional investment firms are increasing their use of customized financing products like subordinated debt and mezzanine financing. These financial products provide greater liquidity than bank debt and are also far less dilutive to a company's current ownership than traditional venture capital.

Putting it all together. If you and your management team have high growth ambitions, make sure you utilize a planning methodology that matches your growth aspirations. Companies that consider all strategic alternatives, refine their strategies with good prudent planning and work diligently to realize their well-thought out plan will consistently build substantial value for all their stakeholders over the long-term.

Chris Risey is a principal with Tunstall Consulting, Inc., specializing in strategy development and capital formation for high growth companies. He has been a resource expert for the Forums in Florida and can be reached in Tampa at (813) 968-4461 or by e-mail: crisey@tunstallconsulting.com.

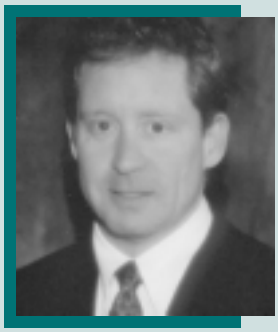
1 "High-Growth Companies: Mapping America's Entrepreneurial Landscape," July 2001, Study completed by National Commission on Entrepreneurship. Based on review of US Census data for several hundred thousand companies in existence from 1992-1997.

Finding More Profit: Look Inside *continued from page 6*

level of detail. Review the A items and develop an understanding of their drivers. How many of the B items can become A items in terms of inventory turnover? Look at the C's and ask how many can be eliminated as active items. Assign someone the task of reducing the investment in slow moving and inactive items. Cash tied up in those items can be a "windfall" benefit for your balance sheet.

Reviewing the purchasing and inventory areas within your company can provide significant opportunities to increase profitability quickly and without more investment. Look inside - you may be surprised at the results.

Member Profile: Jim Brost



***Jim Brost**, President*

Miniature Precision Components, Inc.

Wisconsin's 2001 Manufacturer of the Year

Title: President

Company: MPC is a recognized leader in the innovative design and production of world-class, thermoplastic quality parts for the expanding automotive and commercial industries. We employ 1,500 people in four manufacturing locations in the USA and Mexico.

Founded: 1972. In the first year of business an automotive check valve was developed, patented, and manufactured for Ford Motor Company.

Background: BS Mechanical Engineering, University of Wisconsin. MBA, Carnegie Mellon.

Age: 39

Residence: Fontana, Wisconsin

BIG PICTURE

Biggest plus of ownership: A "family" relationship with hundreds of co-workers, often spanning decades.

Biggest drawback of ownership: None, really. But the sense of responsibility to employees - to make their careers satisfying and rewarding - can be daunting (also, very motivating).

Greatest strengths: Persistence, patience, creativity.

Biggest weakness: Procrastinating or working around difficult people problems.

Smartest moves: Having great plant managers. Learning to focus on growth from a sales point of view.

Biggest mistake: Not realizing earlier the benefit of being a part of groups like the Executive Forum, Family Business Center, and Industry Action groups.

Biggest worries: I try not to worry; worrying never solved a problem or created an opportunity. Our safety record has been excellent. I think accidents to employees would be the closest I come to worrying.

DAILY ROUTINE

Most challenging task: Prioritizing and managing my own time. Pushing the envelope of growth and change without pushing too far.

Favorite task: Problem solving and continuous improvement on the plant floor. Having others see and do and say things just as I would have.

Least favorite task: Planning.

Greatest frustration: Resistance to change. Seeing competitors get business or survive because our customers aren't comfortable with having only one source for a product line.

Source of support or advice: My entire top management team. My Executive Forum Group.

Essential business tool: Lotus Notes.

DREAMS

Goal yet to be achieved: To make every under-hood plastic part for every vehicle made in North America.

Five-year vision: To grow 15% per year. To continue to diversify our customer base and product line.

First choice for new career or venture: Scuba charter guide, saltwater fishing guide - Key West, Florida.

PERSONAL

Most admired entrepreneur: Jay Brost, my dad and founder of MPC, for his salesmanship (especially the internal sale), creativity, energy, and risk-taking.

Most interested in meeting: Jimmy Buffett

Favorite pastimes: Tennis, boating.

Stress reducer: Crossword puzzles, reading, racquetball.

Last vacation: Longboat Key, Florida

Favorite book: "Undaunted Courage," Stephen Ambrose's account of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

Favorite sayings: Try a change. If it doesn't work out, you can always change back; or better yet, change "forward."

Favorite Web site: I like to look at competitors' web sites.

How has *Renaissance* Executive Forums helped your business? It has helped me focus in my role as a leader on the big picture of the company, instead of smaller issues. It has helped me realize the importance of the top managers working as a team, without hidden agendas, smoldering issues, and with direct and open communication.