

SECOND EDITION  
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# IT'S WHAT WE DO TOGETHER THAT COUNTS

*The BIC Alliance Story*



*A story about faith over adversity, perseverance, and entrepreneurship*

BY: EARL HEARD

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THE BIC ALLIANCE STORY

A STORY ABOUT FAITH  
OVER ADVERSITY,  
PERSEVERANCE, AND  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

EARL HEARD

EDITED BY TED MOON

*This book and the life about which it is written are dedicated to a loving and forgiving God, who has given me the strength to overcome adversity through faith, hard work and perseverance.*

*This book is also dedicated to my loving wife Bodi, our family, our fellow BICSTERS, staff, marketing partners and our loyal friends in business, industry and community.*

*I would like to give special thanks to Mike Bourgeois and Brady Porche for their hard work and dedication in helping to make my dream of publishing the first edition of this book become a reality. I also want to thank Ted Moon and Mark Peters who helped me update the book in 2018 and 2019 as part of our 35th anniversary of BIC Magazine. I also want to give a special thanks to Heather Cavalier who helped with the exceptional cover design and layout of both books and to Denise Simoneaux, who helped with our first edition. Lastly, I want to thank everyone who has prayed for us and supported us over the past three decades as we endeavored to produce "Media That Matters" to help our world become a better place.*

# Foreword

In the 14 years since the first edition of *It's What We Do Together That Counts*, there have been many significant milestones in my relationship with my father, Earl Heard, and BIC Alliance. The most significant was when Thomas Brinsko and I decided to join the family business. It has been twenty years since then, and it was a hard choice to make at the time. I remember a moment of panic when I encouraged Thomas to decline the offer. Thomas has always put our family first. My concern was that BIC would take precedence over our relationship and time with our children. Today, I can say Thomas works hard, but family is a priority.

The second major milestone occurred when my father and mother gifted Thomas and me 49% of BIC and IVS in December 2012. They said that we were partners, but making it official was thrilling. I felt Thomas had indeed been an intricate part of the company's growth; it was beautiful to see him recognized for his dedication to the business.

I'm very proud of the impact that BIC Alliance has in our community, particularly with regards to our ever-growing desire to help others in a faith-based environment. We have offered welding scholarships for local high school seniors that have an interest in the middle skills. As long as at least two BIC team members volunteer together, the company gives comp time to allow team members to serve in our community during the workday. We have supported local Christian charities with toy drives at Christmas. Thomas serves on local nonprofits to help make our community stronger. My father Earl has several charities that he actively supports, and his development of BIC Media Solutions to offer inspirational and faith/family-friendly media illustrates his spiritual growth and passion for sharing our family's blessings with others through "Media That Matters."

I am also proud of the prosperity of the company. It was a long hard struggle, which impacted both my parents and me personally. My parents remarried in 1987. Their love for each other today is a testament to hope and reconciliation. Each sacrificed much to keep BIC afloat in the early years. My parents went fifteen years without a vacation when they were building the business. It is impressive to see how much the company has grown.

We have a great team at the BIC Alliance. My father has instilled the mindset that we are family. I have seen how he celebrated milestones and struggled through hardships with many individuals that have passed through the BIC Alliance over the years.

In closing, seeing my father's delight as he celebrated BIC's 35th Anniversary was an unforgettable moment. He had worked hard for so long, and without a lot of support in the early years. It was a joy to see him celebrate and be celebrated. Our update of *It's What We Do Together That Counts* is part of our 35th anniversary celebration and a way of thanking everyone who has given our family their kindness and support over the years.

Hope you enjoy! ~ Dane Brinsko

## Introduction

In all honesty, no successful person can say that he or she attained success without help. I am no exception.

In fact, I could not easily list on these pages all those who have contributed to my success to date — particularly our marketing partners and the readers of the *Business & Industry Connection (BIC) magazine*, as well as the users of IVS Investment Banking, BIC Recruiting and BIC Media Solutions, where we offer custom publishing, film and television production, event planning and a speaker's bureau.

In gratitude for that assistance, and in an effort to help you achieve greater success in your life, I present the information in this book as more of a guide than a narrative. I encourage you to glean insights from these pages that you can use daily for the betterment of both your personal and business life.

I firmly believe that when we place God, family and friendship at the top of our priorities, instead of seeking fame and fortune at any cost, we find greater peace, happiness and success in our lives.

It has been said that to strike it rich, you must develop a niche. The kind of richness with which God has blessed my family encompasses far more than mere monetary success. For the truth is that financial success isn't the most important aspect of our lives that we should be concerned about enriching or bettering.

It is my fervent hope that the information contained in this book will be a blessing to you and your loved ones. It is also my prayer that you will share some of the “nuggets” you read here with others seeking greater peace, happiness and success in their lives. After you've read my story, you'll find additional words of wisdom, not only from me but from a host of successful executives and entrepreneurs in different industries whom we've had the privilege to meet and interview over the past three plus decades.

The entire Bible can be summarized in a few words from Jesus Christ: Make God first and do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

— Earl Heard —

*“You cannot be the slave both of God and of money ... Set your hearts on His kingdom first and on His righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you as well.”*

— Matthew 6:24 & 33 —

## Reader Beware!

The life of an entrepreneur is not for the lazy or the weak in spirit. Furthermore, if you're married and want to stay that way, it is important that your spouse be as strongly committed to your entrepreneurial dreams as you are. My wife Bodi and I are blessed to have come from families with entrepreneurial backgrounds whose marriages had weathered the storms that accompany the rollercoaster ride of entrepreneurship. This didn't make our journey easier, but it at least helped us to know what lay ahead.

Bodi and I have not only known folks who have gone from rags to riches, but also those who have gone from happy, financially comfortable lives to poverty and overwhelming sadness in the quest for entrepreneurial success. Our lives have been shaped by our adversities and touched by people we've known who have experienced divorce, bankruptcy, family feuds, depression, addiction and even suicide as direct results of failing to achieve their entrepreneurial dreams. Yes, we know both the joy and agony of entrepreneurship, but we are thankful that we can count ourselves among the minority of entrepreneurs who have lived up to their aspirations.

At one point in writing the BIC Alliance story, I came to a crossroads — I could have focused either on the positive things that have occurred during our lifetime or I could have launched into 100 pages of “woe-is-us” tales.

I could have written about all the hundreds of horror stories that Bodi and I, along with millions of other entrepreneurs, have lived. I could have gone into detail about letting down loved ones and friends, going without a vacation for 15 years and the stress of not knowing if you'll make it financially from one day to the next.

I could have described in great candor what it felt like to experience such things as the deaths of loved ones, merciless ridicule by peers, separation from family, divorce, bankruptcy and tax problems. I could tell you about the many folks who told Bodi and I we'd never rebuild our marriage or have a successful business. I could have told you about the day a banker told Bodi to get out of a drive-in lane because our car was smoking so badly or how the roof of an apartment in which we once lived fell in during a heavy rain. I could have talked at length about driving dilapidated cars and trucks that would break down on the way to work or about having to barter for food and lodging. I could have related one instance in which I flew to Dallas out of desperation in the middle of the night, using my dad's credit card for the fare, to try to sell a business that I'd poured my heart and soul into for pennies on the dollar — only to have my plea laughed at.

Some folks with whom I've spoken about this story reminded me of an age-old journalism rule — if it doesn't bleed, it doesn't lead. Others have suggested that by sharing how excruciatingly difficult our lives were from 1980 to 1994 — the BIC Alliance's formative years — it might inspire folks either to hang in there when the going gets tough or forget about becoming an entrepreneur at all.

However, my response to these people has been the same all along. It's true that a lot of

things have happened in our lives, and to others we know, that we'd never wish on another living soul — many of which we will touch upon in this story. But every form of adversity that Bodi and I faced has ultimately brought us closer to God and one another. We've since learned to focus on the positives of today and the opportunities and adventures of tomorrow rather than dwelling on the past.

We hope this story will help inspire those who wish to become successful entrepreneurs and/or business executives to persevere and maintain close relationships—both with God and those who care about them along the way.

More than 30 years ago, Bodi and I got some advice from the proprietor of an RV dealership that we'll never forget. The dealer told us that in our travels there would be times when we would journey down a road for miles, only to learn that our destination is closed. Our only option would be to back out carefully and start over. His words of wisdom were, “Always remember that you started out to enjoy an adventure that you'll remember for a lifetime.”

Your lifetime is an adventure to be enjoyed. We hope the road we've traveled along, with its various dead ends and detours, will inspire you and help to make your journey easier and happier both at work and at home, whether you're a successful entrepreneur or are just trying to make ends meet.

In my Alligator Management & Marketing seminars and keynote presentations, I utilize plenty of stories because people seem to remember stories and will relate personally by imagining themselves as the characters. Jesus, the greatest storyteller of all, often used stories in the Bible to help people learn and remember.

I figure that if this technique is worthy of the greatest teacher who ever lived, it's good enough for me.

## **Part I:**

# **The BIC Alliance Story**

## **A Childhood of Entrepreneurship**

To get an idea of where we're going in our lives, I believe it is essential to know where we've been. In my life, I've been up and down more times than a rollercoaster. I've enjoyed great successes, but as in the Old Testament story of Joseph, I know all about being thrown into a pit. Fortunately, I also know how to dig my way out, one handful of dirt at a time.

The thing to remember about digging our way out of our pitfalls is this: If we are passionate enough about what we do, and we dig in the right place long and hard enough, we'll hit pay dirt—spiritually, emotionally, personally and even financially.

I've had ample opportunity to practice this belief throughout my life. Early on, I learned to think of failures and problems as challenges, and this attitude has helped me to face and overcome obstacles in one way or another over the years. Let's face it — everyone has problems. But most of us like a good challenge. So isn't it better to think of the adversities we face as opportunities and turn them into doorways to adventure?

To accomplish this, I've always been able to draw on my internal drive and willingness to work hard. A hard work ethic was instilled in me at an early age by my parents, Leo and Margie Heard, and by my aunts and uncles. One of my favorite uncles, my mom's brother Bobby Crump, was my first mentor and one of the hardest working people I ever met.

My parents were raised on farms in North Louisiana with the understanding that if they didn't work, they didn't eat. From early childhood, my brother George, sister Ann and I always had chores to complete. We cut grass, trimmed hedges, washed dishes, cleaned toilets and made beds. We were taught that if we were fortunate enough to have something, along with it came the responsibility to keep it in tip-top condition.

We were also taught to save for a rainy day. Kids often dream of receiving the gift of their first bicycle — I'm the only person I know who had to save up his allowance to buy his own. Because I was taught to save, however, I didn't pout. Besides, the words of praise I received from my folks for having earned the money to buy the bike made me just as excited as receiving it. My wife Bodi has a wonderful way of thinking about the importance of saving. She always insists that it's not how much a person earns, but how much they have on hand when they need it that counts.

My parents not only expected us to do household chores, but also to be entrepreneurial. My dad came from a large family, and many of his five brothers and two sisters were entrepreneurs at different times in their lives. Some succeeded and others failed, but the ones who failed always tried again, which was inspiring to me.

One of Dad's brothers, my Uncle Roby, was a journalist for the L.A. Times. He used to mesmerize us kids with stories of Hollywood stars he'd met and written about, such as Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe, John Wayne and Howard Hughes. Who knows? Maybe hearing those stories from Uncle Roby and going to the picture show on Saturday mornings were what inspired me to become a filmmaker and TV producer in my later years. (More on that later.)

My brother George and I collected soda bottles to cash in for refunds, and we sold cold drinks at high school sporting events on Friday nights and at LSU football games on Saturday nights. As vendors, we learned quickly that we made more money lugging the drinks to the top of the stadiums instead of hanging out by the lower seats—we could sell more drinks since there was less competition up there. This taught us that by working harder and creating a niche market for ourselves, we could reap greater financial rewards.

There have been many times in my life when I've encountered folks who want to succeed in life as much as they can, but aren't willing to climb to the higher elevations where the greater opportunities lie. Others, however, climb the ladder of success the same way George and I used to make the journey to the high seats of LSU's Tiger Stadium — one step at a time.

On some occasions, we were encouraged to combine the skills honed while doing our household chores with entrepreneurship. For example, while other kids used their parents' lawn mowers to make money by cutting grass, my dad financed a lawn mower for me with the understanding that I would hire George and that we would pay him back by cutting yards throughout North Baton Rouge.

The competition was keen, but George and I built a loyal clientele because we would do additional things, such as cutting hedges, trimming sidewalks and raking — all things we knew how to do quite well because we always did them at home.

As a child, I was fortunate enough to be able to take advantage of another great opportunity — selling a booklet called TV Times door-to-door. I bought those TV schedules for a nickel apiece and sold them for a dime during the early days of television, when there was no such thing as TV Guide. Since the supplier would not take any returns, I learned quickly to keep selling until I was out of inventory. Likewise, time management was important because if I didn't complete sales before the first day of the TV schedule, my customers wouldn't buy the publication.

While selling TV Times, I learned additional lessons about the importance of saving money. You see, if I wanted to grow my territory, I needed to tap these savings in order to pay in advance. Neither the vendor nor my folks believed in advancing me the money to buy the next week's supply of booklets.

Another memorable experience from my TV Times sales days was the exhilaration I felt when using some of the money I saved to do something special for others.

On one occasion, my parents were on a trip to St. Louis, and my maternal grandmother kept us kids while they were away. Wanting to do something nice for our folks while they were on their trip, I used my TV Times savings to send them flowers, with a note attached telling them how much we loved and missed them. (My grandmother helped me because I was only about 10 years old at the time.)

This is my first recollection of having saved money for the specific purpose of giving to another person, and it gave me the sense of joy that comes from making someone else number one. Today, in my Alligator Management & Marketing sales and management training seminars, I share a secret from Les Gelpin's book, *People Smart* — when you make others number one, they will respond in kind.

I learned the joy of giving, and witnessed it many times firsthand from my mom and dad. Even though we were not very well off financially, my parents were always helping others whenever they could. This commitment began with making God first and tithing 10 percent of their income, plus giving something—their time, money or both—to others, regardless of our own family's circumstances at the time.

# Sink or Swim:

## *Turning Adversity Into Opportunity At the Pool*

Among my crowning achievements in elementary school was being selected as captain of a group known as the Patrol Boys. A troop of about 20 fifth and sixth graders, the Patrol Boys helped younger kids cross the street before and after school. Our job required us to arrive at school earlier than the other students, and our days were not done until all the younger kids were safely escorted back across the intersection near the school. This was the first time that I was given responsibility for the actions of others, and the experience introduced me to the world of management at an early age.

Another great lesson I learned at an early age was the importance of training.

I was one of those youngsters who was slow to develop athletic skills. By the time I was 12, almost every kid I knew already knew how to swim. But I didn't.

My dad's approach to teaching came from the old "sink or swim" school: he would take me to a public pool during peak attendance (or sometimes to a local river during family outings) and throw me into the deep end. Thinking I was going to drown, I'd cry and scream like a baby. Try to imagine the embarrassment I felt in a pool filled with my classmates and their parents or in a river swimming with my aunts, uncles and cousins!

I nearly drowned several times before I was 12, and had to be rescued by lifeguards and family members. Despite this, there was nothing I wanted to do more than learn to swim. As fate would have it, I would finally get my chance at the age of 15 when a lifeguard at Howell Park in Baton Rouge named Freddie Marks came into my life. Freddie took me under his wing and helped me overcome my fear of the water.

He taught me the basics of breathing and kicking as I clung tightly to the side of the pool. And, he told me that if I listened to him and practiced what he showed me, I would soon become a great swimmer—and maybe one day even a skilled lifeguard. Freddie and his fellow lifeguards at Howell Park were the first of my many safety mentors.

Freddie's patience and encouragement helped me overcome my fears, and soon I was swimming like a fish. Once I did learn, my new dream (which Freddie and the other lifeguards helped spark) was to become a lifeguard so that I could pass on what I learned and help non-swimmers master the art. At 15, I got a job at the pool as a basket room attendant, which gave me the chance to practice swimming every day.

By the time I was 16, I had earned my lifeguard badge and was a lifeguard and swimming instructor at the local pool. (Freddie, my mentor and friend, was the lead lifeguard.) Over the next two years, I taught children, adults and handicapped people to swim and saved numerous lives. I considered my lifeguard position to be truly the best job in the world.

Progressing from near drowning victim to lifeguard taught me that anything is possible with

God's guiding hand. The experience showed me how to turn adversity into an adventure, and sparked a passion for mentoring and training others that is still very much alive in me today at the age of 77.

God blessed me with the ability and patience to train others. Over the past six decades, I have trained hundreds, if not thousands, of people in the art and techniques of fire and safety, technical skills, management, marketing and sales. I have taught people how to save lives, manage other people, conduct sales presentations and seminars, and build successful, multimillion dollar organizations. I have also counseled many folks who were starting new businesses — some of whom had lost everything in previous business ventures and were starting over.

I, however, was a slow learner who had to work very hard to succeed. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why I have always identified with the trainee and imagined myself in his or her situation in every instance. Adopting a feeling of empathy — learning to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand their experiences and emotions — is one of the most important keys to being a successful trainer and leader. Remember — there is a world of difference between empathy and sympathy, the feeling that you care about and are sorry for someone else's misfortunes or sorrow. While we need both, empathy is the most critical to leadership.

Like many other cities and towns across America, Baton Rouge had a railroad track that separated the more affluent area of town from the predominantly blue-collar area. Our family lived in North Baton Rouge near the industrial plants, where most of the hourly wage earning folks lived. Growing up in that environment helped me become a better manager and entrepreneur because, I learned to empathize with others through the experiences of my daily life.

While still in high school, I picked up one of my most useful learning tools: journal keeping. I found that recording my thoughts, experiences and new ideas in a daily journal was an excellent way to help me remember things that I might otherwise forget and capture lessons learned that I could share with others. I've written some of my best ideas and inspirations in these daily journals over the years, which is why I continue the practice to this day.

There are many other invaluable training lessons and tips that I've acquired over the years. For example, I've found that one of the most effective elements of training is repetition. Simply put, repetition involves first telling the trainee what they are about to learn, then showing or teaching them, then letting them do it while you or someone else critiques them. Of course, during the critique, it is important to be encouraging—don't just lay down a litany of things they might have done wrong. Start with an encouraging message of something they did correctly and then diplomatically point out the thing that they could do differently to improve.

I've also learned that both trainers and trainees must have patience and do what they can to make learning exciting and fun. As my good friend Charles "Peanut" Hull used to say, you should learn something new every day — and never stop.

## **From Football Cheerleader to Boardroom Cheerleader**

Between junior high school and my attendance at LSU and Louisiana College — a Baptist institution of higher learning in Pineville, La. — several things happened that helped forge the kind of person I would later become.

In the midst of all our entrepreneurial endeavors, my siblings and I were expected to keep up our grades, which we did. I was an above average student in high school — until I began taking algebra, biology and chemistry. I always loved reading, English, social studies and history and thought that one day I would become a history and social studies teacher.

I found adventure in books — they helped fuel my desire for achievement and success. My favorite books usually weren't fictional. I loved reading about real-life heroes and entrepreneurs who were able to build something out of nothing. Since I grew up in the 1940s, there was no television in our home until I was in the sixth grade — so, reading became an integral part of my life.

I particularly liked books about history, especially the autobiographies of American heroes such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Jackson.

As my interest in management and entrepreneurship grew, I began reading, watching and collecting everything I could about individuals who overcame adversity and achieved success. Today, my libraries at home and at work are chock full of books and movies about management and entrepreneurship. Among my most favorite books are those about how to deal effectively with people, entrepreneurship and the power of networking, which I define as “getting together to get ahead.”

Like books, movies also stirred a sense of adventure in me. On Saturday mornings, we'd go to the movie theater downtown, where we'd watch good cowboys like Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and the Lone Ranger in their white hats track down the bad guys in their black hats. Every great cowboy had a sidekick who was there through thick and thin — Roy Rogers had Dale Evans and Gabby Hayes, and the Lone Ranger had Tonto. This taught us kids that when push comes to shove, our success in life depends on doing right and having a good sidekick or two in our corner. Like all families, we occasionally squabbled among ourselves, but in times of adversity we stuck together. These experiences taught me the role of teamwork and networking in success, whether it be in business or in one's personal life.

I cannot overestimate the role that my participation in extracurricular activities in junior high and high school — such as the Thespians and the Journalism Club — played in shaping my future. Upon joining the Journalism Club, I took the subject as an elective. Since I was poor in spelling and had no creative design skills, my teacher, Mr. Case, concluded that I could only pass the class by coordinating sales for the school newspaper. This would become another destiny-shaping development.

Mr. Case loaned us his car to make sales calls. It didn't take long to dawn on me that I could seize the opportunity afforded by access to this automobile to become an even better sales coordinator.

I loved selling and training others to sell, so I took to advertising sales like a fish to water. I decided to use Mr. Case's car as a motivational tool for our sales team, an idea that worked very well. Teenagers all, whichever member of our sales crew sold the most each day got to drive the teacher's car back to school from the sales calls. As you might imagine, I could hardly have chosen a more powerful motivator for this age group. As a result, sales took off and we were very successful. My lifelong friend Edwin Butler and I were the top sales producers.

During the ninth grade at Prescott Junior High School in Baton Rouge, I considered going out for football — not because I liked playing football or was gifted in sports, but because football players were among the most popular kids in North Baton Rouge. More importantly, the girls seemed to be attracted to athletes and popularity.

In the late 1950s, Istrouma High School and arch-rival Baton Rouge High School typically ranked among the state's championship teams in class triple-A sports. Football was king in Louisiana at that time, just as it is today. It was typical to have more than 20,000 people in attendance at an Istrouma High School football game on any given Friday night. On Thanksgivings, our family would first travel all the way to North Louisiana to attend the annual Haynesville High School-Homer High School football game, then onward to Shreveport to watch LSU play the University of Arkansas.

Those involved in sports were the heroes of the day. By the time I was in junior high, I had stopped selling drinks at high school football games, but would continue selling them at LSU games until my junior year of high school.

Of course, nearly everyone who played high school football in Louisiana dreamed of attending LSU or Tulane and becoming an All-American like our high school and college heroes, Billy Cannon of Istrouma High and Jim Taylor of Baton Rouge High. (Another one of my childhood football favorites was North Louisiana's John David Crow, who went on to play for Texas A&M.) Many young men of that era who played football at Istrouma Junior High and Prescott High School later played on LSU's first national championship team in 1958. Many of these same players went on to become All-Stars in professional sports.

But there I was—a skinny, not particularly athletic kid who had aspirations of fame and fortune on the gridiron. I'll never forget standing under the goalpost watching the coaches and football players at practice. Seeing the coaches holler at the players while they limped to the sidelines, I was beginning to wonder if football really was for me.

Everyone marches to the beat of a different drummer. At that moment, I realized that maybe I wasn't cut out—either physically or mentally—to march to the drumbeat of a football star. I had to find something that better fit my personality.

As I stood there agonizing about my athletic future, I was distracted by the cheerleaders and pepsters who were practicing along the sidelines. Watching all of those beautiful girls jumping, laughing, dancing and having the time of their lives was like finding an oasis in the middle of

the desert.

Laughter is soothing to the soul, and people always seem to like having others around who can make them laugh. In the midst of such merriment, and right in the middle of those beautiful girls, I saw a few male cheerleaders also having the time of their lives.

Right then and there, I made a monumental decision that I have never regretted — I tried out for cheerleading on the junior high school squad. I went on to become a cheerleader at Istrouma High School during the heyday of high school athletics in Louisiana.

My brother and sister followed my lead. At one point, we were all cheerleaders at different schools.

I loved cheering for our teams and providing the moral support that drove them to greatness on the football field, basketball court and baseball diamond. Cheerleading opened the door to a joyous high school experience filled with adventure. I got to ride to the ball games in the pepster bus, made lots of great friends and, with my confidence built and my social skills refined, I was chosen the “Wittiest Boy” in my senior high school class.

From the outset, I learned that the only person we should laugh at is the one looking back at us in the mirror. For everyone else, we should laugh with, not at, them. And if something isn’t funny for all, it’s not funny at all. I also learned not to be afraid to march to the beat of a different drum and to focus on my own strengths. That’s when I made the decision that I would go further in life by being friendly and kind than I would by being smart.

It was during this time that I also learned the “Power of Recognition” — cheering on others and recognizing them for their accomplishments. I saw this power play out from my earliest days as a cheerleader, and any time I gave an encouraging word or compliment to the editors and writers of the school newspaper. People love being recognized for something they do well. Not only does it make them feel valued for their efforts, but it also motivates them to keep going—much more than criticism or an unkind word ever could.

So there I was, a popular cheerleader during the school year and a lifeguard at the most popular swimming pool in the summer — not a bad life for a skinny, slow learner with marginal athletic abilities. (As for my own athletic career, I did play church basketball as a youth, and the sport has become my favorite — to me, there is no better game for teaching teamwork and the art of the come-from-behind victory.)

I was even able to go on a few dates in my dad’s 1950 automobile. Like all cars my folks bought, this one was a six-cylinder with four doors and no whitewall tires. My brother George and I kept that car spotless, partly because we shared the privilege of borrowing it for dates. I fondly remember Dad feeling the car’s hood the morning after George or I had borrowed the car to see how warm it was, and therefore how late we’d stayed out. My brother and I each dreamed of the day when we could purchase vehicles of our own.

Little did I know at the time that one day my career would flourish as a cheerleader and trainer of fire and safety professionals, business and industry executives, and sales and marketing personnel — and ultimately the owner of various luxury vehicles. Although it took me nearly 40 years, I was finally able to buy a souped-up 1950 Chevy in the early 2000s, much like the one my dad owned all those years ago.

## **Finding the True Love of My Life the Hard Way**

My parents' deep religious beliefs—they regularly attended church for Sunday services and Wednesday night prayer meetings—greatly impacted the first 20 years of my life. I accepted Christ at an early age and attended church regularly, but more to please my parents than to become a strong Christian.

However, I do remember becoming so inspired by the word of God on one occasion that I attempted to read the Bible from cover to cover. I didn't quite meet that objective, but I did find many wonderful stories that meant a lot to me.

I have since read the Bible regularly throughout my life and found it a boundless source of inspiration. The Bible's consistent use of parables to deliver God's word was particularly impactful and taught me the power of using stories to drive home a point. It is a technique that I have used throughout my training and mentoring career.

Because of my family's devotion to the Baptist faith, I attended a summer youth camp one year in Ridgecrest, N. C., where I met my first love and learned another monumental lesson—an "Earl's Pearl"—about life. She was a devout Baptist and an honor student at a high school in Shreveport, La. We planned to attend Louisiana College together when she graduated (I was one year ahead of her).

As time progressed, several circumstances started taking their toll on our relationship. Among them, I didn't quite meet the expectations of her family, especially her older sister, who was a beauty queen, an honor student and dated a football star. They also didn't consider me as devout a Baptist as she was, and I hailed from Baton Rouge, which was nearly 250 miles from Shreveport. Since my family didn't have much money — my allowance was a meager \$5 a week — I never owned a vehicle and had to hitchhike to Shreveport from Baton Rouge for visits.

Because my girlfriend's sister also attended Louisiana College, I could occasionally get a ride back to Pineville from Shreveport with the family. One Sunday after church, her parents drove her sister and me back to Louisiana College, and my girlfriend came along for the ride. Just north of Natchitoches, La., we encountered a young man hitchhiking. I noticed that he had a Northwestern Louisiana College insignia on his travel bag. Being a fellow college hitchhiker,

I suggested that her dad give the young student a ride, and he did.

The young fellow was in the car for less than 20 minutes, but that was plenty enough time for him to become acquainted and mention that his half-sister attended the same high school as my girlfriend. The good deed that I innocently recommended on behalf of this young stranger set the stage for consequences I could hardly have imagined and definitely did not intend.

About six weeks later, I went back to Shreveport only to learn that the hitchhiker was now dating my first love and that our courtship was finished! Broken hearted, I hit the road back home, hitchhiking in the middle of the night and crying the whole trip.

Little did I know that this heartbreak would actually become one of the most significant turning points and greatest learning experiences of my life. As I walked along the highway that night with only the moon to light the way, I prayed to God to relieve my pain and to help me find the true, lasting love of my life.

God answered my prayer less than two years later when I met my future wife — Mary Alice Bodi, or “Bodi,” as she is commonly known. But as I continued along that dark highway that night, I pondered the reasons why the hitchhiker was chosen instead of me. I surmised that it was because his family had more money than mine and, therefore, he seemed to have a more promising future.

The pain of that night helped me to clearly realize that just because we think we’re headed in the right direction doesn’t necessarily mean there isn’t an alternative path God has planned that might bring us greater peace, joy and happiness. Looking back now, it is obvious that I had become someone who was more interested in having fun than studying hard and creating meaningful relationships. From that day forward, I resolved to set my goals higher, work harder, earn more and win greater respect from those I cared about.

By the time I arrived in Pineville in the wee hours of the morning, I had convinced myself that a better, happier life lay ahead—all I needed to do was go for it. Thinking back to that incident of more than five decades ago, I’m certain God positioned the hitchhiker on that highway for everyone’s sake. Up to that point, my dream was to become a junior high or high school history teacher and basketball coach. While these are admirable careers, God instead directed me to become an entrepreneur and a mentor of men and women.

The experience also taught me to try harder and be kinder in my relationships, especially with my family and friends. Today, I am one of the happiest husbands, fathers and grandfathers I know, and I am enjoying the fruits of having built, from scratch, one of the most successful industrial marketing and communications businesses in the United States. What’s more, Bodi has been a better wife than I could have imagined and an inspiration to me in both good times and bad.

The night was just one of several challenging times in my life—challenges that I managed to turn into opportunities for growth. It stirred within me a passion for sharing inspiring stories that would help others find greater faith, hope, peace, happiness and success through “Media That Matters.”

It’s all about mindset. You can give up or you can give it your all. I have always given it my all and have worked to help those who do the same.

Once you’re in the pit of adversity, you are presented with only two choices — dig harder and climb out, or do nothing and get covered with dirt. I am living proof that perseverance prevails and that tomorrow will be better than today if you believe it will. When adversity rears its ugly head, just put on your inner smile and say to yourself, “Here I go on another adventure.”

## **A Career Forged by Explosion and Fire at Ethyl Corp.**

In 1962, I left college after having attended for several years to become a bricklayer apprentice and, later, a journeyman carpenter with Union Local 1098 in Baton Rouge. Looking back, I often wish that I'd finished college — these days I encourage everyone to get as much formal education as possible. I do believe, however, that the key to success in business involves more than just a college education. It requires a lifetime of learning, a willingness to work hard, and, most importantly, the ability to communicate, empathize and network with others for mutual benefit.

My mother, God bless her soul, was my greatest role model. When I dropped out of college, she took me to see her brother, my Uncle Bender, and asked him to give me the hardest job he had. You see, my uncle was a self-made millionaire in the construction business—he worked hard and amassed a personal fortune building new homes in South Louisiana for returning GIs after World War II. My mother hoped that the experience of working a grueling construction job would be enough to motivate me to return to school. In reality, the experience showed me how an entrepreneur lived and worked, and prompted me to be more like him rather than go back to school.

For several years, I worked on many commercial and industrial construction jobs in South Louisiana. I did carpentry work during the week, and on the weekends I mixed mortar and learned how to lay brick. Mixing mortar with a hoe and keeping up with the bricks and scaffold for three bricklayers certainly helped to make a man out of me.

One day in my early 20s, I was driving around Baton Rouge when I spotted about 20,000 bricks stacked in front of a beautiful home. I stopped, knocked on the door and asked the owner if he and his wife had chosen anyone to lay the bricks, which were to be used to build fences, flower beds, etc. He told me they were in the process of getting bids and asked if I knew someone who could do a good job.

Even though I'd spent much more time chopping mortar than laying brick, I knew how to bid work and told the man that I'd like to bid for the job. I gave him a price, along with an estimated date of completion, and asked him if he'd let me do the work on weekends. Surprisingly, he accepted my terms and gave me the job, which I immediately subcontracted to my older friends (the very same friends who had been using me as a laborer on their bricklaying jobs). We attacked the project in earnest and pushed hard to complete it, since we each had day jobs.

As long as we were building fences and being paid by the thousand of bricks we laid, things went well. But when we got to the slow and tedious work of building flower beds and other non-fence tasks, my older partners no longer wanted to see the project through, so they loaded up and headed home.

Since I'd made a promise to complete the job by an agreed upon time, I had no choice but to work throughout the night, using only the headlights of my car to light the area. Once the job was completed (on time), the homeowner shared why he'd selected me over more experienced craftsmen: he sincerely believed that I'd accomplish what I said I would. In the end, his words of praise meant more to me than the profits gained from the job. Another day, another valuable lesson about the importance of hard work — and keeping promises!

This experience created another one of my "Earl's Pearls"—once a job has begun, don't leave it until it is done!

My fellow bricklayers were a lot of fun to work with, and they good-naturedly picked on me a lot. They taught me the importance of having fun at work through friendly competition and how competition can be used as a motivator for reaching a common goal. As laborers, we competed over who could mix the most mortar, and the bricklayers competed to see who could correctly lay the most brick in a day.

On one occasion, I chopped mortar for an entire day and earned \$20 in cash. That evening, I left in such a hurry to get home for a date with Bodi that I passed another car on the shoulder of the road and was ticketed by a police officer — the fine was \$24. Despite my pleas, the officer cut me no slack. To this day, when I see someone in such a hurry that they take an unnecessary risk, whether it be on the road or in the game of life, I recall this experience. (Let us all remember the lesson outlined in the story of the tortoise and the hare — going about things in a slow, deliberate pace can often lead to greater success than taking the path of haste.)

Bodi and I were married on August 30, 1963. Not long after, she graduated from beauty school and became a hair stylist. We worked hard, saved our money, and six months after our wedding, purchased our first home. My friends and family gave us the down payment and also helped us lay brick one weekend.

In 1965, we were in Monterrey, Mexico, on our first vacation together. After spending a few hours enjoying the city's attractions, I returned to our hotel to retrieve some pocket money. That's when I received a call from my mom, who had tracked me down through the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey, informing me that I was to report for a job interview with Ethyl Corporation (now Albemarle). Bodi and I left for home immediately, driving almost 18 hours straight through without any sleep.

I ran a 101-degree fever during the interview. The Ethyl executive interviewing me asked how badly I wanted to work for the company — when I informed him that I'd driven all the way from Mexico he was quite impressed. Despite my discomfort, the interview went well and I was offered the job. I went to work as an operator trainee at Ethyl, thinking I had died and gone to heaven. No longer would I have to worry about rainouts and strikes, hindrances

common to carpentry work and bricklaying.

Out of that experience, I learned another Earl's Pearl: the importance of being able to switch course quickly in times of adversity — or, better yet, times of opportunity. I also considered it a miracle that my mom was able to track us down in a city of nearly 1 million people in a foreign country—just one of the many blessings that Bodi and I have experienced in our life together.

From my first day at Ethyl as an operator trainee, I was confident that achieving the rank of supervisor was an attainable goal. Having come from the hard-work environment of bricklaying and carpentry work, I knew that no job at Ethyl would be more physically challenging. But I also knew that without a formal education, I'd have to work harder and perfect my people skills. On the other hand, I knew quite well how to compete fairly and to make work fun for myself and others.

Now, I thought, all I needed to do was learn the jobs and learn how to manage people.

My time at Ethyl taught me many Earl's Pearls that I still use and share today. I learned about mentor-protégé relationships, effective people management skills and proper responses to life-and-death situations. I was reminded of the rich benefits of keeping personal journals and daily activity reports — the simple act of writing something and referencing it afterward is one of the best learning techniques in the world. I also learned about the importance of networking with industry peers and dealing effectively with change.

I had the great fortune of working with and learning from dozens of great mentors at Ethyl, but the ones who stand out the most include Joe Andre, a foreman who was also an entrepreneur in his spare time; foremen Ted Crawford and Hodgie Fredericks; Plant Manager Merlin Keonecke; Superintendents Quentin Hall and Dale Motsinger; and the other good men who became foremen or supervisors along with me — Charles "Peanut" Hull, Henry Currie, Jules Leblanc and George Newbill.

During my nearly 16-year tenure at Ethyl (from 1965 to 1980), I also met some of the best operations and fire-and-safety trainers in the world, including the legendary Red Adair; Bill Koen of Exxon; Buddy Irby of Mobay; John Quincy Adams of Enterprise Products Partners; Carol Herring of the LSU Fire and Emergency Training Institute; Boots and Coots; and Dwight Williams and his dad, Les Williams, of Williams Fire and Safety (now Williams Fire and Hazard Control). Nicky Prejean of Southland Fire & Safety Equipment and Dave Dewey of Vallen (now vice president of Gas and Supply) also became good friends of mine and were early supporters of BIC.

Early on in my Ethyl career, I was assigned to operator Joe Andre, who was promoted to foreman shortly after. Mr. Andre gave me a piece of advice that became another Earl's Pearl: he advised me to get on shifts with older, more experienced operators who would take me under their wings and show me the ropes. He said this would provide a better learning experience than working with shifts of younger men who would spend a lot of their time talking about fishing and football.

Now don't get me wrong, I loved leisure activities and sports as much as anyone. But I knew that the more money I earned, the wider my range of leisure options would be.

Mr. Andre also stressed the importance of listening carefully, especially to instructors and even to the sound of equipment. He and my other mentors at Ethyl taught me not only to listen, but to speak up by asking questions first.

In later years, I developed a process called "Listening for Success" for my Alligator Management & Marketing seminars, which was built on the fundamental principles I first learned from Mr. Andre. And to help people of all ages learn the art and skill of listening, we published

Michael Learns To Listen as part of BIC's "Media That Matters" library.

Right out of the gate, Mr. Andre told my co-worker Robert Wasson (now deceased) and me how our relationship with him would go: he was the brains and we were the brawn. He also said he would take credit when we did things right and blame us when things went wrong, but he was willing to share everything he knew with us. However, if there was any hard physical labor to be done—climbing ladders, fire- or explosion-related work—we would be the ones handling that.

In addition, he shared with us how shift work could be used to our advantage. By working on our days off, we could increase our personal revenue, start a side business or pursue some other cash-generating venture (just as Mr. Andre had done). In time, we grew to love and respect Mr. Andre, and he treated us like his sons.

Two months to the day after starting work, I experienced my first industrial explosion and fire when the Number Four Ethyl Chloride Plant blew up right before my eyes. I was loading a tank car about half a mile from the unit, but I immediately headed over to the explosion site.

Frank Richardson — one of my first supervisors, best friends and the first person to arrive at the tank car location — showed me how to isolate the lines to and from the Number Four Unit. I learned that you shouldn't try to extinguish a hydrocarbon fire completely, but cut off the fuel source instead. You should also keep the unit cool and let the fire burn out in a controlled environment. (Extinguishing such a fire would leave a vapor cloud that could find a new heat source and create an even bigger explosion and fire.)

More than 50 years ago, I learned through this (and other experiences) that in times of crisis and opportunity, we need to think three-dimensionally and take a few seconds to weigh our options.

That day, I saw firsthand the importance of teamwork and training. I also learned how to interact with crews at Exxon and other nearby plants and how mutual aid brought the best firefighters in the area together in only minutes.

We fought that fire, shut down nearby units and cooled the area without relief for more than eight hours. Even though damage estimates totaled in the millions of dollars, we were thankful that no one was killed. After the fire, I was assigned to a maintenance turnaround group and worked 12 hours per day for several months until we got the unit back online.

I learned so much that day about the importance of fire and safety training, and the experience showed me how I could punch my ticket toward continued career success at Ethyl Corporation. I dedicated myself to learning everything I could about safety and training others, particularly in times of danger or adversity. I spent the rest of my time at Ethyl as a member of the fire brigade and later became an instructor. Seeing friends and loved ones killed and severely injured, both on and off the job, has made me a lifelong advocate of safety awareness in both settings.

During the next 15 years, I rose from operator trainee to operator, foreman, assistant general foreman, general foreman and ultimately, to training coordinator for the entire hydrocarbon operations department. It took me from 1965 to 1970 to make foreman and, during those five years, I turned down overtime only twice. My co-workers nicknamed me "Cabbage Hog" because not only did I take all the overtime offered, I also maintained my journeyman carpentry membership in Union Local 1098 and worked most of my days off and vacations on major construction jobs and/or turnarounds at local plants. My mother-in-law, Yvonne Bodi, was the secretary for the Carpenters Local Union, and she always helped me get extra work when it was available.

Since I was weak in chemistry and a slow learner, I knew I had to work harder and study more than most of the other operators at Ethyl. I also noted that companies will offer

advancement opportunities to those who want to get ahead rather than those who just want to get by.

I learned early on that if you want to advance within an organization, you should keep company with those who share your mindset. So, while many of my cohorts shot the bull or cooked their favorite Cajun foods, I'd spend my free time tracing line or talking with the old-timers about what to do during emergency conditions such as fires.

As a volunteer for Ethyl's fire brigade, I also trained extensively with the fire schools at Texas A&M, LSU and Lamar, and offshore with Bill Koen of Exxon (now ExxonMobil). Video was just being introduced as a training tool, so I learned how to shoot, edit and produce training tapes. Even before the days of video, I produced Super 8 home safety tapes for my safety meetings at Ethyl.

My love for training enabled me to become a process trainer as an operator and later as a foreman. I became active in the American Petroleum Institute's (API) Training Conference, where the best refinery and petrochemical trainers in the world came together to share information and best practices with one another. I also became an active member of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD).

Ethyl was a wonderful place to work because the company was committed to training. The Gottwald family, who were Ethyl's primary shareholders at the time, were strong believers in effective management and safety training, which made the company a great place to develop leadership skills. There were ample opportunities for any employee interested in getting involved in its training programs.

During my time at Ethyl, I also began to hone my skills in networking—getting together to get ahead. The goal was not just for me to get ahead—if that was my sole purpose, then my networking aspirations would have gone nowhere quick. No, everyone that I networked and worked with would have to benefit—and then each of us would give back to others and draw more people into the networking community.

This early networking was done largely face-to-face and by word of mouth, out of necessity. This was well before cell phones, the Internet, or even fax machines. My ability to grow a network of business associates and personal friends at this time earned me the reputation as “The inventor of networking before there was a computer.”

In the mid-1960s, the Vietnam conflict was in full swing, and many of my friends were drafted. Initially, those of draft age who were married, and some who worked in the industry, were draft exempt. But that was to change. By 1966, I knew it was only a matter of time before I would be drafted. So I joined the U.S. Army Reserve and was assigned to the 4010th Unit, based in Baton Rouge.

I went to basic training in 1967 at Fort Knox, Ky., and spent six years on active reserve status, attending monthly meetings and summer camps at places like Fort Polk, La. and Fort Hood, Texas. In order to make the meetings without losing pay, I'd swap my days off at Ethyl with co-workers. This, coupled with the fact that days off were determined by seniority, meant that I worked about seven years with few weekends off.

My time in the Army Reserve gave me a new respect for America's armed forces, especially the career soldiers and drill instructors. At one point, I even considered converting my reserve status and joining the Army full time.

Throughout my six-year stint in the Army Reserve, I used my carpentry experience and training expertise to help train fellow reservists. Watching the methodical way in which the Army trained recruits enabled me to integrate many of its techniques into my operator and fire

safety training at Ethyl, and later as a training and management consultant.

The year 1970 was a pivotal one for me, both in my career and personal life. On August 6, Bodi and I became the proud parents of a beautiful baby daughter, Dane. It was by far one of the greatest moments of our life together. Later that year, I advanced to wage roll foreman, becoming one of the youngest foremen ever promoted during that period at Ethyl's Baton Rouge facility.

The transition from wage earner to management brought with it a whole new set of challenges and adventures. Instead of continuing to be viewed as one of the guys by my co-workers, I was now looked upon as an outsider. The fact that most of my fellow supervisors were about 20 years my senior presented more challenges.

There were times in the beginning when Bodi and I would attend social events only to be shunned by those who previously had been close friends of ours. There were some who wouldn't socialize with us because they believed in a strong division between labor and management, and still others who had been put off by my then-inadequate management skills. This prompted us to turn another adverse situation into a blessing: our response was to buy a boat and travel trailer so that we could enjoy more family leisure activities such as fishing and camping on our own.

Since my status in the reserve and my seniority at Ethyl meant I was off on weekdays only, and since our daughter was at an age that allowed us to travel, we were able to enjoy trips along the entire Gulf South. This drew Bodi, Dane and me closer together and helped forge the great love for quality leisure time and adventure that we continue to share to this day.

Whenever we had free time, we'd hook onto our boat and trailer and take off on a camping adventure. Even though these excursions took place about 50 years ago, they served as the inspiration for The Leisure Connection magazine, which I launched in 2002 and relaunched as The Leisure Connection TV series in 2018.

Meanwhile, because I had little to no management experience, I had to learn to manage people at work the hard way, which meant making numerous mistakes in my new role. In the beginning, instead of treating folks the way they would like to have been treated, I made the mistake of treating others the way they treated me. I learned through the school of hard knocks that treating others with respect accomplishes much more than taking a dictatorial approach. Thankfully, pros like Mr. Keonecke, Mr. Hall, Herb Olson and others took me by the hand — and, sometimes, by the throat — and taught me to manage others with empathy, compassion and understanding. Under their guidance, I learned how to listen more, communicate better and always remember that there are two sides to every story. This insight served me well and became yet another Earl's Pearl that I've shared with others over the years.

But as I said, I had to learn things like this the hard way. On one occasion in my first management role, my supervisor, Mr. Hall, called me to his office and told me that if I couldn't become a better manager, he'd be forced to cut me back to operator. I was crushed because I felt that I was doing a better job and getting more done than other new supervisors. However, Mr. Hall explained that it wasn't just a matter of getting things done. Equally important, I had to get things done diplomatically.

He told me to go home, think about it and let him know if I could meet his standards. I went home disappointed, hurt and ready to resign. I was preparing myself to go back to work in the construction industry.

I'll never forget Bodi's response. She said, "Earl, how is it that these men who knew so much when they selected you as a foreman over dozens of other candidates now know so little?"

Don't you respect them enough to follow their advice and leadership?"

She closed by saying that she would always love me, but would respect me more if I'd listen more closely to, and follow the advice of, the people who genuinely cared about me. The next day, I returned to Mr. Hall, the other management folks, union officials, shift workers and maintenance crew and apologized for my behavior. Within a few years, I progressed from one of the least popular supervisors to one of the most admired and respected. This was one of the greatest triumphs of my life, right up there with becoming a lifeguard.

When asked why people chose my shift, they said that they always knew where they stood with me. And in times of crisis, my people considered me a great leader because I put their safety first.

There are several key points about that time that I shall remember forever. First, I am grateful for Mr. Hall's willingness to give me another chance as a manager, when he could have just as easily demoted me to operator. Second, I'm thankful for Bodi's words of wisdom, which changed the course of our life for the better. And third, I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn how to apply the "TEAM" approach, which means that "Together, Everyone Accomplishes More."

"It's what we do together that counts" became my favorite phrase almost 50 years ago—and it's one that I've used as a guiding principle ever since.

## **A Rude Awakening**

Ethyl Corp. had been good to Bodi and me. My employment there enabled us to carve out a comfortable living, and I learned myriad lessons and Earl's Pearls about professionalism, training, management, networking and safety, among other things. By 1980, however, my interest in a lifetime career at Ethyl had dwindled. Instead of being excited about going to work as I'd been for several years, I began to think about career opportunities and adventures beyond the gates of the plant.

An entrepreneur once told me that the gates around any business are built not only to keep intruders from trespassing, but also to keep workers from leaving. I believe, however, that we sometimes build gates around our own minds—gates that confine our imagination and limit our opportunities for advancement by lulling us into complacency.

Don't get me wrong — I've known thousands of folks who retired from long-term careers in business and industry who've enjoyed every moment and still enjoy their lives to the fullest. Working at Ethyl had been tremendously fulfilling for me in many ways. It helped build my

confidence and a network of contacts across industry, and it also made me fearless when it came to facing failure.

I'd risen from an operator trainer to a general foreman and training coordinator in a relatively short time. I'd learned how to manage people effectively, face life-and-death situations such as fires and explosions without fear, deal with unions and disgruntled employees and handle the tedium of doing the same things day in and day out. I'd also learned how to think fast during times of challenge and opportunity.

However, the thought of doing the same thing for another 40-50 years — not to mention listening to co-workers talk about how tough things were and how many great opportunities there were beyond the gates — inspired me to shoot for more. Besides, by the late '70s and into the early '80s, there was great regulatory pressure from the newly formed Environmental Protection Agency on industrial corporations across America to clean up their act. This meant that practices that were traditionally seen as commonplace, such as dumping effluents down a drain and out into the Mississippi River, would no longer be tolerated.

In Baton Rouge, Ethyl's main products were tetraethyl lead, a gasoline additive, along with ethyl chloride, VCL and several other chlorinated hydrocarbons. These were all more strictly regulated due to environmental and safety concerns. I was high enough up in the company to know that, sooner rather than later, some of these products would be phased out.

At the same time, many of the shift workers on these product lines would be let go. I realized that nobody was going to swoop in and save my job—I'd have to take care of my family and myself.

However, my time at Ethyl had been rewarding. Not only had Ethyl helped build my confidence and management skills, it also gave me firsthand lessons in the power of networking every day and how to think "outside the box." I had the opportunity to meet and network with successful entrepreneurs like Mr. Andre, Nicky Prejean of Southland Fire & Safety Equipment, Barry Hardy of Training & Development Systems, and dozens of others who dared to leave the confines of industry for the adventures of entrepreneurship. I'd watched my own dad, who went blind at age 38, build a successful business after being laid off from a plant only two months before becoming eligible for disability retirement and I'd witnessed my uncles — Bobby Crump and my dad's five brothers — and my father-in-law launch successful businesses after honing their skills as craftsmen, sales professionals, retailers and/or body shop mechanics. I'd also known many entrepreneurs who had failed, only to start over with the same level of enthusiasm they'd shown in their first runs.

The common thread that binds all successful entrepreneurs is that they are not afraid of failure. Even more importantly, they consider their initial failures as stepping stones toward success. After all, even Thomas Edison failed thousands of times before achieving what was arguably his greatest success — inventing the light bulb.

During my time at Ethyl, not only had I built a network of fire and safety and training professionals throughout the petroleum industry, I'd also turned my hobby of producing home movies and training tapes into a successful part-time business. In 1980, I resigned my position, bid farewell to Ethyl and launched Videoscan, an industrial video production and training company. Little did I know at the time, but the story of the Business and Industry Communications (BIC) Alliance actually began on that day.

Just before heading out of the plant gates for the last time, Mr. Keonecke, the Ethyl plant manager and one of the greatest men I've ever known, visited with me one on one. He thanked me for my devotion to duty, wished me well and told me that if I ever decided to return to industry to give him a call. I left the meeting with tears in my eyes and prayed that one day I

could be such a great leader and a fine gentleman.

Wow, was I getting ready to learn some new and painful lessons! From the day I resigned from Ethyl, things went downhill. Believe me, going downhill at full throttle is an adventure in adversity. Getting up one step at a time, however, is an even greater one.

Bodi and I had worked hard for more than 15 years, saved our money, built a nice home, had a beautiful daughter and were happily married. But within two years we were on the verge of losing everything, including our marriage.

Try to imagine a soldier going into battle, ill-equipped and without any training or leadership. That's how it was when I launched Videoscan.

I did have a little experience. I had gone to New York in the late '70s to attend some basic video training workshops and worked on a few amateur video training productions while at Ethyl. I invested our life savings, along with all of my 401K money, into video production equipment and took out loans for about \$75,000 at 18 percent interest, the going rate at the time.

Since I had minimal sales or marketing experience, I decided to produce a video training program on sales and marketing as a learning tool. I approached Butch Baum (now deceased), the leading insurance salesperson in the world at the time, and offered to produce a story about his life at my own expense in exchange for the opportunity to learn how to sell from the master himself.

I spent a month with Butch and produced my first video. Working with him was a great learning experience, but a financial disaster. By the time I began producing revenue-generating training tapes, I was heavily in debt and advances in new video technology were quickly making my equipment obsolete.

Through my network of contacts in the API, I launched the first video basics workshop in the southern United States and began training people in the industry on how to produce their own videos. I intended to teach the folks in industry how to script and tape their own videos, which would give Videoscan the opportunity to do the post-production work, such as sound, editing and music. After all, post-production was time-consuming and few trainers had the time to do it.

I also offered reduced rates for production in order to get the rights to the stock footage so that we could produce generic training tapes on topics such as safety orientation, firefighting basics and "train-the-trainer" clips.

Train-the-trainer programs are important, because as I tell my BIC people to this day, "It doesn't matter how good you might be in your job... if you can't effectively train the people coming up behind you, you're not as good as you could be."

Over the next two years, Videoscan produced about 40 training videos and won the BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL TRAINING AWARD at the Mardi Gras Film Festival in 1981 for a piece about the work of a clerk of court. Our biggest client was Tenneco Oil Co. in Chalmette, La. We produced 17 tapes for Larry Hess and L.A. "Tiger" Pereira, then Tenneco's fire and safety manager and operator training coordinator, respectively.

Our greatest commercial success was a film called "Firefighting Basics," which we produced with the help of Buddy Irby and a group of professional industrial firefighters from the Houston area. We sold more than 50 copies of "Firefighting Basics" to industrial and municipal firefighting trainers across America. The fire training schools at Lamar University, LSU and Texas A&M all used the film as a part of their industrial and municipal fire training programs.

Among the most interesting of my experiences in the video production business was my collaboration with legendary pool hustler Minnesota Fats, who starred in a series of 10 safety films that I produced in 1982. This collaboration came about after I had helped one of Fats' friends,

Gene “The Mighty Glove” Catron (a professional pool player and trick shot enthusiast), shoot a television commercial. I never received payment for my work, through no fault of The Glove. That story was relayed to Minnesota Fats, who approached me to find out how he could help resolve his friend’s debt. The weeks spent with the very colorful Fats were among the most interesting of my life. Paul Carroll, founder of Cherokee Scaffold and a pool enthusiast, helped pay the production cost, as I was on the verge of closing. We made it through production but never had the money to edit the tapes, which we still have today.

In the beginning, I tried advertising my services in trade publications but quickly discovered that none of the big industry and trade publications offered multi-industry content that reached across a wide range of sectors and job titles. In oil and gas, for example, there were great publications for drilling and production, marine, pipelines, refining, hydrocarbon processing and petrochemical. The same was true for construction, pulp and paper, and power generation. This was great for publishers, but terrible for service companies.

To reach across all the markets, a service company that offered multi-industry products and services — such as equipment, training, fire and safety, environmental maintenance or construction services — needed to be in more than a dozen publications. There were some great vertical publications, but none were horizontal, meaning that they did not provide content that catered to a broad cross-section of industries and departments.

To make matters worse, the publications only wanted to sell advertising space. Most would do little more than laugh at my requests for editorial coverage of my company’s history or access to their reader databases for leads of potential customers. The only people who ever called me after I placed an ad were people who wanted to sell me more advertising.

Once again, as I had done so many times before, I saw the possibility of turning adversity into opportunity. The adversity that had been created by the people at those publications opened a new door to publishing adventure for me.

Out of frustration and with my capital dwindling, I decided to produce a training newsletter and mail it to trainers across business and industry in the Gulf South. My first newsletter, News and Views from Videoscan, appeared in December 1980 and the results were amazing. Not only did we receive inquiries about our production and training services, but more importantly other industrial suppliers called to see if they, too, could utilize my newsletter to communicate their stories to industrial buyers.

Like me, they needed a vehicle with which they could share their success stories and wanted to utilize a publication’s database of readers for prospecting. The concept of a multi-industry, multi-departmental newsletter was so unique and promising that I decided to launch America’s first industrial training magazine, The Training Coordinator, in 1981 instead of printing another newsletter. This training publication became the forerunner of BIC Magazine (which we would launch on April 1—April Fool’s Day—in 1984).

Our feature story in the first issue of The Training Coordinator was about Tenneco and the training videos we were producing for them. The folks at Tenneco were truly visionary at the time and saw this editorial as an opportunity to promote their safety, environmental and community service activities. In those days, the idea of an industrial buyer going on record to talk about the products and services of a supplier was unprecedented.

Little did we realize at the time, but this was the beginning of a phenomenal communications alliance between buyers and suppliers in industry — something that really didn’t exist in this type of multi-industry format prior to 1981.

By the time The Training Coordinator was launched, it was too late to salvage Videoscan as

a viable television production and training company, despite an excellent product. To make matters worse, the economy was in terrible shape and many of the industry folks didn't have the budget to buy or produce video training tapes.

Furthermore, instead of buying tapes, some people would rent and copy them, a violation of copyright laws. I couldn't help but be saddened that some of the very people responsible for helping train our future leaders saw nothing wrong with this practice.

During this time, I was working night and day on both ventures, and my family relationship suffered. My relationship with God also declined, and we seldom, if ever, went to church.

In 1981, my loving and supportive wife was pushed to the limit after I took out a second mortgage on our home over her objections. She suggested that had I complied with her wishes, we could have saved ourselves years of suffering and hardship. She then recommended that I shut down Videoscan and throw all my time and energy into building The Training Coordinator.

Her logic was simple — the multi-industry publication was a winner, and Videoscan was a financial loser. Why not invest my efforts into something that the industry wanted and supported? Instead of hoping people wouldn't copy our tapes, we'd encourage them to use our material to help educate and train others through pass-along readership.

Call it ego, shortsightedness or just plain stupidity, but I didn't heed Bodi's advice. As the Kenny Rogers lyric goes, "You've got to know when to hold 'em/ Know when to fold 'em." I didn't "know when to fold 'em," and eventually wound up losing nearly everything I held dear.

Bodi co-signed a loan out of love but told me that if I lost our home and couldn't put God and our family first, then I had the wrong outlook on our marriage and was putting it at risk. Like a fool, I tried to keep both the video production company and publication going. At the time, I didn't know anything about product life cycles, market research or strategic planning, and it cost me dearly. I vowed to myself that in my next entrepreneurial venture, I'd not only learn how to sell, but master the techniques of marketing as well.

By mid-1982, my family's faith in me was at an all-time low, and my relationship with God was limited to praying for survival.

Finally (and too late), I heeded Bodi's advice, laid off the Videoscan production crew and tried to keep the publication going while I looked for a job. By 1982, I was forced to shut down The Training Coordinator as well.

Always a believer in the power of networking, I went back to my friends Butch Baum, my longtime friend and Videoscan partner Bobby Davis, Mr. Keonecke and others. Butch told me that if I wanted to start over in business that I should stay focused on the Gulf Coast and decline a job offer that I had received in the fall of 1982 from an oil company in Tulsa, Okla.

He also told me that if I really wanted to rebuild a happy marriage and, a successful business, I should remain close to my family. He informed me that most entrepreneurs fail on their first attempts at business ownership. But if I ever started another business, people who might have ignored me in my first endeavor would help me the second time around because, like many of them, I had the guts to start over. Time would prove him right.

Even though things had gotten rough, I remained confident in my decisions. You see, I've always been a firm believer in what's become another Earl's Pearl: "refraining from complaining," especially if the complainer isn't willing to make changes. For instance, instead of complaining when we see co-workers being promoted ahead of us, we should strive for promotions ourselves—especially if we sincerely think we can do better.

The same is true for entrepreneurship. Instead of complaining about how successful others are, why not prove you can do it yourself? My mom always used to say that, "There is no use crying

over spilled milk.” In addition, I never once heard my dad complain about getting laid off without benefits. His revenge was simply to live well and be happy.

When the time came that I felt I could do better for myself and my family, the fearlessness I’d learned at Ethyl was what had sparked my decision to move on. Even years later, after I’d lost everything and was working 12 to 14 hours a day, six or seven days a week, I never once regretted resigning from Ethyl to pursue my dream. If success has taught me anything, it’s that if you’re not satisfied, you should spend your time trying to make the situation better. And if that’s impossible where you are, you shouldn’t be afraid to move on. After all, sometimes the only way to move up is to move on. Like many entrepreneurs say, “No guts, no glory.”

## **Climbing Back Up at Hill**

My friend Bobby Davis loaned me the money to pay my car note and survive until I found a job. I soon learned about a training position at the Hill Petroleum refinery in Krotz Springs, La., from a fellow ASTD member and called my former boss and mentor at Ethyl, Mr. Keonecke, for a referral.

Mr. Keonecke called Hill Petroleum Plant Manager John Bender, who was gracious enough to interview me at 7 p.m. on a Friday night. Before returning home from the interview, I went to my office, which was shut down and devoid of furniture. I sat on the floor, cried and asked God's forgiveness for ignoring Him and my family and prayed for the job at Hill Petroleum.

I had reached rock bottom that night. I was in the pits again, lower than a snake's belly in a wagon rut, and the only way to go was up.

I loved God and my family too much to kill myself. I had always heard that work won't kill us, so I decided to find out for myself. It was then that I vowed to work night and day until I'd restored my relationship with God, family and friends—or die trying.

The following Monday I was interviewed again by Hill Petroleum (this time in their Houston office) and hired, even though many of the more than 700 other applicants held master's degrees and Ph.D.s. Even though I had never worked in a refinery, my training references and contacts with fellow refinery trainers convinced the folks at Hill that I was worth the investment.

Folks, networking is one of the most important things a person can do to succeed in business and in life. The networking I did with my ASTD friend and Mr. Keonecke led to the interview, and it was then that I became a lifelong advocate of the practice. Although it doesn't always get you a job, it certainly can help you get in front of a decision maker. Networking not only helped me get the interview at Hill, but years later it played a primary role in the phenomenal success of the BIC Alliance, from day one.

Thus began my long road back. I was 40 years old and starting over in both my business and personal life. In the first week of July 1982, my mother had to drive me to Hill Petroleum because my vehicle wasn't dependable enough to make the one and one quarter-hour trip. Shortly thereafter, and with the help of a loan from my parents, I purchased a trailer at False River in New Roads, La. (part of my employment contract with Hill stipulated that I live close to the plant).

We survived on \$500 per month for about a year in order for me to continue to pay the large note on our home in Baton Rouge, which we were trying to sell because of the high expenses incurred as a result of my business failure. We were so broke that our entertainment was limited to playing checkers and cards, fishing and enjoying cookouts. Dane and I saved our change to buy a Monopoly board game and joked about our "monopoly" fortune when we finally bought it.

A particularly devastating event took place toward the end of 1982. The stress that my business decisions placed on our marriage was too much for Bodi to bear. We separated just after Christmas and ended up getting divorced in early 1983.

I realized that everything that happened to bring us to this place was my fault. At False River, I vowed not only to come back from rock bottom professionally, but more importantly in my spiritual and personal life as well.

Since I was broke, I had plenty of time to work on what I called "The Three Ps" – Prayer, Planning and Prospecting. When I wasn't working at the refinery, I would spend my time praying, thinking, studying, and networking.

During my year at Hill, I worked long hours. I began to use my spare time to engage in planning for my re-entry into industrial publishing. I read every book about sales, marketing and entrepreneurship I could get my hands on and began compiling a database of "who's who" in industry across America in order to build a list of prospective recipients of an industrial publication.

I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that my commitment to networking helped save my

life, and change it for the better. My refinery training friends, including Don Traigue and Otis Crawford of Shell and Tiger Pereira of Tenneco, helped me to develop a refinery training program at Hill, and many of my associates in API gave me input to help make our program a winner. In this way, I benefited from the fact that there is a brotherhood among people in business and industry built on mutual respect and a desire to help one another, especially in times of trouble and of opportunity.

By June 1, 1983, my mission at Hill, which was to train personnel for a cat cracker startup, was complete.

Even though my first business had been a bust, I was ready to climb out of the poverty pit and start over — it was more clear to me than ever that failure was not an option. So, with only \$3,000 to my name, I resigned from Hill, developed a prototype of the first cover of the Business and Industry Coordinator (BIC), stapled it over a copy of The Training Coordinator and went back into business. I worked “half days” for the next 15 years (any 12 hours I chose, six or seven days a week).

## **A New Beginning — The Money Clip Moment**

It took nearly a year—from June 1983 to April 1984—to publish the first issue of BIC. During that time, I also sold advertising for Travelhost magazine, conducted management and operator training for Placid Oil Co. and Tammco in New Iberia, La., and worked as a marketing consultant for the University of Southwestern Louisiana (USL) in Lafayette (now the University of Louisiana-Lafayette).

I sold the trailer, paid off my folks and traded advertising for a couple of rooms at the Bellemont Hotel in Baton Rouge, where I both lived and worked. Bellemont owner A.C. Lewis had just built the Great Hall, a spectacular convention and meeting facility at the hotel, and hired Kent Wasmuth as sales manager. In exchange for living and office space (and occasional access to food during happy hour), my job was to help Kent market the Bellemont and the Great Hall to business and industry across the Gulf Coast.

From our humble beginnings on the banks of False River and the two rooms at the Bellemont Hotel, the BIC Alliance was launched. From the start, those offering hospitality, lodging, meeting and convention space became some of our first and most loyal clients. My successful experience in the hospitality industry with these folks 30+ years ago helped pave the way for TLC Magazine, which we published from 2002 to 2006. In 2018, TLC was rebranded and launched as Leisure Connection TV.

Many of these hospitality industry people (including Kent, who went on to become director of sales and marketing for Opryland Hotel and Conference Center in Nashville and later the Wyndham New Orleans Hotel at Canal Place) have been longtime supporters of both BIC and TLC.

I originally envisioned BIC to be a business-to-business publication across South Louisiana and a business-to-industry publication across the Gulf Coast—from Mobile, Ala., to Corpus Christi, Texas. This way, I could barter for essentials like food, lodging, office space and supplies and use the revenue from the cash sales to industry to cover products and services, payroll, printing and mailing.

Many times during the early years, I had money for printing, but no money for mailing. Even though we were divorced, Bodi was an invaluable contributor to getting BIC through the tight spots. She would often give me the tip money she made as a hair stylist (or we borrowed from friends and family) so that we could pay to mail the magazine out — even though I had broken her heart and lost everything it had taken us 20 years to build.

If that wasn't enough, I had yet another financial disaster on my hands. BIC was getting off to a great start, but The Woman's Coordinator, another publication I had started, was losing money and slowing BIC's growth. I was working night and day as publisher, salesperson and managing editor, all while handling the other duties of the business as well.

One evening, I made a cold call to Baton Rouge businessman Guy Bellello, owner of several health clubs, to talk to him about The Woman's Coordinator. As I proceeded to Mr. Bellello's office in the pouring rain, I wondered where in the world I would get the money to publish the next issue of either publication.

I was soaking wet when Mr. Bellello answered the door. Once we were inside, he offered me a beverage and began telling me about the upcoming 25th anniversary of his health clubs.

All of a sudden, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a money clip filled with \$100 bills. It was the largest wad of money I'd ever seen, but I was even more flabbergasted at what happened next. Mr. Bellello threw the money clip onto the desk in front of me and said, "Earl, I'm tired of seeing some of those women on the front cover of The Woman's Coordinator who

aren't true entrepreneurs.”

He went on to say that he wished to sponsor the next front cover of *The Woman's Coordinator* and feature his wife, Ginger, whom he considered a true female entrepreneur, and their business's milestone of 25 years.

Talk about turning adversity into opportunity!

My experience in life-and-death situations at Ethyl, combined with the gravity of the dire financial situation I was in at the time, somehow coalesced to trigger an idea deep inside my brain that would forever change the destiny of BIC and our family in one fell swoop. A light went on that would illuminate and pave the way for a successful future.

You see, even though I had been offering clients ongoing editorial and direct mailing as part of a marketing campaign in BIC, it had never occurred to me to offer a business the opportunity to invest in a front cover sponsorship.

As Mr. Bellello spoke, my mind was racing at a thousand miles per minute. If he was interested in sponsoring a front cover of *The Woman's Coordinator* in order to recognize a person and an event, I wondered what someone else might be willing to invest to sponsor a front cover of BIC and showcase a multi-million dollar construction project, a new product or some other endeavor.

I unfolded the money clip and began to count the \$100 bills. Mr. Bellello told me it amounted to \$5,000. This unbelievable experience—on a cold, rainy night after most people had quit for the day—marked a spectacular turning point in my life. In less than 30 minutes, Mr. Bellello's request helped me envision a way not only to keep BIC alive, but also to build it into a viable business venture.

As I drove off with the \$5,000 contract in hand, I began thinking of more scenarios in which people would sponsor BIC covers. They could invest in covers to build market share, enhance public relations, gain exposure for successful projects and events such as trade shows, announce mergers and acquisitions, and on and on.

Today, our front and back cover campaigns are our most popular and are usually reserved six months to a year ahead of key industry trade shows, conferences, projects and company anniversaries.

The list of possibilities kept growing in my mind to the point that I was awake all night, trying to decide who to contact first about sponsoring BIC's front cover. I had the excitement of a child at Christmas and waited impatiently for daybreak so I could begin making calls and offering sponsorships. In my Alligator Management & Marketing seminars and during keynote presentations since that fortuitous day in 1986, I have continued to share my “Money Clip Moment” with others as well as the ways our minds can work during times of crisis and opportunity.

Early the next morning, I started contacting industrial service company managers and entrepreneurs to sell them on this novel idea. One of the first people I contacted was Brooks Bradford, who owned an industrial service company called Mobile Air at the time. Mr. Bradford was not only a visionary entrepreneur; he also completely understood the role of marketing and promotion in the world of industry.

Almost on the spot, he agreed to sponsor the next cover of BIC for \$7,500. In addition to three full advertising pages on the inside, this brought the total to approximately \$12,000. Bingo — we were off to the races, even though it would take almost another decade before we would reach the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

With this new concept to help our marketing partners, I put Mrs. Bellello on the next cover

of The Woman's Coordinator and Mr. Bradford and his company on the next cover of BIC. Shortly after that, I shut down the women's publication to focus more energy on BIC, which I expanded from four to six issues per year.

Sometimes we have to take a step back to make a leap ahead. The demise of The Woman's Coordinator taught me the importance of conducting market research — as it turned out, most business women preferred to be featured in publications that appealed to members of both sexes rather than those focusing merely on women.

Sonny Anderson, founder of Anco and Basic Industries and a longtime BIC Alliance member, had kept BIC alive by co-signing a note several months earlier. As part of our agreement, he wanted me to tell him how I planned to make BIC a success, which would ensure the success of his investment. Not only did I promise to work from daylight until dark, I also informed him that I was changing the publication's paper from glossy to newsprint, which was more economical and would enable me to invest more into expanding readership.

I started searching for a printer who specialized in newsprint and would take a chance on a startup operation. Ralph Hay and his wife, Josie, of Dixie Web in New Orleans agreed to print our publication, as long as we paid in full when each job was completed. That meant that we needed the money for printing and direct mailing at the same time. In those days, I'd stay awake all night watching press runs and waiting to get copies of the latest issue, which I'd deliver to our marketing partners in the morning. Upon delivery, I'd collect their payments and then swiftly head to the bank to make a deposit so that I could get cashiers' checks from the post office to pay the printing bill. Thankfully, this process has simplified over the years!

Mr. Bradford appeared on the cover of our last fully glossy publication. (It would be 12 years before I'd return to a glossy format, and then only for covers.) Other companies were soon lining up for sponsorship opportunities on BIC's cover. The next issue of BIC was sponsored by Mack McDonald of Modern Valve, and a new concept in industrial marketing and communications was off and running.

# A Baptism By Fire

I'd often heard the saying "God works in strange and miraculous ways," but my mom's death in 1986 provided a perfect example. Mom's passing not only brought my dad and me closer together, it also helped me realize how much Bodi and Dane loved me. Watching Bodi and Dane share my suffering was a wake up call for me to focus first and foremost on rebuilding my own family and my relationship with God. On Valentine's Day 1987, Bodi and I remarried at a small ceremony at her parents' house. From that day forward, both our marriage and spiritual life have grown stronger each year.

That Valentine's Day was a turning point in our lives because Bodi and I vowed to one another to discuss only the positive aspects of our lives up to that point. We agreed that the past was the past and that the best way to have a wonderful future was to focus on the positive. This promise factored into my decision to omit some of our most heartbreaking experiences from this narrative.

I recommend this practice to anyone who has faced trials with others, whether it be with a spouse, family member, friend or someone at work. It has been said that the greatest peacemaking words in the world are, "I'm sorry, it won't happen again." An integral part of preventing something negative from recurring is simply not to discuss it or, even more importantly, not to think about it.

In the early years, much the same as today, there were literally thousands of folks who helped keep BIC alive. First and foremost were our readers, who supported our concept, shared their expertise in articles and used the products and services of our marketing partners (we always preferred this term over "advertisers" because that's how we saw them—as true partners in a cooperative relationship). Each marketing partner who reserved space with us in the first few years took a chance that their ad and editorial might never appear in print because we were so under-capitalized.

In addition to our readers and marketing partners, who often paid in advance to allow us to meet payroll and publishing costs, countless others loaned me money and/or co-signed loans on pure faith. People such as Sonny Anderson, Bill Brackman, "Big" Ernie Hernandez, Haskell Douglas, Ed Sakakeeny, Bobby Davis, Maxie Thiel and many others helped along the way. My uncle, Thomas Heard, and my sister and brother-in-law, Ann and Shahram Nickroo, all pitched in. My brother, who had been a maintenance executive for Exxon, introduced me to dozens of industry contacts, many of whom later became BIC Alliance members.

But the two people who sacrificed the most were my wife and daughter.

For several years we lived on Bodi's income from styling hair so that every nickel generated from BIC could help cover expenses. Dane worked during high school to help us make ends meet and paid for almost all of her college expenses. She, along with my friend Bobby Davis, drove all over the Gulf Coast distributing publications. What we lacked in money, we made up for in hard work, perseverance and good humor.

After my dad lost his sight, he had no choice but to find employment at a hospital concession stand for the blind, where he worked from dawn until dusk six or seven days a week for more than 20 years. As I've said before, never once did I ever hear him lament about the hand he was dealt. Without his inspiration and the support of my mom and Bodi's parents — John and Yvonne Bodi — we would never have been able to persevere.

As an entrepreneur, my father-in-law was a great role model for me. Although he dropped out of school in the seventh grade, he went on to learn the automotive body shop business and became the owner of one of South Louisiana's largest independent body shops. Early on in my relationship with Bodi, he encouraged me to one day launch my own business. He also taught me the power of networking, hosting hospitality functions and sponsoring golf tournaments and other events.

I still thank God every day for the blessings we received during that time and for the support we enjoyed, all of which encouraged me to work diligently toward a successful future for the BIC Alliance.

In those days, every bit of revenue we generated was used to pay debt and bankroll growth to reach a wide range of industries—nationally, not just regionally. Bodi and I went without a week of vacation for almost 15 years and were once more than \$600,000 in debt. We promised ourselves that we would always live on the bare essentials until we were debt free, a milestone we achieved more than 10 years after the launching of BIC. This was not only a proud moment for Bodi and me, but it proved to all who supported us that they had not done so in vain.

Sadly, my mom, who had stuck by me through thick and thin, never got to see us turn the corner. I often look up into the heavens and imagine her with the angels smiling down upon our family and putting in a good word for all of us with God.

During the period from 1985 to 1995, I spent more than 70 days a year on the road, mostly between Baton Rouge and Houston. I was keenly focused on expanding both my personal and business network across the Gulf Coast and beyond during these years. Once, Mike Conners — a longtime friend of mine who worked with me at the time — and I drove to Pittsburgh for a trade show and took turns sleeping because money was so tight that we couldn't afford to stay overnight until we reached our destination. For several years, Dad loaned me his credit cards when I traveled because my credit was too poor for me to get a card of my own.

Most of my work weeks during these years followed a familiar pattern. To maximize time, I would come home on Monday or Tuesday evenings at around 6 p.m., eat supper, go to bed, get up at 9 p.m. and leave for Texas. I would arrive in Houston at about 2 a.m., sleep until 7 a.m., and begin my sales calls at 8 a.m. I would work until 6 or 7 p.m., have supper with a client or prospect, get back to my room around 10 p.m. and work until midnight on editorial content and/or my mailing list. On Thursday evenings, I would make the drive back to Baton Rouge in order to be able to put in a full day on Friday.

One weekend, Dane came home from Chamberlain-Hunt Academy in Port Gibson, Miss., where she was attending high school. She and I, along with Bodi, sat on a bed in our apartment one evening and had a long and emotional discussion about our future. As we cried together, they asked me to consider shutting down BIC and going to work in industrial sales. I explained that even if I made \$100,000 to \$125,000 a year at such a job, it would take decades to pay off our debt and that we had no choice but to hang in there. We held hands and prayed together, and from that day forward we never discussed that option again.

Around that same time, I visited my dad, who was in the habit of walking to church alone near his home several days a week. Come rain or shine and despite his disability, Dad was a regular churchgoer.

I'll never forget asking Dad why such a devout man as he attended church so frequently. His response was, "Son, I'm not going to church regularly to pray for myself. I'm going to pray for my family, especially for you, to find the kind of peace and love for God that I have."

After Dane graduated from high school in 1987, she began college at USL. She worked in

restaurants to help pay for school and, in her spare time, helped distribute publications for free, never once complaining. She would leave Lafayette after finishing classes for the week and travel to Baton Rouge—via New Iberia, Morgan City, Houma and New Orleans—distributing several hundred publications throughout Louisiana’s Acadiana region before reaching home late on Friday nights.

From 1984 to 1991, I worked day and night, generating more than 80 percent of all sales for the company. For all practical purposes, I had no full-time sales help until Paul Tyree joined me in the early 1990s. Even though Paul had no formal industrial sales experience, he was, like me, broke and driven to succeed.

We made a great team. The two of us traded for hotel space in Houston for a room that doubled as an office and began rotating our trips so that one of us was in Texas every week.

Paul was a classmate of Dane’s, as was Harper Jones — both came to work for me at BIC around 1990. Harper stayed for about a year and Paul was with us until 1996. During that time, two excellent production folks — Mindy Brodhead and Patti Lacobee — used their exceptional editorial and design skills to help build BIC into a well-respected publication.

Mindy worked part-time until I could afford to hire her as a full-time editor, and Patti worked as a freelance designer. I’ll never forget one instance in which Patti hid the material for an issue of the magazine in her oven until Mindy loaned me the money to pay her creative fee (in those days, we often lived on Bodi’s salary, as getting a paycheck was never a sure thing for me). Patti went on to become a highly regarded designer in New York City and Mindy became a successful writer with several books to her credit.

I firmly believe that to win in life, we need good sidekicks and a strong network of folks willing to work together for the betterment of all. I had definitely assembled such a network with Paul, Harper, Bobby, Mindy, Patti and others in the early ‘90s. As I mentioned earlier, I first learned about the power of a strong team in the 1940s and 1950s, when many movie makers stressed the message that good guys win, bad guys lose and that teamwork is the essential component in victory.

This message is just as relevant today. It rings loud and clear and is repeated time and again throughout this story. It serves as a reminder that the best definition of “networking” is “getting together to get ahead.”

While we entered the 1990s still deeply in debt, Paul, Bobby Davis, Mindy and I began to turn the company toward success. Bodi and Dane were our No. 1 cheerleaders.

Bodi never complained, and we would never have made it without her. In 1990, Dane married Thomas Brinsko, a law student from Mandeville, La., and transferred to LSU, where Thomas was enrolled. After finishing law school, Thomas went to work for Exxon’s land acquisitions division based in Houston, and Dane completed her education at the University of Houston. They worked for BIC in their spare time and played an important role in its success.

On the day Thomas graduated in 1991, adversity struck again — Bodi and I were involved in a near-fatal auto accident. Traveling over 60 mph, a drunk driver hit our vehicle while we were stopped at a red light on Airline Highway in North Baton Rouge. Bodi’s foot was crushed, my ribs were broken and the first decent vehicle we’d owned in years was totaled — we’d only had it for two months.

We were faced with another dilemma. Not only was the driver uninsured, but Bodi was now unable to work as a hair stylist, which deprived us of a source of revenue we needed to make ends meet.

Since selling our house in 1983, we spent the next eight years living either in a trailer or an

apartment. Thankfully, my wife's parents and my dad came to our rescue. In 1992, Bodi and I scraped together our savings, and Mr. and Mrs. Bodi helped us buy a small house in Baton Rouge. My dad advanced us a loan from his savings of three years of royalty revenue from our family's oil property in North Louisiana. For the first time in more than 12 years, we were beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Those experiences taught me that even when the money is tight, you should never give up.

As an underdog and rebounding entrepreneur myself, I have always tried to help other struggling entrepreneurs and folks who were similarly down on their luck. The underdog has always been my hero, which might explain why I was such a diehard New Orleans Saints fan through their many disappointing seasons (I'm still a fan today).

Just as there was a glimmer of daylight at BIC, I hired a former classmate from Louisiana College to take over as our administrator and chief financial officer (CFO). He and his wife were going through a divorce, and I tried to talk her into giving him another chance to no avail. She told me that I didn't know him the way she did — perhaps I should have taken that as a warning.

One day, about a year later, I was looking for some paperwork when I came across a stash of checks for an expensive apartment and other checks made out to Baylor University, where the man's daughter was enrolled as a student. Further research revealed that he had been stealing from me from the beginning. Although, he always left enough for me to survive, which he revealed in his confession!

Thanks to the help of Thomas and my brother, I didn't lose control of my temper. Because I was more hurt than angry, I didn't file formal charges. Instead, with Thomas's help, we worked out a restitution plan for repayment of the stolen money.

Although he never repaid the more than \$20,000 he had stolen from me, I learned a valuable lesson that paved the way to the financial success that came years later — there is nothing sadder in the life of a business owner or entrepreneur than employee and management betrayal.

Like many other times in my life, I tried to look upon this heartbreaking and devastating situation as a learning experience. It taught me that no matter how hard we work, or how devoted we are to our cause, we are only as strong as the people with whom we surround ourselves.

It wasn't until Theresa Kennedy came along in the early '90s that we had a competent financial manager who could keep the BIC Alliance on a sound financial footing. Theresa was originally hired as an administrative assistant but eventually worked her way up to her current position as chief financial officer. Today, our company is in excellent financial shape. All of our business and personal real estate is paid for, and we have the financial resources to bankroll expansion without borrowing. (We went for so long with so little that we learned how to operate on cash flow.)

I've seen countless entrepreneurs spend years trying to reach financial independence, only to begin living the high life at the first taste of success rather than reinvesting in their companies. We took the opposite approach by putting our employees and clients — whom we think of and refer to as partners — first. We reinvested in our people, our databases and the quality of our publications, and expanding our distribution and mailings.

The betrayal by my former classmate and CFO taught me that we should work only with people who are honest, honorable and willing to work as hard as we do. Furthermore, we must watch our money with the same diligence and scrutiny with which we should approach sales and the quality of our products and services.

As I look back over the past four decades, I can describe the period from 1980 to 1991 only

as a time of great adversity — you could say our family got a baptism by fire. We would never have made it if we hadn't made serving God, family and others foremost in our lives. We were also aided by an attitude of turning these great challenges into great adventures.

One of the many valuable lessons we learned during this period was the importance of saving as much as you can and giving back whenever you can. My wonderful and loving wife has a saying that's become our mantra, and another one of my Earl's Pearls: "It's not how much we make, but how much we have saved when we or others need it that really matters."

Without the love of God, loved ones and family and friends in business and industry, we would not have been able to prosper, let alone survive. I had suffered the loss of precious time with the family I love and all my worldly possessions, and my faith in mankind had been shaken. But despite all of that, I still thank God every day that there are more good, honest people in this world than bad, dishonest ones.

But during those 11 years, I had also gained a lifetime of experience in business ethics, sales and marketing, entrepreneurship and networking among peers in business and industry.

# Everybody Wins When Movers and Shakers Network

As I mentioned earlier, the essence of the word “team” is captured by the phrase “together, everyone accomplishes more.” From that perspective, BIC’s success has been a team effort from day one.

As the BIC Alliance grew across the Gulf Coast and eventually across the United States in the late ’80s and into the ’90s, I had the opportunity to meet and begin networking with many of the most interesting and successful industry executives and entrepreneurs in the oil and gas, construction and environmental industries. I’ve had the pleasure to learn from some of the best, and they’ve shared their expertise in management, marketing and super-networking with me and vice versa.

You might be asking yourself what I mean by “super-networking.” People who practice super-networking, who might also be called super-connectors, make networking a top priority in everything they do (In Louisiana, it’s practically in our DNA—we network on where to go to church, where to eat, where to send our kids to school, etc.).

Super-connectors try to connect at least three people a day, and say at least one nice thing to three different people who weren’t expecting it. They gain a reputation as super-connectors within the industries and communities in which they work and live.

And by connecting people of diverse skills and backgrounds, they become the spoke of their own networking wheel. Through their willingness to bring new people together for everyone’s benefit, super-connectors also motivate others to become better networkers and, through the law of reciprocity, connect the super-connector with new people and business opportunities as they arise.

I’ll give you an example of a super-connector who helped BIC Magazine gain a strong foothold in the growing environmental sector in the 1980s. Wally Landry, founder of Oil Mop (one of the earliest oil spill response companies in the world), did a front cover with us. He also helped us generate interest and made introductions to other companies in environmental services for oil and gas. BIC was already the only magazine that tied upstream, midstream and downstream together, but with Wally’s help we also wove industry-related environmental topics into our publication.

For our April/May 1990 issue, we featured Buckner Rental in our cover story. Like Oil Mop Founder Wally Landry, Robert Buckner considered his business a labor of love. He founded Buckner Rental in 1978, and by the time we met in 1990 he had expanded to nine stores.

Mr. Buckner was the kind of person you would never forget. Having been a national service

manager for an equipment company prior to starting Buckner Rental, he could operate and repair every piece of equipment he owned. He believed in diversification — with 50 percent of his business being upstream oil and gas, 25 percent downstream, 20 percent construction and 5 percent general household needs. His company was perfect for our publication because his market diversity matched our readership.

I'll never forget Mr. Buckner's straightforwardness. When we first met, he was quite outspoken about his thoughts on advertising. Within the first five minutes, he told me that advertising had never worked for him, that he didn't believe in it and, furthermore, he didn't like sharing his success story with others.

Instead of being discouraged by his candor, I agreed that, like him, I'd had the same experience with advertising before launching BIC. I explained BIC's unique ability to combine advertising, editorial content and direct mail.

I told Mr. Buckner that it was obvious he placed a high value on his people and the maintenance of his equipment. Perhaps we could feature his managers on the cover and focus on the role that their devotion to duty played in his success, rather than focusing solely on him?

Immediately, Mr. Buckner asked me for the investment figure for an annual campaign. When I told him, he responded, "We spend more than that on caps and T-shirts."

Mr. Buckner's cover story was inspiring in many ways. He believed in what he called the "Midas Touch" when it came to his employees. He demanded excellence, and those not willing to give it their all were not Buckner people for long. Mr. Buckner required his folks to have all the right stuff — character, loyalty, dedication and a strong work ethic that went beyond the norm. Such qualities aren't created by education or experience according to Mr. Buckner — they're born from within.

During our conversation, he told me that another key to the company's success was to focus its energy on customers instead of worrying about what the competition was doing. Mr. Buckner believed, as I do, that we must set the standards in our chosen industry and let other companies strive to meet them.

Because networking and training were always cornerstones of the BIC Alliance's success, we began sponsoring networking and training events early in our history. We launched Enviro Expo, the first series of industrial-environmental trade shows and conferences ever held in the southern United States. I first got the idea to sponsor this conference after visiting various industrial events, including the Offshore Technology Conference and the LOBOS Industrial Trade Shows. We also learned a great deal by attending the Environmental Business Conferences in Pasadena, Calif., and Boston during the late '80s and early '90s.

By 1989, we expanded the reach and scope of our conferences. In addition to Enviro Expo, we were also sponsoring industry/business conferences and VIP networking events in Houston (where the first such conference took place), New Orleans, Baton Rouge and Biloxi, Miss. We added another industry/business conference to our sponsorship roster in 1996.

Our conferences brought together several hundred industrial service entrepreneurs, presidents and CEOs, in addition to upper-level managers in finance, human resources, marketing and sales. Featured speakers included Lynn Lantrip of Waste Management USA; Browning-Ferris Industries Vice President Marcia Williams; and Keith Huber, founder of Keith Huber Inc.; and many others.

These events, along with hospitality and networking functions such as the one we currently sponsor during the annual American Fuel & Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM) Reliability & Maintenance Conference and Exhibition, attracted a veritable "Who's Who" in American

industry.

And for the past 12 years, the BIC Alliance and its partners have hosted an Industry Appreciation and Networking crawfish boil in the spring of each year. In 2018, we added a fish fry to our roster of events, which will be held in the fall of every year.

Our management and marketing conferences covered a great many topics, including:

- State of the industry reports
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Entrepreneur and executive roundtables
- Long- and short-range strategies
- Developing effective marketing and sales tools
- Strategic marketing and sales
- Hiring and training the best people
- Leadership and the power of networking.

I conducted the leadership and networking session myself, and it has become my most requested speaking presentation.

In 1990, we traveled to Arkansas to do a story on MRK's remote incinerator, the brainchild of a high school friend, Chip Efferson. I also met two men — Clint Pearson and John Egle of Land Treatment Systems, the subjects of our November/December 1990 cover story — who gave me the idea for launching IVS Investment Banking (more on that later).

Egle and Pearson taught me the importance of teaming partners together who complement one another. Pearson was an expert in finance and law, while Egle's strengths were in operations, sales and marketing.

They also taught me the importance of building a company not just to operate, but to sell if the right opportunity comes along. Even if we plan to keep a company, we should run and organize it as though we expect to sell it. This includes things like keeping a bottom-line orientation and maintaining a strong organizational chart. Having these things in place will prompt us to run the company more efficiently and at higher profitability.

Over the next decade, Egle and I worked to build market share for companies that he either owned or managed. In the early 1980s, Egle had been busy running a Golden Meadow, La., radio station left by his late father. His brother-in-law, who was in the tank cleaning business, asked Egle to use his contacts to help him find work.

One of the first tank-cleaning jobs he secured called for the disposal of 30,000 barrels of production sludge for \$5 per barrel, a total of \$150,000. Egle had been selling radio advertising to small retailers for rates as low as \$100, but now saw opportunity in the environmental business and said, "I'm in the wrong business." Further research in the area led him to discover opportunities in the handling of oil field waste, and Land Treatment Systems was born.

Pearson, who was originally Egle's attorney, left his law practice. The two men approached B.I. Moody and Tom Becnel of Lafayette, La., who agreed to capitalize additional treatment cells at the Land Treatment Systems site south of Morgan City, La. In later years, Egle used BIC to launch and promote other companies and technologies, and he was featured in our 2007 book *Energy Entrepreneurs*.

It was during this time that we and others in the energy sector realized that we must unite to help create "more fans for the energy brand." During the late 1980s and early 1990s, we began conducting several public relations and awareness programs for Star Enterprises in Beaumont, Texas, and Texaco Chemical Company's Port Neches, Texas plant.

Our relationships with industrial corporations and service companies have grown closer over

the years, mainly because of the value that we provide them (and vice versa). Our clients/marketing partners have important messages they need to share with their employees, stakeholders, neighboring communities and with regulators and legislators at the local, regional and national levels.

We help them get these messages out in many different ways. For instance, each time we sign a marketing agreement, we add the names of our new partners' clients and prospects to our mailing list and send them complimentary subscriptions of *BIC* (courtesy of our new partners). We also add the names of trade show and conference attendees, association members and paid subscribers.

Today, many in the industry consider BIC's database to be second to none.

By the end of 1990, Enviro Expo had evolved into one of the most important environmental events in the southern United States, with attendees, speakers and exhibitors traveling from all across North America to participate. More than 1,000 attendees and 100 exhibitors participated in our Enviro Expo in Kenner, La., in the spring of 1992.

By far, our largest public relations and employee relations campaign during that time involved a comic strip character by the name of Captain Wow ("Wow" stood for "War on Waste"). The campaign took place at Star Enterprises' Port Arthur, Texas, refinery and was featured in our January/February 1991 issue. This program, which we helped launch in 1990, created environmental awareness throughout Southeast Texas, as Captain Wow took his war on waste to thousands of children each year. The management and staff of Star Enterprises and the Texaco Chemical Plant in nearby Port Neches were great to work with. They helped build the BIC Alliance's reputation as an industry communications partner—a reputation that is still alive and well today.

In another major marketing and public relations milestone, we distributed an extra 15,000 copies of *BIC* in host hotels during the 1988 Republican National Convention in New Orleans. Featured company Marine Shale Processors, which was owned by Jack Kent at the time, wanted to get its message to America's top-ranking Republicans, and the convention offered the perfect opportunity to reach them all at once. Furthermore, the cover of the issue we distributed featured prominent Republican lobbyist Fred Thompson, who went on to serve in the U.S. Senate and act in major motion pictures and the TV series *Law & Order*.

I volunteered to work on the group that helped round up Louisiana products to put in the VIP and media promotional packets so that I could include *BIC* among the "goodies." A team from the BIC Alliance worked all night to achieve further distribution objectives. Around midnight, I cut my finger while reaching for a stack of magazines and had to have six stitches to close the wound. After a quick trip to the emergency room, I returned to distributing *BIC* and we completed our task around dawn.

Following that successful marketing and PR campaign, we got calls from firms across America wanting to learn more about the BIC Alliance and our marketing techniques. We had truly set ourselves apart from every other business or industrial publication in America.

Around that time I read an excellent book titled *Guerrilla Marketing* by Jay Conrad Levinson, and got some great new ideas that we would soon integrate into our operations. However, when I thought of the term "guerrilla marketing," I couldn't help but think of a gorilla pounding on its chest and making a loud roar.

To me, sales and marketing are about listening and strategic planning. I named our unique marketing techniques and, later, my seminars and keynote presentations, "Alligator Management & Marketing" because the alligator is as quiet as a mouse — until it strikes.

Furthermore, the alligator has no vocal cords and has survived since prehistoric times because it is a great listener.

On a more personal level, I also picked the alligator for my marketing seminars because the animal is a symbol of the Louisiana heritage that we at the BIC Alliance hold dear.

As I stress in my Alligator Management & Marketing seminars, there are two types of managers and sales folks — those who are interested and those who are interesting. The interested are the most successful. Why? Because they are listening instead of talking. Perhaps that's why God gave us two ears and one mouth — so we'd listen twice as much as we talk.

I've studied non-verbal communication for years, and I genuinely enjoy sharing such techniques. In fact, after we launched BIC Media Solutions in 2005, I turned my Listening for Success presentation into a popular children's book, *Michael Learns To Listen*.

Among our largest marketing partners between 1990 and 1993 were Rollins, Plant Machine Works, Charles Holston Inc., Separation Systems Consultants Inc. (SSCI), The Cajun Crusher, Walk, Haydel and Associates., LOBOS, Basic Industries Petroleum, Geraghty and Miller and SGB — an international scaffolding company run by Neil Woods and my good friend David Starkey.

David and I became friends during the days when I'd leave my car running while on sales calls so I wouldn't have to jump start it when I left (I couldn't afford an alternator). David, who was one of our longest running marketing partners and was also featured in *Energy Entrepreneurs*, went on to become one of the owners of Empire Scaffold, which sold to Sunbelt Rentals in 2011.

The July 1991 issue of BIC was sponsored by Laidlaw, whose CEO at the time was Bill Stillwell. Bill was a great guy to work with and spoke at several of our Enviro Expos and industrial entrepreneurs' conferences. Our March/April 1992 issue was sponsored by C. M. Penn, which sold its trucking division to Gulf South Systems. In the late '90s, BIC Alliance and IVS helped broker a deal for Gulf South to sell that division to CEI Environmental Services. This deal enhanced the growth of both the BIC Alliance and IVS.

After years of industry's adverse treatment of the environment, the 1990s was called the "Decade of the Environment." The environmental industry was growing by leaps and bounds during this time, with new jobs opening up for tens of thousands of workers and business opportunities for hundreds of companies in construction and industrial engineering.

Among this vast number of companies, the BIC Alliance once again turned adversity into opportunity. During this decade, BIC became the publication of choice for industrial, construction and environmental decision makers. I traveled to Los Angeles, Boston and Washington, D.C. to learn about growth opportunities and how to successfully market environmental manufacturing and energy-related service companies.

When the devastating Exxon Valdez oil spill took place in Prince William Sound, Alaska, in 1989, an opportunity arose for emergency response businesses to create top-of-mind awareness in industry. We helped turn the adverse publicity that resulted from the Valdez spill into an opportunity, both for our clients in the emergency response and environmental businesses and for ourselves. BIC, which already had a heavy emphasis on safety and the environment, went on to greater success and expanded at the national level.

By the beginning of 1993, not only had we changed the name of the publication from the *Business and Industry Coordinator* to the *Business and Industry Connection*, but we had also evolved into the premier industrial and environmental marketing firm in the southern United States. The BIC Alliance helped launch more industrial and environmental companies and new

industrial technology than any other trade publication during that period.

Early in the year, I met and became a marketing partner with one of the early pioneers of environmental manufacturing — Will Crenshaw of Modern Manufacturing in Beaumont, Texas. Since 1961, Modern Manufacturing (now known as The Modern Group) had provided high-quality equipment manufacturing capability. The BIC Alliance was chosen to help market and promote Modern's Dragon Gut waste containers, and the company became our largest marketing partner until its environmental rental division was sold a few years later.

I loved working with Will and his entire family. He believes not only in building the best equipment in the industry, but also in being the leader in the marketing of environmental, industrial and oilfield equipment. Modern became the corporate sponsor for Enviro Expo and sponsored more front and back covers than any company before it. We developed a great marketing partnership and mutual respect that remains alive and well today.

Will's sons Casey and Colby have since joined him at The Modern Group, a family of equipment supply and rental companies that includes Dragon Products Ltd., Tiger Rentals, Modern Ag and MG Finance. Casey and Colby are following in Will's footsteps by delivering quality products that are aggressively marketed.

During 1993, many other great companies joined the BIC Alliance and/or renewed their marketing campaigns. Two of my most loyal and supportive partners were Claude Barber of Plant Machine Works and Ronnie Reynerson (both now deceased) of Appco. Claude often pre-paid me to help cover printing and mailing expenses, and Ronnie helped distribute more copies of BIC than any other partner in our history. Every two weeks, Ronnie would stop by our office and pick up several hundred copies of BIC. He would apply his own trademark label, which indicated the page numbers of his ads and editorial copy, to each magazine and then distribute them to industrial facilities across the southern United States.

In January 1993, I traveled to Little Rock, Ark., to distribute BIC during President Clinton's economic summit prior to his taking office. On that trip, I met Herb Kelleher, president and CEO of Southwest Airlines, whom I later visited in Dallas to hear his story of entrepreneurship. BIC was the only business or industry trade publication that was distributed at the airports and hotels during that economic summit.

In addition to being a faithful marketing partner, Ronnie Reynerson also gave us the idea to expand not only our direct mailings of BIC Magazine, but also our "bonus" distribution of each issue. Bonus distribution at trade shows and conferences became an added feature of our strategic marketing programs that expanded every year. Thanks to this unique feature, many of our front covers are chosen by companies such as Hertz Equipment Rental, which has taken the front cover for the month of the CON-EXPO show, and Brock Enterprises, which is typically featured during the month of the NPRA (now, the AFPM) Reliability & Maintenance Conference and Exhibition.

We believed then, as we do now, that in order to be America's leader in industrial and environmental publications, we needed to make more fans for our brand and offer much more than great advertising, editorial and direct marketing. If we were to be a leader, we needed to be the most widely read publication when and where leaders gathered. By the end of 1993, we were participants in over a dozen trade shows and conferences annually from coast to coast. Currently, BIC Magazine, along with promotional materials for IVS Investment Banking, BIC Recruiting and BIC Media Solutions, are bonus distributed at more than 40 trade shows a year across North America.

Many times, in the dead of winter and in 100-plus-degree summers, my cars would break

down under the weight of all the magazines as I traveled across the South. During my hitchhiking days, when cars would pass me in the pouring rain or freezing cold, I dreamed of owning a fleet of Lincolns that would serve as a calling card for my successful business. This dream was kept alive by the many dilapidated cars and trucks I had to drive on my journey to success. After years of hard work and sacrifice, the dream was realized during the 10th anniversary of our business in 1994, when I was able to buy our first Lincoln.

A few months later, I was driving the car on a sales call in New Orleans during a downpour. As I checked on the car before going to bed that night, it was up to its headlights in water. This was obviously a disappointment, but it was not the first on my path to success. Nevertheless, I was convinced that not even flooding could dampen my dream.

Now, each time I walk up to a Heard family luxury car or one of the vehicles in the BIC Alliance fleet, I am reminded of the hard road we have traveled. I'm also reminded of those days when hitchhiking was a necessity, and of the cars and trucks that sputtered out and had to be fixed along the way. Since then, we've been fortunate enough to add a purple 1950 Chevy named "Mr. BIC" that we use to promote a greater love of reading and learning among people of all ages through our "Great Things Happen When We Learn" campaign.

I'm also reminded of all those who helped me get around by providing me with transportation — Jimmy Culpepper, Mike Conners, Bobby Davis, "Big" Ernie Hernandez, Thomas Heard and Gerry Lane, owner and operator of Gerry Lane Enterprises. In the late 1980s, Gerry allowed me to apply his advertising investment as a down payment toward the first new vehicle I'd owned in years.

# How We Die is More Important Than How We Live

From 1990 to 1995, we refined BIC by expanding into all facets of energy, as well as into pulp and paper and power generation. By 1990, we were poised for growth, and we spent the next five years becoming debt free and building a reputation as America's largest multi-industry, multi-departmental newsmagazine. We had learned how to build something out of nothing but faith, hard work, perseverance and a savvy marketing formula that we loved to share with others.

One of the most important things I learned from those days is that no matter how hard things may become or how little we might have we must put God and family first and stop periodically to take a break. I began learning this painful lesson during my first business venture and the period from 1983 to 1987, when working was about all I did.

There is an old saying that the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree. Both Bodi's and my parents were not only some of the hardest workers I have ever met, but they also believed in spending quality spare time with loved ones. From the earliest years of our lives, our parents placed a high value on wholesome leisure time activities. Both our parents owned camps at False River for years, and Bodi, Dane, Thomas, our grandchildren and I made cherished memories while fishing, boating and camping out on weekends and holidays.

Even though Bodi and I went many years without a real vacation, we went to False River every chance we got to rest, relax and prepare physically and mentally for the challenges ahead. In the poorest of times, we used our families' camps and boats and rarely dined out, except at restaurants where we had bartered for marketing services or advertising.

Often times while camping out, I'd awaken in the wee hours of the morning and spend several hours thinking and planning strategy for the days, weeks and months ahead. I loved drinking coffee, watching sunrises and sunsets, and spending those precious hours in nature with my loved ones.

During the early 1990s, Bodi and I found an old, dilapidated camp about midway between our parents' respective campsites, rented it for \$85 per month and agreed to restore it to a livable condition. Thanks to my carpentry skills, and plenty of help from family, friends, co-workers and lots of duct tape, we patched the place together. The place came to be fondly known as Camp Duck Tape because every time a crack appeared in the walls or the floor, we would seal it up with "duck" (duct) tape!

I conceived and refined most of the dreams and plans for our future on the back porch and pier of that camp, just as I had in that nearby trailer 10 years earlier. By 1995, Bodi and I were on a strong enough financial footing to buy a large home in Baton Rouge and a second home on the banks of False River near New Roads, La.— great timing, as our first grandchild, Hannah Yvonne Brinsko, was born on June 22 of that year.

Decades earlier, both Bodi's and my parents told us that one of the greatest joys you can experience in life is owning a home that's paid for. Since the early '90s, Bodi and I have used what we call the "stair-step approach" to home ownership. In the beginning, we saved our money and bought a small home we could afford to pay for in cash. Next, we saved some more

and stepped up to the next notch. It took four steps and 12 years for us to finally acquire the home of our dreams (at the time), which was located on a beautiful lake in Baton Rouge.

We visit the bayous and coastlines of our beloved Louisiana as often as possible and enjoy brainstorming for upcoming issues of *BIC* and what adventures we have yet to experience. *TLC* (which we ran from 2002 to 2006) was conceived along the bank of False River, as was *IVS* Investment Banking, our merger and acquisition company. I'm not sure why, but there is something about being around nature — water, in particular — that seems to elevate creative thinking and our love for peace to new heights. Somehow, the solitude of nature and participation in golf, fishing and other relaxing outdoor activities seems to allow our minds to think in a three-dimensional way and helps us come up with better solutions to challenges. I'm still that way today.

Show me a person who doesn't take a break, and I'll show you someone who will never compete as effectively or be as successful in his or her business and family life as the person who takes some time to relax.

Today, Bodi and I enjoy the privilege of sitting on our back patio in League City, Texas, with our pontoon boat Aqua *BIC* docked behind. It's here at our home, located very close to our daughter and her family, that we enjoy life to its fullest. We get a front-row seat to nature at its best, watching sunrises and sunsets that are as beautiful to us as the view from the South rim of the Grand Canyon or the majestic, snow-covered mountains of Alaska.

The year 1996 was one of the saddest and most challenging of my life. My dad, who had become my best friend since my mom's death in 1986, died that year. After causing my parents much sadness when my first business failed in 1981, one of the greatest joys of my life was rebuilding this wonderful relationship with my dad. Thankfully, he lived long enough to see Bodi and me begin to turn the corner in both our business and spiritual lives and witness Hannah's birth.

The adversity I experienced and the disappointment I caused family and friends inspired Bodi and me to strive for success in our business, personal and spiritual lives—or die trying.

Dad, Mom, my wife, her parents, Dane and Thomas were the greatest cheerleaders for me and the *BIC* family. I thank God that Dad lived long enough to see us become nearly debt free with our own home and office building, sharing God's message of love with others. No one prayed harder for us than my dad and Bodi's sister, Beverly, who passed away in 2004 after a courageous and inspiring bout with cancer. Both Beverly and Dad believed, as do Bodi and I, that God placed us in the communications and training business for a purpose.

Even at his death, my dad — commonly known as “Mr. Leo” because he was so well-respected — was an inspiration to our entire family and everyone who knew him. There never seemed to be any doubt in his mind, nor in the minds of those who knew him, that he was going to heaven to be with God and loved ones who had gone before him.

Bodi and I always referred to my dad as the perfect Southern gentleman, and no truer words were ever spoken. Of course, like most loving wives, she always encourages me to be more like my dad and other Southern gentlemen in my faith and demeanor. After more than 51 years as my soulmate and best friend, she reports that I am making great progress! Thank God for wives, family members and friends who aren't afraid to help guide us along life's path.

When the doctors told us that Dad wasn't going to make it, my brother, sister and I were devastated. After breaking the news to us, the doctor entered Dad's room to tell him, just after the hospital attendant had delivered his evening meal. After the doctor left, my brother, sister and I entered the room somber and saddened, with tears in our eyes.

None of us knew what to say or how to act. My brother George, in a gallant effort to lift our spirits, asked Dad if he would like more of his partially eaten supper before it got cold. My dad, with a twinkle in his eye and a smile across his face, said in a loving voice, “No, son, the doctor seems to have ruined my appetite.”

I’ll never forget my dad’s actions as he took our hands, held them tightly and said, “Looks like I’m going home.” Even in the hours before his death, Dad demonstrated his faith in God by bringing peace to others. He was a gentle, God-loving man who showed us how to die with style. He had absolutely no fear of death because he had the peace of knowing that he was going to a better place.

Folks, over the past 76 years I’ve learned great lessons from some of the most successful people in America, but no lesson has ever been more precious than the one I learned that night from my dad — how we live is important, but how we die is far more important.

Dad held our hands that night and prayed that we would always be close on Earth and, one day, reunited in heaven. Seeing his peace and happiness in both life and death played a tremendous role in my spiritual journey.

My dad and Beverly shared another thing in common — they both inspired Bodi and me to make God first in our lives and share God’s love for others in what we say and do. When Bodi and I remarried in 1987, we began to attend church more and pray regularly. It was then that Bible reading became one of my greatest joys. The Gideons did the world a great service when they put Bibles in hotel rooms around the nation — on hundreds of occasions, I’ve read the Good Book’s stories of faith, love and perseverance during the sleepless nights of work- and leisure-related trips. It’s something that I continue to do regularly, particularly in times of stress and challenge, for the pure joy it brings and for the lessons it teaches me.

The lessons I learned in the Bible inspired me to give back by publishing and giving away inspirational, family-friendly books and movies. I started thinking about this in earnest back in the ‘90s, and we finally reached a level of success in the mid-2000s to make this dream a reality. The first edition of *It’s What We Do Together That Counts* was published in 2005, and our first movie, *The Gift Horse*, was released in 2014.

# **What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger**

Paul Tyree was offered a sales management position with AllService, a BIC Alliance marketing partner in Texas, in 1996. His departure was bittersweet for all of us because he and I had become a great team, and his contributions helped get the BIC Alliance on a sound financial footing. Even though Paul was no longer a full-time “BICster,” we continue to have an excellent relationship right up to this day.

In 1996, the idea of launching a mergers-and-acquisition intermediary company, as well as a recruiting company, was born. In 1996, with Paul's help, IVS (then known as Ind-Viro Marketing) was created. IVS's first deal was to help facilitate the acquisition of AllService by Total Safety.

Matt Malatesta, a Texan who graduated from the Manship School of Mass Communication at LSU, took over management of our Western U.S. operations in Houston — which had opened in 1995 — and played an essential role in the continued growth of the BIC Alliance and IVS. During his time at the BIC Alliance, Matt set sales appointments for me, wrote columns for BIC, handled our newly founded creative services division and learned how to sell. He published his first novel, *It's My Life*, a story about a Texas high school football team, in 2004.

Once we completed the Total Safety/AllService deal, Bodi and I reinvested the entire intermediary fee into changing the cover of BIC to a glossy format. Although the fee covered the printing for only four of our 12 annual front covers, we were convinced that this strategic move would be a wise one.

It was around this time that our dear friend Ralph Hay of Dixie Web passed away. Not long after his death, we entered partnerships with Baker Printing of Baker, La., led by Andy Bishop and his family, and Baton Rouge Press, which is owned by Pat Prather. The former printed all of our covers and the latter printed the body of each magazine until we switched to an all-glossy format in 2007. We still work with both companies on various projects, and our continued success would not have been possible without their hard work and dedication.

By the time we published four issues with the new format, our sales had increased well beyond the amount needed to cover the increased printing investment. Notice that I say “investment” instead of “cost.” We firmly believe that one should develop the mindset that taking action to better market or grow his or her company is an investment, not a cost.

When an owner is confident enough to invest in his/her own company, it helps build confidence in that company among its partners and customers. We invested every dollar we had and borrowed hundreds of thousands more, confident that we were truly going the extra mile and charting a path toward even greater successes.

One of the things I've found most interesting about the most successful entrepreneurs and business executives is that money is rarely our primary driving force.

Most, including myself, really enjoy what we do and would probably do it for free if we could. I also find it interesting (and have experienced it firsthand) that once we have reached (or are starting to reach) tremendous success, we continue to derive greater peace and happiness from helping others in the process. Furthermore, I firmly believe that the notion that “givers get” is totally true.

When we make God, family and others a higher priority than ourselves, and when we connect individuals for mutual benefit, great things happen. As Mr. Andre had told me 30 years earlier, the key to success in business is to stay in business.

There will be times when you think about shutting it down and walking away from your business—particularly in times of hardship like the loss of a stellar salesperson. Hang in there! Good employees will come and go, but if you’re doing a good job and have cultivated a solid relationship with the client, the business will stay with you.

To date, we’ve had some great folks who’ve been part of the BIC Alliance — some as marketing partners, some as employees and tens of thousands who’ve been loyal readers. Like any successful company, we’ve lost some great folks along the way, but other great folks have taken their places.

Life is a journey of hills and valleys. While 1996, a year of great challenge and adversity, had its share of valleys, 1997 was our best year in business to that point. As they say, it is always darkest just before the dawn. In the case of the BIC Alliance, no truer words were ever spoken.

Paul’s departure inspired me and everyone who remained at the BIC Alliance to work harder and do what had to be done to sustain our growth. The events of the next year reminded me of the old Gene Autry song, “Back in the Saddle Again.” In 1997, I got back in the saddle and took over the reins — in both sales and production. I traveled about 100 days that year, mostly in Texas, but also nationally whenever the situation dictated.

Thankfully, our CFO Theresa Kennedy, production manager Kathy Hayward and our entire Louisiana staff did an excellent job. With the help of Matt in Texas and Chris Coffee in Louisiana (both editors who I quickly trained in sales after Paul’s departure), not to mention BIC Magazine’s shift to glossy covers, we grew by about 20 percent in 1997. In his own way of saying “job well done,” my friend and benefactor Sonny Anderson, who co-signed a note to keep the BIC Alliance alive in the mid-1980s, sponsored one of our front covers that year.

Chris Pettitt, a BIC account executive from 1997 to 2003, played a critical role in the growth of both BIC and IVS and helped spur the growth of our Western U.S. operations. Chris, along with IVS independent agent Billy Gauthier, helped initiate our intermediary role in CEI Environmental Services’ 1998 acquisition of Gulf South Systems’ transportation division, one of the largest deals in the history of IVS.

Bodi and I continued to live comfortably and to devote all extra revenue to expansion and to paying off debt. By 1997, after going bust in ’82, we were almost debt free. We celebrated by paying off (using the fee from our second successful IVS transaction) the building we had agreed to lease-purchase several years earlier. It remains our corporate headquarters to this day. It had taken more than 15 years, but we were finally fulfilling our financial obligations and beginning to reap the fruits of our labor.

The last few years of the ‘90s were memorable, to say the least, with many major events that would change my life and alter the course of the BIC Alliance forever. One of our biggest business moves was to stop producing the Enviro Expo trade shows and focus all our attention on our flagship publication and executive recruiting and merger and acquisition activities.

Ill health had not been among the many trials I'd endured in my life up to that point. However, in April 1998, I began to suffer from chest pains just before leaving for the Industrial Fire World show in Houston. Bodi insisted that I go to the hospital instead of leaving for Texas. She may have saved my life. I was experiencing pretty serious heart problems that required me to undergo an angioplasty to re-establish good circulation. This also meant making some changes to my lifestyle, including regular medication, more regular exercise and a reduced workload.

But compared to what happened to me in August 1997, my heart problem seemed like a minor setback.

I was on one of my regular visits to Houston when I was carjacked at gunpoint by three men who beat me into unconsciousness, robbed me and left me for dead near Interstate 10.

As I felt the cold steel of a gun pressed against my head, it seemed that every breath I took would be my last. However, the angels were with me that night — I believe the only reason my attackers didn't shoot me was because they thought they had beaten me to death.

From the moment I was attacked, my first thoughts were of God and my family.

Bleeding profusely, I feared that I would die before making it to the hospital. Nobody would pick me up in the state I was in, so I stayed on the service road and, as luck would have it, came to a convenience store. The store employees called for an ambulance.

It took almost three hours for me to get stitched up and get an MRI to see if I'd sustained permanent brain damage. The doctor reassured me, however, by telling me that I was a hard-headed Cajun.

During my struggle to maintain consciousness and get to a hospital, and later while getting stitched up, I repeatedly thanked God for sparing me. I promised Him that I'd devote the rest of my life to being a better Christian and to share His message of love and forgiveness with others. Launching BIC Media Solutions in 2005 to publish inspirational, family-friendly books and produce feature films, TV shows and videos was part of that pledge.

I vowed, once again, to spend more quality time with my wonderful family — which soon added one more member when our second granddaughter, Mary Ada Brinsko, was born Feb. 20, 1998. I would also devote more time and resources to helping others learn how to find greater peace, happiness and success by putting God, family and serving others as top priorities in their lives. I stopped doing business in some of the environments I had frequented previously, and stopped being seen as a “wheeler-dealer” and a “party guy” who did whatever was needed to make a sale. I truly believe God saved my life that August night because He had a higher purpose ahead for me. And, my business and personal life flourished as well.

During my recuperation period, I reflected on the times in my life when my dream of becoming an entrepreneur was threatened by people who tried to kill my confidence or sabotage my goals. If you are to be successful in life or business, you cannot let debt, ill health or other major setback deter you from reaching your goal. This formula is key to anyone seeking success. Your will and your faith in God must be as durable as the hide of the reptile from which my Alligator Management & Marketing program got its name.

As the classic Sly & The Family Stone anthem says, “You can make it if you try.” You too can succeed by making a solid effort fueled by passion and resolve.

After these life-altering experiences, Bodi and I also decided that we needed more strong Christian leadership to help take the BIC Alliance into the new century. Our prayers were answered in April 1999 when, with his wife Dane's support, our son-in-law Thomas decided to leave his job with Key Production (now Cimarex Energy Co.) to become my partner in the BIC

Alliance.

Up to that time, Thomas was in the prime of a successful career with Key Production in New Orleans. But, he began to show great interest in joining me to run the BIC Alliance. For years, Thomas had written a column for BIC, and both he and Dane would often attend key industry-related events with Bodi and me, including trade shows, conferences and networking functions.

Bodi and I had always dreamed and prayed that someday Dane and Thomas would join us in taking the BIC Alliance into the 21st century. However, we all wanted to be sure that the timing and circumstances were just right before making such a major, life-altering change.

They moved from Mandeville to Baton Rouge in the summer of 1999 and bought a home just down the street from us, making Bodi and I very happy. Thomas and Dane were excited about joining the BIC Alliance. And, we were thrilled that they, plus our beautiful grandchildren Hannah and Mary, would be in Baton Rouge full time.

We're updating this book this year, in 2019, to celebrate two milestones. Not only does this year mark the 35th anniversary of BIC Magazine, but it is also 20 years since Thomas and Dane joined us as our partners (and eventual successors) at the BIC Alliance.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of our Associate Publisher Heather Cavalier being part of the BIC Alliance family. In addition to managing everything publication- and operations-related for the BIC Alliance, Heather helps me manage all operations for BIC Media Solutions, which publishes our books and produces our faith-based films, TV and videos.

## Keeping On Keeping On

With the Holy Spirit's guidance, Thomas and I — with the invaluable assistance of our great staff, faithful marketing partners and loyal readers — steered the BIC Alliance to unprecedented growth. Within a few years of joining the company in 1999, Thomas had learned all facets of the administration, production and sales management of *BIC*. Prior to his arrival, *BIC Magazine* was perceived primarily as an advertorial publication with only a few features. However, with Thomas's hard work and emphasis on quality editorial (including more industry news and technical articles), *BIC* was brought to greater respectability. He was promoted to president and chief operating officer of the BIC Alliance and IVS in 2002.

From 1996 to 2004, not only did the annual readership of our publications increase from approximately 650,000 readings to more than 1.5 million, the BIC Alliance also doubled in sales and expanded to the national level. Although *BIC* began as a Louisiana publication, by 2004 only 30 percent of our business came from our home state, with 40 percent from Texas and the other 30 percent from across the nation. We at the BIC Alliance take great pride in helping share the good news about the U.S. Energy Sector with the rest of the world and appreciate the role that folks in state and local government and others across the South have played in our efforts.

The BIC Alliance continued to grow by leaps and bounds as we entered the 21st century. Due to the excellent work of our production team and input from our knowledgeable sales staff, the content of our flagship publication became more informative and insightful with each issue.

The tragic and disturbing events of September 11, 2001, and the demise of corporate institutions like Enron and Arthur Anderson in 2002, presented many challenges for both the American public and for industry. Security and stability became the issues of the day, and it seemed as though corporate integrity was at a premium in 2002.

But as I peruse the pages of our publications from that year, I am reminded that there were still honest, hardworking men and women of virtue leading corporations in all sectors of industry. Just by reading their insights into personal success and how to empower others, I can see clearly why we as a nation were able to bounce back from the events of 9/11 and stand united in the face of adversity. When I think of the Civil War and all that I've read and heard about it since early childhood, it amazes me how our great nation was once so divided, and I thank God that today we are truly the *United States* of America. While some may feel differently, we are still proud to be Americans and want to play a role in making America even greater by producing "Media That Matters."

The year 2002 was a big one for the BIC Alliance and its partners. January marked the biggest month of membership growth that we'd ever had. *BIC*'s June issue was the first in our history in which a BIC Alliance company sponsored a back cover in our own publication: we explained how IVS can help connect the right people and the right companies. That issue's accompanying story illustrated how IVS used its matchmaking expertise to locate qualified candidates for positions with companies such as Kiebler-Thompson and Kenny Industrial Services; assisted CEI Environmental Services in purchasing Gulf South Systems' transportation division; helped build AllService; and assisted in the sale of AllService to Total Safety.

Since launching *BIC* in 1984, many hospitality and high-end leisure partners wanted to reach our readers on both the regional and national levels. As part of our commitment to improving the quality of life for our BIC partners and faithful readers, we launched *The Leisure Connection* (*TLC*) in 2002. Formerly a long-running section in *BIC*, *TLC* became a stand-alone, family-oriented leisure publication with a strong emphasis on off-the-job safety, since more people get hurt off the job. And because it seemed that most people (my own family included) enjoyed several types of leisure activities, we made *TLC* a publication that would open the door to many kinds of family- and work-related adventures.

In the research we conducted prior to publishing *TLC*, we found that baby boomers were retiring earlier. And unlike their parents — many of whom had lived through the Great Depression, worked longer and were more frugal — the boomers enjoyed more of the finer things in life. This led us to believe that there were excellent business opportunities in what we now refer to as the “indulgence” market.

And when it comes to indulgence, the Gulf South region ranks highly in both tourism and the variety of convention and meeting destinations it offers. As a result, *TLC*'s mission was to help our Gulf South readers enjoy their home while helping bring others from across America to the region.

With *BIC*'s successful formula as a guide, we launched *TLC* as a multi-leisure, multi-state publication. *TLC* gave us a vehicle to launch an event planning division and offer getaway packages such as hunting and fishing trips, golf outings and hotel stays. By becoming our publication's biggest client, we became true marketing partners with our other advertisers. That formula sounds simple today, but it took decades to refine and use in the most effective way — the rapid success of *TLC* underscored that achievement. As the publication grew, we began to feature more meeting coordination and event planning articles, along with more safety, community service and spirituality-related features and executive- and entrepreneur-at-leisure interviews.

We published *TLC* for four years, from 2002 to 2006. Readership for the publication dropped after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in August 2005, and the region was recovering from the devastation that the massive storm left behind. We decided to focus our efforts on publishing more books in our Media That Matters library rather than publish a second magazine. Coincidentally, our first edition of *It's What We Do Together That Counts* was released the same week that Hurricane Katrina hit.

The true highlight of 2002, however, was the birth of our first grandson — Thomas Michael Brinsko III. As fate would have it, little Michael shares his birthday (Oct. 16) with his dad and paternal granddad.

The year 2003 was one of transition for our family and for the BIC Alliance. After the departure of *BIC* account executive Chris Pettitt in the summer of 2003, Thomas and Dane

offered to relocate to Houston to expand our operations in the Western U.S. with new regional sales manager (and native Texan) Terry Grover. This meant that Bodi would be accompanying me on almost every trip I made to Houston to spend as much time with Dane, Thomas and our grandchildren as possible!

Although the changes were challenging for our family, I can say with pride that what took place that year elevated the BIC Alliance to a new level. With many industrial companies feeling the adverse effects of geopolitical instability (the most prominent factor being the Iraq war), some of our marketing partners faced an uphill battle. We wanted to be there to help, and I'm happy to report that many of our advertisers had banner years.

At the beginning of 2004, our company resolved never to stop learning and to share whatever knowledge we'd gain with our readers. That summer, our team traveled to Valero's St. Charles facility in Norco, La., to attend the "Refining Basics Academy" and increase our knowledge of the industry. Judging by their commitment to safety, teamwork, community service, environmental stewardship and perseverance, we were confident that the Valero team were more than qualified to educate us—and they proved us right.

It turns out that we learned much more than just the refining process during that trip. We also had the chance to closely examine critical issues facing the petroleum and chemical industries and draw our own conclusions as to how they could be resolved, making the *BIC Magazine* the best it's ever been.

Here at the BIC Alliance, I can certainly say that our people, along with our BIC marketing partners and readers, have made us successful throughout our 35 years and counting. It was all because we made a commitment long ago to hire the best folks and to keep feeding our minds with new and helpful information on the latest crude and refining technology.

By the nature of our business, many folks have done more than just hone their management, sales, marketing and operations experience at the BIC Alliance. They've also built a network of contacts that opened the door to what they felt were greater business or entrepreneurship opportunities elsewhere.

In the case of Kathy Hayward, we helped her pursue her entrepreneurial dreams by selling her our interest in the trade publication *Sulfuric Acid Today* and helping finance the acquisition of a publication we had helped launch with her partner, Jack Harris (who is now the president of VIP International, a maintenance solutions provider for the sulfuric acid industry). Similarly, Paul Tyree, Matt Malatesta, Chris Pettitt and others honed their management and sales skills at BIC and made contacts who helped them become successful in their future endeavors.

God has blessed Thomas and me in that every time an employee has moved on, another person has come along and helped us grow. And, even better, some have stayed the course and have made the BIC Alliance part of their long-term career plans. Among those who came and stayed on are Bobby Davis, who was with us from our inception to his death in 2016; our CFO Theresa Kennedy; Associate Publisher Heather Cavalier, who joined us in 1999 (the same year as Thomas); and others.

I credit Thomas, Jeremy, Theresa and Heather for helping to improve the *BIC Magazine*, build its reputation and get better results for our partners. At the same time, they also drew excellent people to our company—the kind of people who are proud to have joined an organization that treats each staff member like a partner.

Here at the BIC Alliance, our commitment to training is just as strong as our dedication to communication. We believe—and have proved—that we can train good people to become great and great people to become phenomenal. Perhaps this explains the success of IVS — we're so

adept at training the right people to do the right jobs that we know both when we see them. In addition, IVS has fostered an unparalleled ability to match buyers and sellers, another skill honed from BIC Alliance's years of connecting business and industry with one another through strategic marketing.

Among the phenomenal individuals who are currently helping to further the success of the BIC Alliance and maintain it through the 21st century are our administrative and customer relations staff — Theresa Kennedy, Kaley Christy and Melissa Freeman; our sales team — Jeremy Osterberger, Tom Derrah, Mark Hertzog, Greg Miller, Laurie Tangedahl and Melissa Wolkenhauer; and our production staff — Heather Cavalier, Dylan Krieger, Andrew White, Shannon Thornton, Cory Lewis, Dillon Lowe and Eric Taylor.

In September 2004, we retained Mike Bourgeois, a semi-retired, award-winning public relations professional known to our readers as a columnist for *BIC* and *TLC*, and enlisted the help of Brady Porche, editor-in-chief of *TLC*, to assist in the writing and publication of the first edition of this book. It would serve as a pilot project for the possible establishment of a book publishing operation as part of the BIC Alliance family.

Every day, we're writing new chapters — not only in our lives, but in the ever-evolving story of the BIC Alliance as well.

## What's Ahead for the BIC Alliance

It's hard to believe that the first edition of *It's What We Do Together That Counts* was published in 2005, nearly 15 years ago. Looking back on that decade and a half, I'm struck by just how much has happened—both to Bodi, me and our family as well as to our growing BIC Alliance family and network of industry allies.

As many entrepreneurs can probably attest, sometimes we're so busy moving forward and doing new things that we don't always take a breath to look back on what we've all done together. That's yet another reason I'm glad to update this book—it forced me to slow down for a bit and reflect on some of the major milestones of the past 15 years.

I also saw this book update as an opportunity to help more people find greater peace, faith, hope, happiness and success in their spiritual, personal and professional lives.

After relocating from Baton Rouge to League City in April 2018, I began going through my years of personal calendars and journals—I have faithfully kept detailed notes of important events and upcoming trips, business plans and family milestones for nearly all my adult life. What follows are the highlights of 2006 to 2018, captured from my journal and calendar reviews and with the helpful remembrances of my valued BIC Alliance staff.

### **Faith, Family and Giving Back**

BIC Alliance remains committed to community and giving back. In 2013, the team “put their boots on” by supporting the Boot Campaign, a national 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to showing appreciation for active military, raising awareness of the challenges individuals face upon return from combat and supporting their transition home.

BIC Alliance sponsored the Boot Campaign's movie screening of “Lone Survivor” in Plano, Texas, and also hosted screenings of its own in Baton Rouge and Houston for veterans and industry. The movie is based on the experiences of retired U.S. Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell, who inspired the Boot Campaign. It was at the screening in Plano where my IVS partner John Zapalac and I decided to expand BIC Alliance's BIC Media Solutions division to produce faith-based, family-friendly films, TV series and video/DVDs.

BIC Alliance will continue its support of the Boot Campaign. Currently, BIC Recruiting is working with several organizations to create jobs for veterans and others who are seeking a better or more meaningful career.

Also in 2013, our president, Thomas Brinsko, founded The Get Together Bay Area — a group of people who meet monthly to use their business expertise, entrepreneurial skills, creativity and connections to help meet the needs of Christ-centered nonprofit organizations and the people they serve. The group meets on the first Wednesday of each month from September to April at 218 Clear Creek Avenue in League City, Texas. Anyone who would like to participate is always welcome.

In other community outreach initiatives, the BIC Alliance team has dedicated time to serving together on beach sweeps in Galveston, Texas, and to cooking and serving meals at The Bridge Over Troubled Waters family crisis center in Pasadena, Texas. And as part of the Speaker's Bureau we launched in the early 2000s, I continue to speak on inspirational and career enhancement topics 6 to 12 times per year.

BIC Alliance continues to support the Oilfield Christian Fellowship, sponsoring its breakfast

events during the annual Offshore Technology Conference (OTC) in Houston and providing ad space in *BIC Magazine*.

My success would not be possible without the loyal support and work ethic of the entire BIC Alliance staff, which I consider a part of my family. And like any family, we make it a point to support each other in times of misfortune or trouble.

For example, when Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana (and flooded New Orleans) in August 2005, our BIC Alliance family volunteered their time and services to relief shelters in Louisiana and Texas.

And when Hurricane Gustav reached the Louisiana coast in 2008, the Baton Rouge area was hit particularly hard. BIC's Baton Rouge office sustained damage that made it impossible to work there. Bodi and I were on a cruise in Europe, and the rest of the team back home picked up the ball and really helped out. Thomas drove from Texas to help the Baton Rouge team. Heather Cavalier, BIC Magazine's associate publisher, still had power at her home, so she hosted several employees while we were on deadline. While many of our BIC family experienced some degree of flooding at their homes, we continued to work on that month's issue and got it out on deadline. In fact, regardless of our challenges, we have never missed a deadline in our 35-year history.

### ***BIC Magazine – In Print and Online***

Over the past fifteen years, *BIC Magazine* has expanded all across North America and beyond. It continues to deliver the messages of energy-related companies and leading industrial service companies to a national and international audience. Through a diverse range of media—including print, digital and industry events—*BIC* reaches 100,000-plus readers every month. This is an impressive statistic considering we publish just 10 issues a year.

Our readers include mid- and upper-level managers and executives in the heavy process industries—refining/petrochemical, drilling and exploration, pipeline, marine, terminal, pulp and paper, power generation and heavy construction. Departments in the publication cover industry concerns such as safety, maintenance, purchasing and the environment. *BIC* is also featured online in its entirety and is accessed worldwide.

*BIC*'s horizontal format, which means that we serve and cover a wide variety of sectors and departments, gives it an advantage over other energy publications' vertical approach (meaning that they cover a limited number, or only one, sector). *BIC*'s unique format features not only the latest news and trends but also marketing campaigns that include ads, ongoing editorial and access to databases.

In 2014, BIC Media Solutions co-produced a short video entitled “Energy Marketing 101,” which explained the energy industry—from upstream to midstream to downstream. It also explained BIC's role in connecting key producers and vendors/service providers across the entire energy spectrum. This video is excellent for helping educate or train others about how the oil and gas sectors are interconnected. It is available for free from the *BIC Magazine* and BIC Media Solutions websites.

The BIC Alliance participates in more than 40 trade shows and conferences each year, delivering our message to a broader audience. We also hold annual networking events attended by a “who's who” in industry, affording industrial suppliers and buyers an opportunity to visit with their peers and exchange ideas, referrals and business cards.

The staff at *BIC* continues to work very closely with the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers (AFPM), the Texas Alliance of Energy Producers, Associated Builders and

Contractors, the Louisiana Chemical Association, the Texas Chemical Council and others. These organizations all use *BIC* as their third-party newsletters. Through ongoing columns, they share their message with BIC Alliance members, owner companies and governments at both the state and federal levels. In each issue, *BIC*'s readers and members also provide a wealth of industry information, with a focus on best practices, safety, trends, challenges and more.

We have also been fortunate to have industry leaders share their experience with our readers through regular columns in the magazine. Dr. Shirley White, Career Strategist at Success Images, is a frequent contributor on effective job search and interviewing strategies. Scott Whitelaw, vice president of environmental, health and safety at Texas United Corp., has contributed valuable, thought-provoking "life lessons" applicable to our readers' lives both in and outside of work. And Kerry Siggins, CEO of Colorado-based StoneAge (a designer and manufacturer of high-pressure water blasting tools and equipment for industrial cleaning applications) regularly shares valuable insights on effective leadership strategies, how to become a more effective manager and employee, and self-discipline and learning from one's mistakes.

The BIC Alliance has upgraded the features of the magazine over the years to include the addition of a glossy cover wrap, international distribution and publication of *BIC* online in its entirety. The magazine also became full color in August 2006.

The BIC Alliance continues to invest in *BIC Magazine*. The June/July 2009 issue of *BIC* was the first of a more interactive digital version where readers could flip through the pages of *BIC* virtually. The online publication also offers "search" and "share" features. Later in 2009, *BIC* began publishing an e-newsletter complement to the print and digital versions. The September 2009 issue of *BIC* included a new feature — a four-page pull out insert. In 2012, *BIC Magazine* upgraded to be perfect bound (adhesive binding) and a UV coating was added to the cover to enhance its finish.

*BIC Magazine* remains America's largest multi-industry, multi-department magazine and the BIC Alliance will continue in its commitment to helping business and industry leaders communicate with one another—both through the pages of *BIC* as well as through the company's other divisions.

We expanded our presence in the digital realm in the early 2010s with the launch of *BICMagazine.com*, which aims to keep readers updated daily on the industry's top news and provide enhanced online access to the content of *BIC Magazine*. The site has been designed for easy navigation, with a menu where users can find content related to specific industry segments and departments. A special "expansions" section provides news on upcoming projects in the upstream, midstream and downstream sectors.

*BICMagazine.com* also gives users a wealth of valuable industry resources at their disposal. The site has dedicated areas for informational white papers and videos, company product and service catalogs and industry webinars. Job seekers find links to the top industry positions available on *BICJobs.com*.

BIC Alliance will further expand its digital offerings and revamp the websites of BIC Recruiting, IVS Investment Banking and BIC Media Solutions this year. The new BIC Recruiting website will have portals for both employers and candidates featuring job listings, informative articles with hiring and job search tips and other helpful resources. And the IVS Investment Banking and BIC Media Solutions sites will provide information on investment banking, media partnerships, custom book publishing, keynote presentations and more.

The BIC Alliance is currently partnering to expand its video capability and is planning to

work with regional video partners in Texas, the Northeast and elsewhere.

Thomas and his fantastic management team and staff have devoted themselves to continuously improving not only our editorial and marketing capabilities but our database as well. Thanks to their efforts, many of our marketing partners think we've got the best multi-industry database and prospecting tools in America.

As we forge ahead, we thank God for blessing us with a wonderful staff, great marketing partners and loyal readers who respond to our requests for interviews and articles for *BIC* and help us to determine what additional products and services we should offer.

### **IVS and BIC Recruiting**

Since the very first transaction that IVS Investment Banking helped put together (the 1997 acquisition of AllService Inc. by Total Safety), the BIC Alliance set itself apart from every publisher in the energy, construction and environmental industries and opened up a new avenue for individuals in business and industry to buy or sell their companies.

In 2007, John Zapalac, a successful banker with years of mergers & acquisition (M&A) and portfolio management experience, joined IVS Investment Banking as a managing partner. With John's help, plus the networking connections that were cultivated by Thomas Brinsko, Jeremy Osterberger and myself, IVS built a solid reputation as one of the industry's preeminent M&A consulting firms that could effectively link buyers, sellers and investors with opportunities, business valuation and recapitalization. Through deep and wide relationships with strategic buyers and intimate knowledge and history with the universe of private equity groups working in the industrial space, we positioned IVS as a firm that maximizes value for every client it represents.

The industry quickly took notice of what we were doing. IVS started getting calls from folks around the country and beyond, who were interested in buying or selling their companies or utilizing our recruiting services. Over the past decade, IVS has garnered a reputation as a leading provider of M&A, recapitalization, management-led buyout, private placement and consulting services.

Since 2008, IVS completed 18 transactions that totaled more than \$425 million. For example, IVS completed a leveraged recapitalization of USA Environment LP in 2008. Founded in 1991, USA Environment provides a full range of high-end environmental services as well as owns and operates a transportation fleet licensed to haul hazardous and radioactive materials in 48 states. The equity sponsor for the transaction was Wingate Partners, a \$300 million private equity fund located in Dallas.

And in 2017, IVS helped secure a leveraged recapitalization of Specialty Welding and Turnarounds LLC (SWAT) by Hastings Equity Partners. It was IVS's biggest transaction to date, the proceeds of which helped BIC Media Solutions fund two more productions—the film *Urban Country* and the film/TV pilot for *Rock Bottom and Back* (more on both of these projects later).

Every time that IVS completed a major transaction, we reinvested the proceeds back into the BIC Alliance's other companies and ventures. In 1997, IVS funds went into *BIC*'s glossy covers. Additionally, our fee for the 1998 sale of Gulf South's Transportation Division to CEI provided the funding to help bring Thomas and Dane Brinsko on as partners in 1999 and helped us pay off our building in Baton Rouge in the same year.

IVS proceeds were instrumental in building the BIC Alliance's newest and largest League City office in 2015. Located at 311 Columbia Memorial Parkway, the 7,500-square-foot facility

is the Texas home for our BIC Alliance companies, including BIC Magazine, BIC Recruiting, IVS and BIC Media Solutions. The building also includes a large meeting and media room equipped with technology to host film screenings. The office building has hosted many of our valued BIC Alliance partners during business and development meetings. Each December, the building is the site of our popular and well-attended BIC Alliance Christmas Open House and Toy Drive.

The success we found with IVS beginning in 1997 made me realize that we weren't fully capitalizing on our ability to match promising candidates with potential employers. That prompted us to start BIC Recruiting, which places sales management, operations management and C-level executives in the energy market. Since Thomas Brinsko joined us in 1999, we've built an extensive network of more than 32,000 contacts to allow division recruiters to find the best candidate for their position. In fact, more than half of BIC Recruiting's placements come from direct referrals, which sets us apart from many other industry placement services.

Hazel Kassu joined BIC Alliance in 2010 to help develop BIC Recruiting and was promoted to director of recruiting in 2013. With more than 20 years of executive search and recruiting experience, Hazel has been an invaluable resource in placing candidates in sales management, operations management, information technology, engineering and administrative fields. She also has experience in human resources management and marketing management.

Hazel was promoted to president of recruiting in 2016. Under her leadership, BIC Recruiting expanded its services to include exhaustive nationwide searches to locate prospects, regular updates on the search process, background checks and drug screening tests, 90-day guarantee and post-placement follow-up.

Thanks to BIC Recruiting's extensive recruiting network, we have enjoyed more than 900 percent revenue growth from 2009 to 2018, with revenue growth of 37 percent from 2011 to 2018. The division continually places more successful A-level candidates into its clients' hard-to-fill roles each year.

And thanks to the tireless enthusiasm of Hazel and her staff, the BIC Recruiting team continues to expand its goals to new heights in 2019 and beyond.

### **BIC Media Solutions**

As I mentioned previously, I've always enjoyed learning and training others through inspirational books, movies and TV programs. Slowly but surely, a passion for publishing was growing within me with each book I read and every film or TV program I watched.

At the same time, I started seeing the value of sharing the new knowledge and inspiration I'd gained by giving away books—both as a show of gratitude and a relationship builder. For the past 30 years, we have given away many books and faith-based movies as a way to say thanks and give something back to our family, staff, BIC Alliance marketing partners and readers.

By 2005, I couldn't ignore the call any longer, so BIC branched out to form BIC Publishing (now known as BIC Media Solutions). The original idea behind BIC Media Solutions (BMS) was to offer networking and training events, keynote speakers and custom book publishing.

The first book we published was the first edition of *It's What We Do Together That Counts*, which I wrote after being inspired by Joseph J. Jacobs, an entrepreneur and dynamic speaker who authored *The Anatomy of an Entrepreneur: Family, Culture and Ethics*. After reading it many years ago, I bought a case of Mr. Jacob's books to share with our staff and to present as gifts of appreciation to our associates, marketing partners and industry leaders we interviewed for *BIC Magazine*. Each contained a personal note addressed to the individual recipient. I knew

then that if I ever became successful one day, I would publish books to thank all of these people and to help inspire and educate others, especially those who have been to rock bottom and back, like me. And of course, that was the goal of *It's What We Do Together That Counts*.

Since then, BIC Media Solutions continued to produce inspirational books, films and videos that tell great stories. *It's What We Do Together* received such positive feedback and was such a great relationship builder, that I started to receive more inquiries about books for other people in the industry. This is how *Energy Entrepreneurs* and *Industry Achievers* came to be, which highlighted several successful industry individuals and BIC Alliance valued partners. We even offered *Energy Entrepreneurs* with custom covers for each person featured in it.

The division has published more than 10 books so far, including the popular children's book *Michael Learns to Listen*, which I wrote to help young children develop their listening skills—the most essential part of communication. We also collected the useful insights and wise words I acquired over the years—Earl's Pearls—in the book, *Earl's Pearls: Jewels of Wisdom Worth Passing On*. A way of sharing our blessings with others, *Earl's Pearls* is now available as a free download at [bicmediasolutions.com/books/earls-pearls/](http://bicmediasolutions.com/books/earls-pearls/) and clicking the “Buy Now” button.

We began to get requests from others in business and industry to help them publish their own books. In 2011 we published a coffee table book celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Turner Industries. And more recently, BIC Media Solutions partnered with Barry Hardy of TDS Inc. and LaunchPad Writing + Research's Ted Moon to publish *The Journey: A Practical Guide to Become an Exceptional Supervisor*. Released in early 2018, the book has served as a useful reference for new first-line supervisors and the managers who are responsible for their training and development. Having been an operator in industry who was promoted to supervisor in 1970, I especially enjoyed helping TDS with this one-of-a-kind book.

Over the past 14 years, BIC Media Solutions also hosted numerous networking events and gave me the opportunity to speak all over the country on various topics—many of which are tied to faith and family values; marketing and sales; and the power of networking and handling your business with honesty and integrity at all times.

BMS expanded again in 2013 by partnering with Louisiana Entertainment Publishers LLC (LEP), the publisher of *Scene Magazine*, which was Louisiana's fastest growing entertainment magazine. And to continue its mission of connecting people through inspirational and faith-related media, BMS went into the movie and television business in 2014.

The first film we funded and co-produced, *A Gift Horse*, was a family-friendly horse film starring John Schneider (of *The Dukes of Hazzard* fame) and Kyla Kennedy. The film was a success and was released on Netflix, Amazon Instant Video, DIRECTV, Hulu, iTunes and other streaming sites. We also packaged the movie for sale at Wal-Mart and other stores.

The success of *A Gift Horse* prompted John Zapalac (our IVS Investment Banking partner) and me to find others in the energy and private equity sectors who would be interested in investing in inspirational, faith-based films, TV, videos or books. We got our next big opportunity with the development of a book and TV series pilot titled *Rock Bottom and Back*, which would chronicle the real-life experiences of men and women who overcame insurmountable odds—their own personal rock bottoms—to reach the heights of success in their business and personal lives. This had a special place in my heart because my family had gone to rock bottom and back from 1982 to 1994. After years of hard work, perseverance, guidance from God and the support of family and friends, *BIC Magazine's* popularity and readership began to grow across America and beyond.

The book was written by Susan Mustafa, the *New York Times* bestselling author of the true

crime thriller *The Most Dangerous Animal of All* (which was about my friend Gary Stewart). *Rock Bottom and Back* featured uplifting stories from 22 men and women who overcame challenges like drug and alcohol addiction, prison, devastating loss of business, and life-threatening illnesses.

In addition to the book, BMS teamed up with Mission Media to produce a short film that featured interviews of some of the book subjects, allowing them to tell their own stories in their own words. With the help of Tracy Balsz of California-based Yasny Entertainment, we also produced a pilot episode of a *Rock Bottom and Back* television program with Danny Trejo (a former convict-turned-successful actor with more than 200 films to his credit).

The short film was screened at several film festivals in 2017 and won in the category of best documentary at IndieFest, the Accolade Awards and the Hollywood International Film Festival. As I write this, the *Rock Bottom and Back* film is broadcast on Crossflix, Upliftv, Parable TV, Dove Channel and Pureflix. Recently, we added YouToo America and BIZ TV as broadcast partners.

In early 2017, BMS and IVS Investment Banking announced their next faith and family independent feature film, *Urban Country*. The movie tells the story of Faith (Brighton Sharbino), a troubled 18-year old who runs with a rough crowd in a big city. After getting into trouble, she moves to her mother's ranch in small-town Mississippi and learns about ranch life, the importance of family, hard work, and about who she truly is. The inspirational film also starred Hollywood veterans Lou Diamond Phillips and C. Thomas Howell.

Yet another opportunity for expansion into a different medium presented itself in March of 2018 when BMS began production on *The Leisure Connection* television series. The series, which follows the same general theme and purpose as *The Leisure Connection* magazine that we published years earlier, is a 30-minute program that showcases the best in lifestyle experiences, location and events that families can enjoy together along the Gulf Coast.

Our goal with *Leisure Connection TV* is to feature "Leisure With a Cause." The first episode featured the Keels and Wheels Concours d'Elegance in Houston, Texas' premier classic automobile and vintage wooden boat show and one of the nation's top concourse events. It premiered in June 2018 on KIAH-TV CW in Houston as well as UplifTV, Parables and Untamed Sports Channel, reaching more than 24 million households. The second episode was broadcast in December 2018 and featured the Sailing Angels' Heroes Recognition Cruise at Kemah Boardwalk, which honored veterans, first responders and their families.

And at the same time we were working to update this book, we were partnering with television production companies to develop and co-produce *TLC TV* for distribution across the Gulf Coast. Also in 2018, BMS partnered with Provicom in Houston to produce several episodes of a new *Earl's Pearls TV* series entitled *The Power of Networking*. We also partnered with DBM Films in Baltimore, Maryland to produce four episodes of a series called *Champions of Christian Networking*.

As we go to press with the second edition of *It's What We Do Together That Counts*, we are looking at several more movie scripts with the aim of selecting one that we can produce in Texas and Louisiana. We are also in talks with a number of television channels and broadcast outlets that will potentially double or triple the number of houses that our films and TV programs can reach.

If you look at all of the books, movies and other inspirational media we've published or been a part of in the past ten years, you can see how diverse BMS has become. I'm still surprised by the vast number and different kinds of projects BIC Media Solutions has been a part of. Our

success has been built on helping others find greater faith, hope, peace, happiness and success.

One of the things that makes Bodi, our family and me happiest is how our Media That Matters library of books and films has helped change (and in some cases, save) so many lives for the better. Many individuals and organizations are using our books and films as part of their fundraising efforts or as charitable gifts.

Bodi and I are excited at the prospect of continuing the good work that we and our talented and dedicated team at BMS have started. In April 2018, Bodi and I moved to League City to be closer to Thomas, Dane and our grandkids, and to allow me to devote more time to serving as the BIC Alliance's ambassador. Not only would I serve as BIC's cheerleader to anyone who would listen (something I had done since the earliest days of BIC), but I would also have more time to pursue the development and production of more faith-based and family-friendly books, film and TV shows. Our mission at BIC Media Solutions is to "Help Create More Fans For Brands," especially those in business, industry and Christian media.

### **Great Stories Need Telling**

Just as it was for the first edition, my ultimate dream for this book is that other entrepreneurs and business and industry executives (whose challenges and successes far exceed those of the BIC Alliance) will step forward to allow us the privilege of publishing books about their companies or their personal memoirs. I have already published a Media That Matters library of books on business and industry, sports and media heroes as well as super connectors. BMS devotes a portion of the revenue of each project to helping tomorrow's entrepreneurs and executives—I would love to continue doing this with every new publication, film, TV series, video and event we produce.

With more than 60 percent of the experienced executives and operations personnel in the energy business expected to retire in the next five years, we're witnessing today's protégés becoming tomorrow's mentors. The BIC Alliance's top priorities are to keep our flagship publication America's No. 1 multi-industry, multi-departmental energy publication and continue growing IVS, BMS and BIC Recruiting as the leaders in M&A, faith-based promotional media and executive recruiting, respectively. And as always, BIC Alliance will stay true to its mission of connecting individuals for mutual benefit. Achieving these goals will help us train and inform tomorrow's leaders.

So, what's in store for the immediate future? While age and health issues are starting to limit our travel, Bodi and I continue to enjoy life to the fullest. For us, this means helping others find greater faith, hope, peace, happiness and success through our "Media That Matters" and our Speaker's Bureau. We will also donate more time to helping those less fortunate. God has given us more than we ever dreamed of and now we want to pass that along to those who wish to fulfill their own dreams.

Like many readers of *BIC* and this book, Bodi and I begin each day with a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings and peace God has given us. We are living proof that the game is not over until the last play. In spite of decades of adversity, including near-death experiences, business failures, betrayals, family turmoil and lost loved ones, our love for God, one another, our family and the family of mankind has grown stronger with each blow.

Bodi and I are firm believers that happiness is a choice. This belief has served us well on our long journey from dire poverty to entrepreneurial prosperity. Along the way, we were constantly reminded that being poor can last an eternity, but being broke is only temporary. Riches far beyond financial success are there for the taking for those with a love of God and a willingness

to give it their all to help others and to see the causes in which they believe thrive.

It has always been my belief that most people, whether in business, industry or any other aspect of life, respect others who are willing to go the extra mile. While I used to get irritated or feel sad when people would insult me or make light of how hard I worked, I now remember what my dad used to say. He'd point his finger at me and say, "Son, God and Father Time will take care of you." To me, this also means making God, family and a commitment to serving others foremost in our lives.

He was right — God and Father Time have helped make me a better person through the many lessons they've taught me. Humility, inner strength and the importance of doing the right thing in every situation are just a few of those.

I hope that you will also be inspired by this and the myriad other experiences about which you've just read. When life deals you a winning hand, don't gloat. Instead, lay it down for others to see and humbly thank those who have helped you along the way. After all, it is nearly impossible to achieve victory in the game of life without first taking the hands of others who care about you and are willing to stand by you through thick and thin.

Now that you've read my story, I encourage you to begin writing your own, whether it's on paper or through your words and actions. God willing, this book will not only revive the weary, inspire those making fresh starts and uplift the broken-hearted, but also motivate those with real ambition to pursue even greater heights. We also pray that all who read this book will be blessed with a greater love of God, family and mankind.

I'd also like to share one final Earl's Pearl with you: Happiness is a choice and today is the first day of the rest of our lives.

And finally, I'll close this edition of the book in the same way I finished the first—with a quote that continues to serve me well: Adversity or adventure. The choice is ours!

## **The BIC Alliance Team Members — Pearls of Working With Earl**

*“When I was hired at BIC almost 26 years ago, Earl didn’t have any money. Times were rough. But slowly and with Earl’s support, Bobby Davis, Paul Tyree and I were able to reorganize the accounting department—we started getting invoices out, paying bills and paying back taxes. I’m proud of what we’ve accomplished with the financial department and other departments within BIC. Thanks to Earl’s guidance, his fairness with employees and his belief in saving money for hard times, the BIC Alliance is now a success and has been for some time.”*

— Theresa Kennedy, Chief Financial Officer, the BIC Alliance

*“Earl has taught me many life lessons, big and small. He taught me that if someone is important to you, you NEVER miss two big events for them: weddings and funerals (He, Mrs. Bodi, Thomas and Dane all attended my wedding in 2012.)*

*He also continually emphasized the importance of thanking someone... we can never thank people enough for their service or good deeds.”*

— Heather Cavalier, Associate Publisher, BIC Magazine

*“Earl is an amazing motivator and someone who is not afraid to take on something big, to set that big goal. He’ll give it his all to help us reach that goal... and even if we don’t quite get there, we’re a lot further along than if we had set a smaller goal at the beginning.”*

— Hazel Kassu, President of Recruiting, BIC Recruiting

*“Earl has been a valuable mentor to me in my career. I have been able to pass on what he’s taught me to other BICSTERS throughout my time at BIC. I enjoy the chance to see others*

*learning from Earl, and from each other, at BIC.”*

— Jeremy Osterberger, Vice President, the BIC Alliance

*“I’ve known Earl since 1996 when he came to the company where I was working at the time. He made a presentation to the CEO and other senior staff on BIC Magazine and what its unique selling proposition was. His love of what he was doing, and his complete belief in what he was doing, was infectious and led to us becoming friends and eventually working together. His entrepreneurial belief and passion helped drive his success.”*

— Mark Peters, Director of Strategy and Development, the BIC Alliance

*“In the ten years since Earl and I met, we’ve managed to make IVS Investment Banking one of the industry’s premier M&A, recapitalization and consulting service firms. Our success comes from what we bring to the table: Thomas and Jeremy bring in potential clients from their vast network of business contacts, I run the numbers and Earl serves as our visionary and sounding board. This formula has helped IVS close 18 M&A/leveraged recapitalization transactions to date with a combined value of more than \$425 million.”*

— John Zapalac, Managing Director, IVS Investment Banking

*“It’s been a real honor and blessing working with Earl and BIC for all these years. When I started working with Earl, many of the people I trusted told me not to do it. I took a major cut in pay and lost the so-called security of working with a major corporate company in the oil field. But I knew it would be fun to work with Earl, and I was right... we’ve enjoyed a wonderful 20 years together in business now. And when I think of all of our accomplishments and memorable moments, I’m proudest of the way we’ve treated our employees and customers with dignity and respect.”*

— Thomas Brinsko, President and COO, the BIC Alliance

## **Part II:**

# **Sources of Inspiration**

## **Earl's Pearls of Wisdom**

Below are selected passages from our writings in BIC and Earl's Pearls, each of which will hopefully inspire you to seek greater peace, happiness and success in your business and/or personal life, whether you're looking for information on how to excel as a sales professional or how to develop a more positive outlook on life and all it has to offer.

### **The Secrets to Understanding People**

How many books do you suppose have been written about improving people skills? Surely

we could fill an entire room in our homes with all the words of wisdom that have been written about understanding people's needs.

Having trained adults and children for more than 40 years, I am constantly looking for new techniques and programs that help people to understand one another better, leading to happier and more meaningful and productive lives. Although there is no real "people encyclopedia" or even a small dictionary to which we can refer in order to learn the techniques we need most in dealing effectively with people, there are two secrets I've used successfully over the years that I'd encourage anyone to learn and practice.

The first secret I'm about to share — which was first brought to my attention when I read Les Gelpin's book, *People Smart* — has been field tested under the most adverse circumstances. Perhaps many of you have already mastered it. To my knowledge, there is no better secret to having a happier, more productive life. Most of us probably agree that in order to enjoy life to the fullest, it is important that we get along with others, that we know what makes people tick, what turns them on, and how human nature works.

The secret is to never threaten another person's survival.

Imagine that you're in a building that has suddenly gone up in flames. There is only one exit, and everyone, yourself included, is crowding the door for escape, but there is only enough time for one person to make it through. Who would you want that person to be?

Yourself, obviously, but that puts you in the same boat with everyone else. After all, survival is a human being's deepest psychological need. No one likes to be crowded in a burning building or in their business or personal life. However, when you help someone else survive, they will appreciate you more.

Secret number two, also taken from *People Smart*, is that when you focus on others instead of yourself, they will respond in kind. This practice works every time and can change your life overnight. And it doesn't take millions of dollars in training or a Ph.D. in psychology to master — it just takes practice.

If you take the effort to practice the secrets mentioned above, you'll never forget the difference it will make in the way people will respond to you. Remember that no matter how much knowledge you have, people secrets are of little value unless you use them.

### **The Importance of Continued Learning and the LISTEN Model**

In the business world, failure to grasp the intricacies of marketing and sales professionalism can mean the death of your opportunities for success, fame and fortune. It may cause you lifelong financial problems and the loss of respect from your family, friends and business associates. Worst of all, it may even result in a low sense of self worth.

The techniques and nuances of industrial marketing and sales are many and varied. Therefore, mastery of these arts does not come overnight. Rather, it is a process requiring a lifetime of learning. The manifold lessons involved are found not only in books and seminars,

but are the result of extensive interaction with seasoned industry professionals who are willing to share their experiences. Regardless of your age, it is never too late to glean expertise, so long as you are willing to invest the time and energy necessary to achieve success.

I am a firm believer in the importance of continued learning. It has always been my belief that a salesperson should expand his knowledge beyond formal education and training, whether he is a beginner or a seasoned veteran.

Prospecting is the first step toward effective industrial marketing. I suggest that salespeople take what I call the “10 x 10 x 6” approach when developing a database of prospects. Using this approach, the salesperson should outline his top 10 prospects in 10 different industries, along with six contacts per company. In addition, using what I call the “3 x 3 x 3” approach, a salesperson should determine his three primary products or services, the three best reasons why another company should use those products or services, and the three best examples of a client using that product or service in a beneficial way.

With regard to making a sales presentation, communication is of paramount importance. I use the acronym “LISTEN” (Look, Interpret, Stay alert, Think, Encourage and Never interrupt) to illustrate how a typical sales call should be conducted.

Following are the key points of the LISTEN model:

**Look:** Always show interest in what someone is saying as they speak.

**Interpret:** Use common sense to make the most of sales opportunities, and interpret what the company will be looking for and what will best help that company’s bottom line.

**Stay alert:** Take notes, ask questions, give prospects choices and stay actively involved in the conversation. The mind works seven times faster when we’re listening than when we’re speaking, so stay focused.

**Think:** In discussing business with a potential client, the salesperson should possess the ability to think three-dimensionally, understanding the needs and objectives of both himself and the buyer through third-person analysis. This allows the salesperson to better assess the situation, whether the buyer is eager or unwilling to make a deal. There is no better way to do this than to think like the buyer.

**Encourage:** Encourage buyers to give more information about their companies. The more that is known about a company, the better the seller is able to establish a relationship and meet the needs of the customer.

**Never interrupt:** Interrupting is often a major mistake salespeople make when trying to push a sale. Instead, the salesperson should listen carefully to the concerns of the potential buyer and absorb the reasons why he is reluctant to accept a deal, if that is the case. The salesperson should then address the concerns one by one and counteract each reason with solid information designed to change his mind.

In order to effectively communicate benefits of a product or service, the salesperson should also have thorough knowledge of the product, industry and competition. Salespeople should also project what I call an “inner smile,” an aura of positivity guaranteed to build the prospective

buyer's trust in the seller's product or service and make a potential partnership more inviting.

Closing a deal is an end that is equally important to the means. When closing a deal, the salesperson should always establish with the buyer what the next step will be.

### **Improving the Supervisor/Subordinate Relationship**

The success of any company depends on its most vital resource — people. How well the people in the organization cooperate and pull together determines the degree of its ultimate success. As a supervisor or a subordinate, you can contribute to that success with an understanding of the relationships that exist between you and those with whom you interact.

To improve your ability to work with supervisors, it is beneficial to know what management expects, how to sell your ideas and how to stay on the “right side.”

Following are some of the tasks that a supervisor expects of personnel in any field:

- Complete a job on time while controlling quality and costs.
- Keep up with technological developments in a specific field of expertise.
- Make sound decisions rather than waiting for management to make them.
- Plan, organize, control and coordinate the work of subordinates.
- Know and apply company policies and procedures.
- Handle employee and customer complaints properly, while knowing how to prevent complaints from occurring.
- Improve procedures and gain employees' acceptance of them.
- Build cooperation and morale among other employees.
- Communicate within the company or organization effectively and honestly.
- Accept criticism and use it to improve job performance.
- Be ready to handle crises and emergencies but work to prevent their occurrence.

The manner in which ideas are presented to your boss (and the time to decide to share them) has a lot to do with their acceptance. First of all, choose a time when the boss will be able to invest in listening to your idea. Also, be cognizant of your company's financial standing when presenting an idea that requires an expense. Here are some more suggestions:

- State the idea very clearly, whether verbally or in writing.
- Estimate the value of the idea. Project figures if applicable.
- List the pros and cons of the concept.
- Show how and where the idea will fit into the company.
- Be willing to compromise when it comes to implementation of your idea.

Some of the indicators you can look for when asking, “How do I rate with the boss?” are affirmative answers to the following questions. Does the boss ask for your opinion? Does he let you take care of your subordinates? Does he give you constructive criticism? Does he back you up?

Of course, the first step is to know what the boss expects. Beyond that, here are a few other

suggestions for keeping in good standing:

- Cooperate fully with one's immediate superior — obey his orders and carry out his instructions. Support his efforts; do not “stab him in the back.”
- Report the outcome of any important phase of the job completely and accurately.
- Display courtesy and respect to the boss at all times. He may be difficult to like as a person, but remember that he is the boss. Disrespect will not improve the situation.
- Always assume full responsibility for work assigned to you and your employees. Don't pass the buck if anything goes wrong.
- Stay out of trouble with clients or other departments. Avoid petty bickering with other supervisors. This only creates problems that the boss will have to resolve. Don't add to his workload.

Incorporate the above suggestions into your performance, and you'll see an improvement in both your work and your relationship with the boss.

### **Six Leadership Strategies**

Some people believe leaders are born, some say they are “called” and others contend they are “made” by the times. However leaders come into being, they are in demand in the new millennium.

Contemporary leadership theorists are returning to the trait theory of leadership. They are finding that certain demonstrable qualities are shared by leaders. A number of those qualities are listed below. Determine which of these you associate with yourself:

- Do you communicate?
- Are you self-confident?
- Do you develop teams?
- Are you ethical?
- Do you share knowledge?
- Do you envision?
- Are you motivated?
- Do you follow through?
- Do you energize others?
- Do you welcome change?
- Do you do research?
- Do you help organize?

These are all essential qualities followers expect in a leader. How these expectations are met or are not met is what determines a leader's credibility factor. Credibility may well be one of the most difficult attributes for a leader to earn, as well as one of the easiest to lose.

According to Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, authors of *The Leadership Challenge*, there are six strategies leaders can take to build and maintain their credibility. I will summarize these

strategies for you to consider. I also encourage you to assess yourself in relation to how you are currently leading those for whom you are accountable.

#### Strategy No. 1: Clarify your values

It is important for leaders to communicate their values to those they lead, because those values are the foundation on which everything else is built. Conveying who you are, your goals and what you stand for can have a significant impact on your followers' performance and attitudes.

#### Strategy No. 2: Identify what your followers want

Followers are unanimous in naming responsiveness to their needs and concerns as a key factor they look for in a leader. Leaders who act only in their own self-interest, ignoring the needs of their followers, eventually lose the trust of those they lead.

#### Strategy No. 3: Build consensus

Followers want leaders who trust the experience and ideas of those they lead; they want leaders who seek and respect their input. While followers understand that it is the leader who must ultimately make the decision, they also know that credible leaders include and involve their followers in charting a course and setting standards. When a leader doesn't collaborate with his team, the message the team receives is that their ideas are not important or trustworthy. This is not a message that contributes to a leader's credibility.

#### Strategy No. 4: Communicate shared values with enthusiasm

Enthusiasm emerges as a crucial characteristic of leadership. Followers want and need leaders who can communicate shared values with ardor and conviction. They want leaders who have energy, who become involved, and who express their genuine passion for what the organization is working to accomplish. Enthusiasm is contagious. Followers catch it from their leaders. As Posner reminds us, "You can't light a fire with a wet match."

#### Strategy No. 5: Stand up for your beliefs

Followers don't follow leaders who lack confidence in their own decisions. While leaders must be open to alternatives and listen to feedback, they must also take a stand. Leaders who do not stand by their beliefs create stress, indecision and conflict within their team.

#### Strategy No. 6: Lead by example

Followers expect their leaders to do more than lead; they expect them to teach and develop leadership within their organization and to do this by setting an example. People believe actions over words every time. To be credible, a leader must be a role model. Leaders cannot hold others responsible for shared values when they don't live by those values themselves.

A final word: Leadership is not about doing it yourself. It is about building relationships with

others as representatives build relationships with clients. At the heart of those relationships is credibility. A leader's credibility and believability are what enable others in any organization to achieve excellence and experience success.

### **Controlling Anger, Managing Stress and Staying Calm Under Pressure**

Over the years, I've had to end business relationships with people because of anger. Some have allowed their wrath to prompt them to resign. Others have had to be terminated because they couldn't get along with their colleagues.

Ending a hostile relationship with an angry person is like removing a cancer from the lives of both parties. It's the same way, perhaps even better, when we commit ourselves to removing anger from our own lives.

We must strive to live more harmoniously with others. We must practice patience and empathy. We must lead by example and train ourselves and those around us to do the same. When we make mistakes, we should apologize.

One of the best ways to prevent agitation from becoming anger is to confront the situation, discuss it with whomever you are having a problem and work together for a peaceful solution. Of course, the time to confront the situation is when emotions have subsided.

We can help make our relationships, our professions and our lives happier, healthier and more prosperous by thinking before we speak, speaking softly, taking the time to sleep on important decisions and remembering to confront negative situations at the right time in the right way. When we make mistakes, we should apologize. In my mind, the six most important words related to conflict resolution are "I'm sorry, it won't happen again."

Remember, people may forget what we say or do, but they will always remember how we make them feel.

#### The inner smile and mind control

Years ago, I made a training film about job burnout. Many of the techniques included in that program were drawn from my personal experiences in industry dealing with large groups of people such as unions and other professional organizations. Stress can make a person mentally and physically tired and far less productive, leading to poor performance or, in industrial settings, accidents that cause injury or death. The way I learned to deal with this long ago is through a combination of the "inner smile" and mind control. I guess you could call this "Devil Management" because I think that anytime we allow negative thoughts or negative people to linger in our minds, it is the work of the Devil and must be controlled by immediately taking that negative thought and trying to turn it into a positive thought.

I use this method in confrontational situations, including management disputes and handling sales objections. I start by putting on an outer smile that helps me transform my inner feelings

into that inner smile. While we cannot keep negative thoughts from entering our mind, we can determine how long they remain and what thoughts we replace them with.

Another technique that utilizes the same concept is developing a “to do” list each day, even when I’m not working. For years, my wife Bodi would feel overwhelmed any time she had five or more things to do. Nowadays, however, she develops a “to-do” list any time she begins to feel overloaded or overwhelmed. Personally, I prefer to use a day-timer for this purpose instead of a cell phone or a computer because I feel more comfortable having a hard copy right in front of me at all times. Another important component of stress management and mind control is giving yourself short-term and long-term rewards. This can be as simple as stopping for a Coke or a glass of water after achieving a certain task (making a set number of sales calls, for instance) or going to dinner to reward yourself for a closing a sale.

During my time in the Army Reserve and in the business of industrial fire and safety, I learned that we must acquire the ability to reprogram our thinking to replace stress with the recollection of skills we obtained during training or time spent with mentors. I would say it probably took me about five years in industry and another three to five years in management to really refine my crisis management skills and develop sound mind control and temper management techniques. Anger and stress management, of course, are lifetime processes.

The day I knew I had arrived was when our executive management team did a survey of all the employees in our division at Ethyl Corp. about why every employee chose a particular general foreman’s shift over others. My shift went from being the last shift filled to the first because the men said they always knew where they stood with me and that they felt they were the safest in a crisis when working with me. As my skill in this area improved, I became recognized as the go-to guy when a fire or explosion broke out. The key is to be able to take these skills and use them in our personal lives to remain calm and collected in our family lives and in the business sector to make money and deal with adversity and rejection.

If you really think about it, stress management is all about mindset. We must have the ability to see adversity as a blessing that enables us to become better and stronger. It is a blessing when young folks either achieve that ability or learn those skills at a fast rate. From a personal evaluation standpoint I believe anyone who can do it before the age of 30 is exceptional. I also think anyone over 50 who doesn’t have that perspective may need to try a little harder or else they may never get it. But we’re never too old to see the light!

### **Rested and Ready**

As a leader, odds are you spend 45-60 hours (maybe more) per week on the job. It is no secret that Americans work longer days and weeks with shorter vacations than workers in any other nation. I’ve always found that mid-year is a good time to take a break, get some rest, review goals and prepare mentally for the second half of the year.

At BIC Alliance, we have a running joke: we only work half days and we also have flex time — you can choose to work any 12 hours a day you want! Seriously though, I am amazed at the steadfast determination and dedication of our production staff; each month they work additional time in the middle of our press period, cramming in an extraordinary amount of productivity into a workday. They accomplish all this, plus they work on a new web site and take initiative to freshen the look of our flagship, BIC Magazine. Wow.

We like to joke, but we have a serious creed as well: no success at the job makes up for a failure at home. Success at home usually involves some kind of break from the job; it means not focusing on career, at least for the moment. With a spouse, it might be a chance to reconnect. With your kids, you might create or deepen bonds. With your family, you will experience life and create memories. With yourself, it might be only a necessary recharge for your batteries, or it might go as far as helping you keep your sanity. I believe that we are created with taking breaks in mind; that is, we are programmed to perform better when we periodically rest.

This is absolutely necessary to prevent burnout and to give much needed time to your family and to worship as you choose. If you believe in God, it is appropriate to note that taking that day off isn't just recommended, it is commanded — “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but on the seventh ... you shall not do any work.”

When folks think of a break, we naturally think of a vacation. However, taking a break might mean just having a little quiet time during the day. I like to get up early and have quiet time in the house. During this time, I can plan my day, think about life, study scripture and pray. I know it allows me a chance to be more productive overall, even though I may not be “accomplishing” much during this break time.

Most of our staff takes vacation during the summer months; it is one of the reasons a single issue of BIC Magazine covers both June and July. At the time of this writing, I had recently returned from taking a family vacation. I hadn't felt more relaxed or rested since the last time I took a big break. I would encourage anyone to take the time to rest, reconnect with your family and recharge for work, no matter the size or significance of your responsibilities on the job.

### **Networking Strategies**

**Network:** a group or system of interconnected or cooperating individuals.

**Networking:** the developing of contacts or exchanging of information with others in an informal network, as to further a career.

*(Source: Webster's New World College Dictionary; 4th ed.)*

One of the most important aspects of marketing a product or service is networking. My definition of networking is getting together to get ahead. In order to successfully utilize the networking process, many rules must be followed regarding who, what, when, where, how and why.

## Who?

Who will be your target audience? Choose companies or individuals that will not only benefit you from a financial standpoint but also base your decision on reputation, quality, service and compatibility.

Determine how many companies you wish to reach. Set goals that are consistent with your ability to produce. If you overextend yourself by trying to reach too many companies at once, your ability to follow up may be limited. It is better to make solid contacts that produce results with a few companies than to make flimsy contacts with many companies.

## What?

What do you hope to accomplish through the use of networking? Establish what image you want to project in the industry, then back that image up.

Determine what products or services are the primary focus of your networking campaign, then stress the good points of those products and services to potential clients.

Decide what makes you different from similar companies offering similar services. Make the most of those differences. Play them up to potential clients.

## When?

When is the best time for your company to implement networking procedures? Networking can be accomplished anytime and anywhere. You represent your company no matter where you go or what you do.

Organized networking at trade shows costs money. As soon as your company can comfortably budget participation in trade shows, then networking at these shows should be a priority. Personal contacts generate revenue. Revenue promotes growth.

## Where?

Where do I find networking opportunities? Trade journals, newspapers and magazines are excellent sources to discover when and where networking opportunities will be available. News releases are another good source.

Restaurants, golf courses, hotel lobbies and sports events also present good networking opportunities. While you cannot have too many personal contacts, it's usually a good practice to limit your hard-hitting sales pitch to companies that show real interest in what you are selling. However, no matter where you are and who you are talking to, always project the image of your company in a positive manner.

## How?

How do I reach these companies? Research plays an important role in reaching potential customers. Business and trade publications and the Internet are excellent tools through which

to find out about companies and how to reach them. BIC Magazine, for instance, reaches 120,000 key decision makers and is read online in its entirety.

The media provides an abundance of useful information about companies that should be carefully scrutinized for clues as to preferences. Mailing lists are another way to determine which companies you should approach and how you can reach those companies.

Phone calls, e-mail, invitations to company functions and attendance at trade shows are just a few useful tools to attract future business. Hospitality suites are also an excellent source for meeting and attracting new clientele.

Why?

Why should you bother with networking at all? Your company produces a good product. Your service is second to none. Your business will sell itself, right? Wrong.

Networking creates opportunities for sales, growth, future alliances and projects, and keeps your company in the forefront of the latest ideas and technologies. By interacting with other companies in a more relaxed environment, you are not only creating an image for your company, you are learning about other products and services that can be useful to you at a later date.

#### Effective networking

The best networkers, like the best communicators, are not those who focus on themselves, but instead concentrate their efforts on filling the needs of others. In essence, this means linking someone with a need with someone who can fulfill that need.

Many opportunities can be found within the networking experience:

- Mutual support between networking members.
- Solid contacts.
- Leads and referrals.
- Showcase products and services.
- Job banks.

#### Communication in networking

Communication skills are a vital part of networking. Knowing when to approach someone, how to begin and maintain a conversation, and knowing when and how to end a conversation are the keys to becoming an excellent communicator:

- Be the first to say hello.
- Shake hands warmly. Do not exert too much or too little pressure during the handshake.
- Pay attention to the person's name and repeat it.
- Notice small details about the other person and use that as a conversation starter.
- Be sincere. People are quick to recognize insincerity.
- Have questions ready so that the conversation does not stall.
- Keep questions conversational.
- Pay close attention to the enthusiasm with which the other person talks about different

topics. This will give you clues about what should be the focus of the conversation.

- Make sure follow-up questions are positive.
- Always close the conversation on a positive note.

#### Networking protocol

Many trade shows and conferences provide hospitality suites, which are a great place to practice networking skills. While many people may view hospitality suites as a place to party, it is important to follow the rules of etiquette when visiting the suites:

- For business after hours, regular business clothes are appropriate, although a little dressier look may be in order.
- Keep body language on the conservative side.
- Limit yourself to two drinks and do not substitute cocktail foods for your supper.
- Avoid messy foods.
- When being introduced or introducing someone, always shake hands.
- Be sure to wear your name tag on the upper right hand side of your garment.
- Smile immediately whenever eye contact is made with anyone.
- Always be professional, and remember — the image you project becomes the image of your company.

#### Gauging success

Successful networking is accomplished through the building of relationships. Truly caring about others is the secret. Everyone appreciates sincerity, and that is the foundation upon which strong business relationships are formed.

Networking has been successful for you when:

- The relationship established is mutually rewarding; both parties gain something from the relationship, whether it be contacts, profits, contracts, referrals or perhaps simply the relationship itself.
- You have helped someone, or someone has helped you to achieve a measure of success, whether large or small.
- You find that you are giving as much as you are receiving.
- Every introduction is viewed as an opportunity to build a relationship.
- You can see the benefits of the alliances that you have built.

#### **Responding to Loss** *(written by Reverend Ron Tyndall)*

Human existence brings unique and unexpected life experiences. We are never ready emotionally or mentally for these events. The purpose of this article is to equip readers with skills and know-how

to relate to each other in the midst of a tragic loss. When a company experiences a sudden loss, it is important to gather workers and have a professional debriefing, but we all can learn some

basic skills that will help in a critical incident.

### What not to say

We all have common sayings or phrases we use during times of loss. Some are hurtful for the grieving person. Let me mention some statements that discount the feelings of the hurting.

- “I know how you feel.” Truthfully, we do not know how anyone feels. Reactions to loss are different and unique. This kind of statement puts the focus on the one speaking and not on the one hurting.

- “Time heals all wounds.” This is an untrue statement. Unless you deal with your grief, it will deal with you. I once had a person who lost a mate attend our church’s grief recovery workshop 15 years after the loss. The deceased’s clothes and belongings were in the same location in the home as before the death and the living spouse had never moved forward in the grief process. Time does not equal healing.

- “You must go on with your life.” Who are we to tell a person when to go on? Everyone goes through the grief journey at his own pace. We are to support people rather than push or control their grieving.

- “You can always find someone worse off than yourself.” You must focus on your precious memories. It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. You will get over this. Be strong.

- “He did not know what hit him.” All of these statements have been said to the grieving and are not helpful. When we use them, we discredit a person’s loss.

There are also some “God clichés.”

- It must have been his or her time. Only the good die young. God must have needed him more than you did. God needed another angel. We need to be very careful not to misrepresent God. These statements are bad theology and cause people to resent God when they most need his love and strength.

- “It was actually a blessing because...” or “God never gives us more than we can handle.” To make such a statement negates feelings and pressures one to be strong instead of acknowledging pain. A grieving person can only deal with these statements at the end of the grief process. Acceptance is the final step in the journey.

Another wrong approach to ministering to the grieving individual is when we make statements that apply unhealthy pressure.

- “You must be strong for your wife/ children/parents.” “You must get hold of yourself.” “What you do not know will not hurt you.” We must give people permission to grieve, be unafraid of their tears and avoid expressing our own uneasiness with their emotions.

Sometimes we try to avoid having children see us cry. All of this slows the grieving experience. What are we to say to people who have just experienced a loss?

- I am so sorry this happened to you. It is harder than most people think. I will check back with you. And then, keep your promise. These statements let the hurting know we support and

accept them where they are. We are giving them permission to say what they need to say and we must be ready to listen. They do not need to hear our philosophy and theories. They want to tell their story. You may hear it every time you visit or talk with them on the phone.

You must never let them know if you feel bored or tired of listening. Validate and normalize their experience by saying that what they are feeling is common. We can do it by saying, “Yes, it must be hard for you. What you are experiencing is normal to the grief process. Do not rush through this time. You do not have to pretend that everything is OK. Your grieving will take time, work and practice.”

There are some common truths about grief. First, grief is normal and with it comes tears, sadness and pain. It drains us, and at times, causes us to act out of character. It rattles the strongest people and produces anger in the most passive personalities.

- Grief is a healthy process. The healing of wounds varies from person to person, and from loss to loss. It is a road that must be traveled. It is not a highway or expressway. It is a road that is traveled slowly with many stops, difficult intersections and a trip best made with friends who are genuine supporters.

- Grief has some common feelings. At the outset, all feel numbness or denial. Some will not even remember the details or who said what. Later, they will want people around them to fill in what was said and done. Emotions of numbness and denial protect us because our brains cannot internalize abnormal experiences quickly and restored health only comes through feeling all these losses.

This defense mechanism is a short-lived blessing because we must ultimately move forward and process these emotions.

- Grieving feelings include distress and anger. After numbness and denial subside, distress and anger may come with intensity to overwhelm the grieving. There may be the loss of financial security, home, friends who do not understand, routine support once given by the deceased, companionship, and all the normal holidays and vacation adventures. Some of the anger results from frustration and unexpected changes. We should not be surprised if some of this is manifested in the work place.

- Grief sometimes brings false guilt. It is not uncommon for people to blame themselves.

People may have the “it should be me” mindset or feel that they should have done more to prevent the death or have seen it coming. “If only I had...” is a troubling mind game that produces guilt. It is important that those who grieve be surrounded by sensitive, compassionate listeners.

When people try to work through grief, do not say, “You should not feel that way.” “The past needs to be put behind us.” “You will get over this in a few weeks.” “Don’t cry. You had him for a long time.” “I do not know why you are still crying.” This talk will cause people to suppress their grief, bring on depression and prevent them from being transparent.

- How can we help people cope? After an exposure to traumatic stress, we need to encourage people to talk about their reactions and feelings. Initially, we need to suggest the cut back of

unnecessary activities to conserve strength and energy. People should avoid becoming workaholics, alcohol and the abuse of drugs. The grieving need to feel their pain and making pain only delays recovery. People need to make time with family and friends to counter feeling isolated. When energy returns, being involved in helping others will restore a sense of purpose.

### **Becoming a Better Person**

One of my greatest passions is continuous learning and sharing what I and hundreds of others have been blessed to learn with our readers. Here, I'd like to share some of what I have learned about becoming a better person.

**1. Define the moment.** Becoming a better person begins with making a conscious decision to change our lives for the better and discovering the steps needed to turn this promise into reality. In 1998, I survived a brutal carjacking, robbery and beating by a car gang along I-10 on the east side of Houston. My attackers beat me and dumped me out. When I awoke, my first thought was, "Thank you, God, for letting me live. I'm going to serve you for the rest of my life, and I'll begin by being a better person from this day forward." The catalyst for changing our lives can be sparked from hearing an inspirational speaker, reading a book or watching a movie.

**2. Make a list.** Define what needs to be changed. A vague goal is much less effective than a concise list. I have always kept a journal or notebook nearby to list lessons I've learned and experiences I've had to refer back to.

After my carjacking, I made a list of things I absolutely had to change about myself to fulfill the promises I made to God. I was determined to become a better person and Christian, and that list became my guide. To this day, I update my personal goals yearly and add ways to improve myself. We will never be perfect, but we can always strive for perfection.

**3. Clean house.** This begins with changing what we think, read, watch and do. It's just as much about your mental attitude as your environment. Mastering happiness begins with mental self-discipline and watching what you think and do. Instead of feeding your mind negativity and sinful thoughts, take control by controlling what you feed your mind. Reading your Bible and other inspirational material is a great start.

**4. Be kinder, more thoughtful and more thankful.** Every day, say at least one nice thing to three different people who aren't expecting it. Try it for a month, and notice the difference it makes in how people treat you and how you feel about yourself. The simple gesture of saying "thank you" is another way to show your kind spirit. I've always said there may be people who can outthink us, but there will never be people who can out-thank us.

**5. Keep a journal.** Every person has a great story to tell, whether it be spiritual or educational, a memorable experience or a story of overcoming adversity. Keeping a personal and business journal has been a cornerstone to my success. At 77 years old, I have several journals, including a spiritual journal I use at church or other events to jot down significant things I hear. Wisdom you hear over the years should be reviewed often to best absorb its lessons.

**6. Take better care of yourself.** When you take good care of yourself mentally and physically, your opinion of yourself and others' opinions of you will skyrocket. I enjoy regular walks to meditate, get my thoughts in order, mentally refresh myself and get a little exercise.

I take inspirational materials with me on trips so I am always improving myself. Some of the most creative thoughts I've ever had have arisen during this time of reflection and meditation. This habit is vital for our improved mental and physical health.

**7. Make meaningful memories.** One of the greatest challenges we all face is how we manage our time. Allocating quality time to our family and loved ones should be at the top of our time management priorities. When I made my life change, I vowed to make God and my family more important than my company. To me, one of the most exciting things was when I began to make God, family and others No. 1, I found greater hope, peace and happiness. Also, when I began enjoying more leisure time with my family, I returned to work more creative, more rested and much more productive.

**8. Remember the people secret and make others No. 1.** Among my favorite books is "How to be People Smart" by Les Giblin. The principle is simple: Being people smart is not about our intelligence; it's about how effective we are with people. If you make others feel like No. 1, they respond in kind. This begins with being a good listener. People always enjoy being around a person who is interested rather than interesting.

**9. Become a better networker.** Networking is getting together to get ahead. A personal practice I follow is to make at least three referrals a day. They don't have to be business related. Networking just means sharing leads and referrals and making personal introductions every day. Networking can help you become better by improving your communication skills and expanding relationships with others.

**10. Be more benevolent.** When we begin serving God and helping others, it improves who we are and how others feel about us. Energy entrepreneur T. Boone Pickens once said God makes some of us successful so we have the resources to help others. I feel better, happier and more excited about life when helping others. It is also professionally rewarding. Since we began publishing inspirational and faith-friendly books and movies, our business has quadrupled. The BIC Alliance staff shares my passion for helping others and making contributions of time and energy to help those less fortunate.

**11. Explore spirituality.** Faith is the greatest self-improvement and success medicine. Even for those who don't have a spiritual life, I believe reading the Bible and following Christian principles help make each of us a better person. For me, the more I made God, family and helping others No. 1, the more I found greater love, peace, happiness and success.

**12. Create a legacy of love.** We all leave a legacy, but what will we and others see when looking back over our lives? If I had died from my carjacking, I would not have been proud of my legacy. The main question we need to ask is simple: Is the world a better place because of my life? The secret to being a better person is leaving a legacy of love. Today is the first day of the rest of our lives. You can start becoming a better person and leaving a greater legacy by making a conscious decision right now. I recommend getting started by reading the article "8 Steps To Becoming A Better Person" by Elizabeth Harrell.

In this issue, we feature leadership insight from Charles Dabadie, Americas regional manufacturing manager, ExxonMobil Chemical Co.; Denny Wiseman, vice president of operations — olefins, Flint Hills Resources Port Arthur; Douglas Castleberry, chairman, The Pipeliners Young Professionals of Houston; William Gonzales, vice president of health, safety and environment, The Brock Group; Ed Marchese, president/CEO, Proco Products Inc.; and Tom Henson, vice president, marketing, Industrial Scientific.

## **Starting Over**

Every day, as the sun breaks over the horizon, we begin a new life. Many of us take life for granted because, for the most part, our routines are the same.

However, I feel that entrepreneurs and business owners have a lot in common with individuals who have lost everything in natural disasters like Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Ike and Harvey because we know that every day brings new challenges and opportunities. Making the wrong decision or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time can lead to devastating losses of financial resources, property and even loved ones.

When it comes to starting over with a business, there are so many things that can be overlooked. There are many details to remember, of course, but starting over is easier when we remember to apply a few important principles.

First, the ability to adapt to change is a cornerstone of successfully starting over. A few years ago, I asked everyone in our company to read *Who Moved My Cheese* by Spencer Johnson and Kenneth H. Blanchard. This is a short, easy-to-read book with a very poignant message: Change can be a blessing or a curse, depending on your perspective. It's up to you to make change a positive aspect of your business — or your personal life.

It's absolutely essential to maintain a positive mindset and to think of our problems as challenges and our adversities as adventures. Most of us hate problems and adversity, but we welcome adventures and challenges that can be overcome.

Many people and businesses that are starting over have a great opportunity to do things differently — or even better. Perhaps entrepreneurs will do more market research before they begin a new business. Job seekers may choose to go in with more knowledge than before about their profession. Those who have previously shunned the latest technological advancements may now see them as a necessity. I don't think there's anyone or any company out there who can't stand to improve in some way.

In addition to a positive attitude, I believe and know from personal experiences that we must have undying faith, a willingness to work hard and perseverance.

Survival is a great motivator, whether it's trying to stay alive during or after a hurricane, trying to get a roof over our heads, finding food and water, or keeping a business going. Starting over isn't easy, but the simple fact is that when you're struggling for survival, there is no other option. You can give up and die or live in poverty and ignorance forever, or spend every waking hour learning and working.

Those who don't have jobs should spend as much time as possible learning more about their field and seeking employment. They should be willing to start at the bottom and work longer and harder than their peers. Starting over never involves a 40-hour work week — it may mean working from daylight to dark and on weekends. It means beginning as early as you can and working as long and as hard as you can until you absolutely can't go on any longer.

This same advice goes for business owners.

Starting over means keeping up your spirits while others around you are losing theirs. It

means not complaining and looking for the ray of sunshine in the middle of the storm.

I've had to start over in every phase of my life — spiritual, professional and personal. When my first business failed in 1982 and I lost everything, I put myself under the microscope. I told myself that if I was going to die, I'd die working. I vowed to master every marketing technique utilized by the businesses and industries we served and to develop new methods that nobody had seen. I saw starting over as a chance to do things bigger and better.

It took more than 10 years of hard work, perseverance and faith just to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Again, it wasn't easy. At one time I was almost homeless and had to depend on loved ones and friends for places to live and transportation to work. I know for a fact that people will help you if you're willing to work harder than anyone else and that you must keep a smile on your face if you want people to care more about you. I feel this is true whether you're a business owner, a company CEO or an employee near the lower end of the totem pole.

I also believe in the old saying that “givers get” — even when they don't have a nickel in their pockets. We've got to give those who help us the confidence that we are striving for better days and that their investments will be worthwhile.

Last, but not least, don't be afraid to ask for help. People helped me because I believed in God, was willing to work hard and was courteous even in dire circumstances. This formula will work for you, too.

Take it one day at a time, find work of any kind, and strive to be the hardest and nicest worker in your environment. Out of adversity comes not only an adventure you'll always remember but also new opportunities. The keys are faith and hope, along with focus — not on the past, but on the present and future. I have found that starting over in my own life has instilled within me a burning desire to help others conquer adversity on the job and off.

### **Using Positive, Meaningful Media to Enhance Lives**

Our mission at BIC Alliance for the past 35-plus years has always been to connect people in business and industry with one another for the betterment of all. We accomplish this by publishing BIC Magazine and other “Media That Matters” as well as hosting networking events and making personal introductions and referrals.

In addition to helping connect individuals with one another through our publications and networking events, we also help connect buyers and sellers of industrial service companies through IVS Investment Banking and those who seek the best jobs or candidates through BIC Recruiting.

At BIC Media Solutions — another entity in the BIC Alliance family of companies — we take enhancing lives and building better personal, company or community relationships to the next level. At BIC Media, our mission is to help “create more fans for your brand.”

Through my 50-plus years of conducting management, sales and marketing presentations and acting as a keynote speaker at numerous events, I have shared the “people secret” with many. Simply put, the “people secret” is that beyond our essential needs of food and shelter, a person also needs recognition. When we make others No. 1, they tend to respond in kind. This is called

“the law of reciprocity,” and this law has been around since the beginning of time.

But how do we begin using the “people secret” to enhance lives and build better relationships for us and those we love and care about? For me, this has been very simple because I have a passion for continuous learning and training others. I will continue to share “Earl’s Pearls” in BIC Magazine articles, and you can also learn more by reading our books, watching our films or attending some of my speaking events.

On a side note, I would encourage everyone to learn and master the art of listening, which you can do by reading BIC Media’s book Michael Learns to Listen. It’s a book geared toward children, but all ages can learn from it. You’re never too old to improve your listening skills!

On BICMediaSolutions.com, there are several videos — “How to get along with your boss,” “Leadership tips,” “Becoming a better person in 12 easy steps,” etc. — which are free and part of the “Earl’s Pearl’s” video series.

After using meaningful media such as books and movies as a way of recognizing and showing gratitude to others for decades, we launched BIC Media Solutions in 2005 so we could publish our own books. Since 2014, we’ve expanded BIC Media Solutions to produce films, TV shows, videos and a speakers bureau.

Here are 10 reasons why you should use “Media That Matters “ to enhance lives and build better relationships:

1. Books and films define the tastes and values of the giver.
2. People appreciate gifts that flatter their intelligence.
3. Wholesome, family-friendly books and movies elicit emotional responses that other gifts sometimes don’t.
4. Books and movies offer mental stimulation, entertainment and education.
5. Books and movies can help reduce stress, improve conversation and increase a person’s vocabulary.
6. We are more likely to learn something new and valuable if we read an educational book or watch an educational movie.
7. Reading about or viewing how others achieved great happiness or success or dealt with challenges can help us make better decisions.
8. The joy of giving and receiving a book or movie that can enhance a life will be appreciated, remembered and shared for years.
9. Great books and movies are often taken home and shared with our families, churches, organizations and community.
10. Great books and movies are timeless and can be used or shared over and over again.

In closing, I hope these “Earl’s Pearls” about how books, movies and “Media That Matters” help build relationships and enhance lives will be beneficial to you and those you care about and love.

## **100 Tips for Achieving Peace, Happiness and Success**

- 1) Make God, family, friendship and kindness to others your top priorities.
- 2) Say one nice thing to at least three people each day.
- 3) Join and become active in the organizations related to your profession.
- 4) Focus on being more interested instead of being more interesting.
- 5) Treat others as you would like to be treated instead of treating them the way they treat you.
- 6) Stay away from anything that can become a dangerous addiction.
- 7) Learn and practice the art of listening.
- 8) Attend church regularly and take notes. Taking notes helps trigger memory.
- 9) Don't be afraid to share God's good news with others.
- 10) Make wholesome leisure activities part of your life.
- 11) More people become successful because they're nice than because they're brilliant.
- 12) First impressions are important — we never get a second chance to make one.
- 13) Keep good business and personal financial records.
- 14) Share your wealth with others, beginning with your church.
- 15) Save regularly. It's not how much you earn, it's how much you've got when you need it that counts.
- 16) Learn and practice the art of networking by making three excellent referrals per day.
- 17) Keep a business journal and a family journal and review them regularly.
- 18) When mistakes happen, learn from them.
- 19) When you've wronged someone, apologize and ensure it doesn't happen again.
- 20) Don't be afraid of hard work. It won't kill you.
- 21) Set written business and personal goals — daily, weekly, monthly and annually.
- 22) If you supervise others, know and review their goals at least monthly.
- 23) Get involved in your community's activities.
- 24) Practice what you preach. No one likes a hypocrite.
- 25) Practice safety and environmental consciousness on the job and off.
- 26) Become a positive role model at work and at home.
- 27) Before speaking, think about how the person listening will interpret what you say.
- 28) Encourage others instead of putting them down.
- 29) Read the Bible regularly. Highlight important verses.
- 30) Never stop learning. The more we learn, the more we earn.
- 31) Remember that you can control and change the things you think about.
- 32) Don't discriminate toward others on the basis of race, color, religion or economic status.
- 33) Seek mentors for yourself and become a mentor to others.
- 34) Listen to motivational speakers, tapes, preachers, etc.
- 35) Spend time thinking. Learn how to harness the power of thinking for productive means.
- 36) Learn and practice effective time management techniques.
- 37) Learn how to dress and dine properly (I learned these and other helpful tips on professional etiquette from longtime BIC partner and friend Dr. Shirley White of Success Images).
- 38) Practice courtesy to others. People never forget how we make them feel.
- 39) Learn and practice good verbal communication skills.
- 40) Thank people regularly for their business, help, etc.
- 41) Surround yourself with honest, ethical, hard working people.
- 42) Stay away from negative people, places and situations.

- 43) Be kind to the elderly. Remember, you're going to be elderly yourself one day.
- 44) Devote special time for loved ones, family and friends.
- 45) Before you evaluate others, ask them to evaluate their own performance.
- 46) Refrain from profanity. It's unpleasant and makes you look bad.
- 47) It's just as easy to wear a smile as a frown.
- 48) Don't pout or carry grudges. If God can forgive us, we should be able to forgive one another.
- 49) Build a library of motivational/how-to books and magazines and read them.
- 50) Pray regularly and give thanks for your blessings instead of praying only in times of trouble and/or despair or when you want something.
- 51) If you're in management or sales, strive for professionalism. In America, only one in 10 salespeople are true professionals. That means that only about 1.3 million out of 13 million salespeople are professionals.
- 52) Practice self control in all that you say and do.
- 53) Know what to do in emergencies (fire, accident, heart attack, family crisis, etc.).
- 54) Remember that not everything that glistens is gold.
- 55) Document fond memories and experiences in pictures, video, audio tapes, etc.
- 56) Practice presentations before making them. A great way to do this is to videotape yourself making a presentation or watch yourself in a mirror acting as both the buyer and the seller.
- 57) When speaking or making a presentation, be prepared for anything or any question that might arise.
- 58) No one's perfect, but that shouldn't stop you from striving for perfection.
- 59) Believe, and you will receive.
- 60) We can fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time.
- 61) In the land of the lazy, a hard worker with vision knows no limits.
- 62) Research and prospecting are the keys to successful entrepreneurship and sales. It's not "see more and you'll sell more" — it's more about prospecting better and then seeing more of the best prospects.
- 63) Early to bed and early to rise makes a person healthy, wealthy and wise.
- 64) Remember what it was like at the bottom, and help others reach the next rung on the ladder of success.
- 65) It is more blessed to give than to receive.
- 66) Find a great partner. God only knows where I'd be without my wonderful wife and soulmate, Bodi.
- 67) Remember, Abe Lincoln lost many times before becoming a winner. Never give up!
- 68) Be proud to be an American. Show your pride by voting.
- 69) Stop complaining. Nobody likes to be around a whiner.
- 70) Watch peoples' faces when you enter a room. Do they smile or frown?
- 71) Learn to master non-verbal communication to influence others — facial expressions, tone of voice, listening, etc. Since 90 percent of our communication is non-verbal, it's important to remember that actions

Speak louder than words.

- 72) When making presentations one-on-one, use a pen to diagram and explain things better. This also helps maintain attention.
- 73) Preview before you begin a meeting, and review after you finish a meeting.
- 74) It's just as easy to sell a Rolls Royce as it is a Chevrolet. You just don't have to sell as many of them!
- 75) Always remember that there are two sides to every story.
- 76) Love and forgiveness go hand in hand. It's hard to have one without the other.
- 77) One of the great things about starting at the bottom is that there is plenty of room to advance.
- 78) When we point a finger at someone, there are always three pointing back at us.
- 79) It's better to be perceived as a fool than to open your mouth and leave no doubt.
- 80) The best form of self-evaluation is to ask yourself, is God proud of me? Setting out to make Him proud every day is a great goal.
- 81) Visualizing where you want to be is the first step on the journey to success.
- 82) There is no big "I" or little "U" in team.
- 83) Give praise in public. Criticism, however, should be done in private, even when it's constructive in nature.
- 84) Compromise is better than confrontation. Find the middle ground where everyone is comfortable.
- 85) Learn and respect the different personality types and communicate with others based upon theirs, not on your own.
- 86) Knowing how to utilize space and tone of voice are the cornerstones of effective communications and sales. These techniques are easily learned and should be practiced daily.
- 87) Alligators don't have vocal cords and strike only when the time is right. Emulate these creatures by listening and learning before taking action.
- 88) Don't let the devil keep bringing up the past. God gives us a new start every day.
- 89) True success comes when we've reached the point where we are more concerned with doing what's right than obtaining money, publicity and/or recognition.
- 90) Just because we graduated at the top of our class in the school of hard knocks doesn't mean we can't earn a doctorate in success.
- 91) Show me a person who is afraid to lose his or her job, and I'll show you a person who most likely will.
- 92) Selling is more fun and profitable when we sincerely believe that our product or service is to our prospective buyers what spinach is to Popeye.
- 93) If you're writing a book, keep in mind the following tip from Ben Franklin: write things worth reading and do things worth writing about.
- 94) Before we can manage others effectively, we must master self management.
- 95) Always remember to laugh with others, not at them.
- 96) A smiling face is the best way I know of to end a conversation or a personal note.

- 97) The best way to build self-confidence is to know how to act properly and say the right things at the right time.
- 98) Attitude is more important than aptitude in determining altitude.
- 99) Make adversity an adventure by finding the rainbow in the storm.
- 100) Remember — it's what we do together that counts!

## Success Secrets From the Experts

What makes a manager great? Connection through regular one-on-one meetings. The best way to build strong relationships is to have regular one-on-one meetings with each team member. Most people want to share certain aspects of their lives and appreciate when their boss takes the time to get to know them better. Use these one-on-one meetings to ask good questions, discuss professional development and performance, solve problems and review priorities. Effective one-on-one meetings will result in more effective relationships.

— *Kerry Siggins, CEO of StoneAge Inc.*

Managers often face the ongoing challenge of engaging their workers and motivating them to deliver their best job performance. Some might recognize exemplary performance with gift cards and other financial rewards. But in my experience, if you give sincere and frequent verbal recognition, that means more than the monetary recognition.

— *Craig Cotter, maintenance and reliability leader for Occidental Petroleum Corp.*

When it comes to plant turnarounds, safety actually starts with the manager, the vice president or president of safety and goes all the way down to the craftsperson on the job. Our corporate involvement is plugged into the turnaround.

— *Troy Rembert, HS&E manager, Specialty Welding and Turnarounds (SWAT)*

One of our senior-level managers has been on every jobsite since we started. We do that to a) show our support to our client and that we're there for them and involved, and b) show our employees we care about them and that safety is important. If you show them from the top down that we are out there and back up what we preach, then they know we're serious.

— *Johnny Holifield, president and co-founder, Specialty Welding and Turnarounds (SWAT)*

It is like running any large business. You have a lot of pieces of your job you have to do to get your job done. You have to spend time being in touch with people so you are visible and people know you. You need to have good communication skills to be able to connect with people at all levels. Here at the plant, we need to be able to create an environment that gets the most out of all of our employees and motivate people to excel.

We want to ensure we get the right people in the right jobs and provide mentoring and training so they can be successful. In the end, it is about building a team. It is a team sport, and we have to get everyone working together as a team and supporting one another.

— *Mitch Krutilek, plant manager, Cedar Bayou Facility, Chevron Phillips Chemical Co. LP*

The most important skills needed for my current position as refinery manager are the abilities to align and inspire the entire organization toward a common vision. A manager must build effective relationships with the surrounding community and government stakeholders by exhibiting values that characterize the company at large. At Chevron, we strive to ensure that we give back in a way that improves the lives of those around us, which is why we're known globally as the partner of choice in the communities in which we operate. Our success is driven by our people and their commitment to get results the right way: by operating responsibly, executing with excellence, applying innovative technologies and capturing new opportunities for profitable growth.

— *Mitra Kashanchi, general manager, Chevron Salt Lake City Refinery*

I attribute Kinder Morgan's successes and growth to both my own professional leaders, starting with our founder Richard D. Kinder, and the team I proudly lead. I am also very fortunate to have learned from those around me. No leader can do the job without having a qualified, motivated and dedicated team of knowledgeable individuals to support him or her.

— *John W. Schlosser, president, Kinder Morgan Terminals*

It takes no talent to be prepared and on time. Anyone can take a look at the work in progress and give a report about it. Each of you has an alarm clock to get you up and on time every day. It takes your initiative and intestinal fortitude to get to meetings on time.

When you are around fellow staff members and craft workers, I expect you to be positive in everything you do. You will have an 'I can' attitude. You will have an 'I care' attitude. You will begin to put others first. You will not have an attitude that's 'about me.' We are not about individuals; we are about the team. When the team wins, the company wins.

— *Bennett Ghormley, past director, HASC Board of Directors*

These five steps will help you develop and refine your company's core values:

- Figure out your own values and those of your leadership team.
- Meet with your leadership team to debate and define the values that best suit your organization and will help foster the culture you want for your company.
  - Have managers meet with their teams to get feedback.
  - Use this feedback to further refine your values.
  - Communicate your final values to the entire company — early and often.

It is critical for employees to know and live by company values. Share stories and insights at company meetings to bring these values to life in a concrete way. Codify how values should be applied when dealing with clients and colleagues. Recognize and reward employees who best exemplify corporate values. Incorporate values-oriented questions in the interview process to find people who share your company's principles. Above all, ensure that you and your senior team are setting an example through your behavior.

— *Jeff Webber, president, AltairStrickland, An EMCOR Industrial Services Company*

It runs against common thought, but helping others is the path to success in life. If by faith we are taught 'Love others as you love yourself,' then surely within that concept we are called to help one another. Help is one of the most visible and tangible aspects of the selflessness that love requires. That helping/loving others will lead to success is true in every aspect of life, whether it be parental, marital, social, managerial or servile.

I'd like to share two specific work-related examples of how helping others will put you squarely on the path to business success. The first is to find and develop a relationship with a mentor. Choose him or her carefully and then be willing to do all of the work delegated to you. In exchange, you will learn your trade correctly. Additionally, when your mentor climbs the ladder of success based in part on your work, he or she will pull you up the ladder behind them.

The second is to join relevant professional associations and participate through contribution of effort. In exchange for the effort put into work on committees and/or the boards of professional associations, you will learn more about the industry as a whole and broaden your network of meaningful contacts.

Like much wisdom, it seems quite self-evident when you hear it or read it. These two specific tips were shared with me by Earl Heard before I started my first day on the job with Exxon. At the time, it didn't surprise me that both tips were related to hard work and learning, but it didn't occur to me until much later that they had a deeper commonality; they both required working for the benefit of someone or something else. Serving others humbly will increase your individual status. They are practical applications of the ancient

and biblical principles, 'Love others as you love yourself,' because 'It is better to give than to receive.' Or, as Earl might say, 'It's what we do together that counts.'

— *Thomas Brinsko, president and chief operating officer of the BIC Alliance and IVS Investment Banking*

The servant leader is the steward of the culture of the organization. Servant leadership is driven by the cumulative words, thoughtful acts of service, praise, correction and coaching of the CEO and his subordinates. Great corporate cultures improve the character of every team member.

— *John Lake, CEO of Rain for Rent*

In some ways, starting a business is like cooking a good jambalaya. You must have all the right ingredients, or it will not turn out right.

In business, you need good partners, loyal employees and customers, honesty, integrity, loyal and fair investors, sufficient capital, a good banker and lawyer(s), competitive insurance agents, a great product line, a good advertising method, a good plan and budget, plenty of determination and the willingness to take the risks you will face.

— *David Starkey, former president and CEO of Empire Scaffold*

I have lived by a simple rule of management both in my business life and my personal life. As a person advances in his or her career, be sure to treat that person like you want to be treated because you will likely meet the same people as your career winds down. Therefore, make sure your reputation remains true to your character in business and your family life.

— *Kent Wasmuth, director of sales and marketing, Hotel Monteleone New Orleans, La.*

A very successful businessman turned my life around more than 10 years ago when he spoke to over 2,000 business men and women at a meeting in Atlanta and said to all of us: "Whether you believe me or not, I know that if you aren't putting God first in your life, you'll never truly be successful in any job or business!"

That day, I gave my life to God and found the true key to happiness and success was having the proper alignment or priorities in the correct order: God, family, job/business. With God as my pilot, my personal and professional life has been blessed abundantly.

Furthermore, all of us meet obstacles in our lives, but it is, in my opinion, the entrepreneurial spirit that allows us to look beyond the obstacles and challenges and become overcomers in life.

— *Margie Larson, retired community marketing director at Williamsburg Retirement*

## *Community*

I am a firm believer in training and self-improvement through reading and educational seminars. I believe that leadership and management are learned skills. Additionally, we at Baker Tanks take pride in developing a culture that I make certain we reinforce with Baker people redundantly. We will do the right things based on customer expectations, with our individual actions strongly entrenched in the highest standards of ethics and integrity that ensure that the Golden Rule has formed our foundation for customer service and communication. The point is, customers trust that we will say what we will do, and that we will do what we say.

— *Bill St. Amant, division vice president of Baker Tanks*

Anyone can realize their dreams through hard work, perseverance, kindness and respect for others. My theme in life is that you must first dream and then enjoy life while fulfilling your dream(s). Life is too short to stress over things you have no control over or to be in relationships, situations etc. that are not fulfilling and do not impact your life in a positive way. So, I say have some values (treat people like you would have them treat you), respect yourself and others, dream big and live life to its fullest. And, last but not least, continuously give thanks to God for everything!”

— *Debra G. Robinson, senior marketing and sales representative for PBI Performance Products, Inc.*

I do not think you can compartmentalize happiness, peace and success within the various segments of your life — family, friends, work, etc. Realization of these goals will only happen when God’s proper balance is recognized and achieved. He wants you to work hard and be interested in your career and add value to your employer, employees and customers, and accumulate wealth. He may want you to have a family, to love them, provide for them, protect them and spend time with them. He wants you to have friends, spend time with them and enjoy their company. He wants you to have other interests, enjoy your free time and play hard. But success as the world sees it and sells it places the emphasis and priorities in the wrong order, never resulting in true success. That will only occur when we make our relationship and fellowship with God our first priority. This will always be a work in progress, as we are continually seeking His will for our lives, working to be obedient, living for others and putting ourselves last. This is a constant struggle for most of us, because it is not our nature, and most of the forces around us support the opposite. But, when we do this, all the other aspects of our lives will go much better, and

we can feel and work toward the ‘success’ we are all seeking.

— *Don Fanning, retired vice president of marketing and contract administration for Austin Industrial*

Curiosity is the key to happiness for me in my business and personal life. Wondering about how something works or how it might work better sparks creativity. Wanting to see what something really looks like, sounds like or even smells like results in travel, study and great conversations. Another important factor in my life that keeps me moving and doing (which is when I am the happiest) is the realization that there is no going back; this is it, and you are doing what you always wanted to do right now! The kids will never be like they are right now — enjoy them. If you can buy that ranch you always wanted, do it now — there is no better time. If you want to see the national parks, set up an agenda right now and go see one.

Two of my greatest annual exercises are 1) listing all the gigantic and small things I want to do in my lifetime, and 2) listing all of the “tolerances” I am allowing to drain my energy. Tolerances are big and small things that you do not like, but put up with for whatever reason; tolerances are constant, usually low-level irritants that dampen happiness. Once these lists are made, magic happens. The lifelong dreams become reality, and the tolerances just get handled!

So, my advice on being happy is to be curious, remind yourself of your dreams and truly live the moment.

— *Helen I. Hodges, president of Separation Systems Consultants, Inc.*

Looking back, I realize that I wanted to experience the challenge of running my own business and being financially successful, but I also wanted to have fun. I wanted to enjoy work! I really enjoy making clients laugh or smile first before we get down to business (IRS agents are a bigger challenge). My firm’s goal is to solve clients’ financial and tax problems and send them home happy — there is just no other way to do business. We cannot have any unhappy clients.

I also enjoy a balance of work and personal life. Starting out, I found company outings and ‘business-after-hours’ activities offer good opportunities to blend work and leisure. Later, I found family time to be a higher priority. Overtime has always been flexible and never excessive, even during tax season. “Rest before you get tired,” is a good motto to avoid burnout. Once, as a young accountant, I asked my boss if I should come in on Saturday to finish a project. He looked at me with an ironic smile and said ‘No, work is going to be here long after you and I are gone.’ Amen to that.

— *Michael Choate, president of Michael Choate and Co., CPAs*

Work hard, get a mortgage and remember to be nice to everyone. Today's office boy will be tomorrow's client!

— *Peter A. Mayer, founder of Peter Mayer Advertising*

I think that, all too often, young people think they are limited in certain ways. There are a lot of people who say 'I could've done that, or I should've done that,' but there are very few who actually step up and try. Sometimes trying involves risking your reputation and/or your financial well-being. It's OK to fail in the beginning. We've seen a lot of people fail. I think that Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton all lost elections at one time or another. They saw failure firsthand. Also, I believe it was Abraham Lincoln who said that great things come to those who wait, but better things come to those who hustle.

— *Jim Bernhard, former CEO of The Shaw Group, Inc.*

In my mind, the keys to my success have been belief in myself and belief in others. There are many who train and speak who have a 'story' to tell — I simply don't. My inspiration comes from the fact that I had a great family — we weren't rich, but I certainly didn't grow up in poverty. Neither of my parents finished college, but they both worked. The environment in which I was raised was one of optimism. Something that my mother and father always encouraged me to do was to try my best and shoot for the stars. Something I have found that's an absolute insight I have gained is to try to surround yourself with positive people. Everybody needs somebody. We can't do this all by ourselves. I've had a lot of friends and clients who have rooted for me in my successes and cried for me in my failures.

I've always been a dreamer. Yet, you have to have an action plan and follow through. My favorite saying is 'Keep on keepin' on!'

— *Dr. Shirley White, president of Success Images*

God is not intimidated, worried or weak-kneed about a problem. I know He could make it go away, but generally does not. I do know that He is going to walk me through it. He is always there and will always provide guidance if you listen.

— *Mark Albers, former president of ExxonMobil Development*

You have to have an ability to work with people. That stems from being able to generate

a vision that can be shared with a lot of folks and empowering them to reach that vision.  
— *Al Anderson, plant manager of Tesoro's Mandan, N.D., refinery*

Leaders need to share the vision, inspire the people and hold them accountable to achieve.

— *Doug Quinn, refinery manager for Motiva's Convent, La., refinery*

Creating an effective team is one of the most dynamic and exciting things about any of our human interactions, especially in the business world. In a lot of traditional businesses, people are divided, but you can accomplish more if you come together and capitalize on one another's strengths and work together to overcome one another's weaknesses.

— *Paul Mott, president of the New Orleans Hornets*

Your ability to change faster than the competition may be your only real competitive advantage, but it is the people who really make a difference. Leaders must not forget this simple truth.

— *Steve Rathweg, site manager for Shell Chemical in Geismar, La.*

If you don't follow up with your customers, they will go somewhere else.

— *Brian Battle, partner of DeHumidification Technologies*

Before you begin a project, you need to make a little extra research to avoid duplicating what others have done in that area.

— *Dr. Michel Daumerie, vice president of research and technology for ATOFINA Petrochemicals*

You have to have the courage to try things and keep what works. Without change, there's no improvement.

— *Roger Gossett, Chairman & CEO at RGC Group*

There's something about making a product each day, and then seeing it out in the marketplace that makes you feel like you've accomplished something.

— *Bruce March, refinery manager for ExxonMobil Refining & Supply Co. in Baton Rouge, La.*

Keep your running shoes on. If you are sitting still, you are backing up, and the market will change right underneath you.

— *Todd Foust, president and owner of Coating Services, Inc.*

Listen to your customers. Listen to other successful business owners. Listen to your conscience. Listen to your employees. Good, basic communication is not only good marketing, it's good business practice.

— *Jim Robinson, Jerry Strickland and Mike Walton, founders of AltairStrickland*

Listening to the people with whom you work is vital. They will help you understand the problems they face, and they will help you see things from a different point of view.

— *Jeff Utley, senior vice president of operations and plant manager of Flying J, Inc. in North Salt Lake, Utah*

Surround yourself with the best talent available. Clearly define and communicate expectations, and measure performance against those expectations. Accept accountability for improvement. Encourage positive, proactive behaviors, and then let the people do their jobs.

— *Jeff Davis, director/advisor at Furmanite*

Never compromise your ethics. Money can be a great motivator, but I strive to balance the requirement for generating a profit with the need to reinvest in business itself. It's not just about making money.

— *Darwin H. Simpson, president of Pakhoed Logistics Americas*

I work from a basic philosophy that success comes with pride. I believe you teach people to be successful and you empower them to make decisions. When you believe in your people and have confidence in them, they will grow your business and satisfy your clients.

— *Jon Hodges, president and founder, Evergreen Environmental Services*

One of the most important things is to learn how to convey your thoughts and ideas to other people. You have to be able to communicate, motivate your workers, instill your corporate values and ensure that everyone within the company remains safe on the job.

— R. Dewon Rankin, former president of HRI, Inc.

If someone who was just starting out asked me for advice, I would tell them to work hard and do what's right, and you will succeed.

— R.E. "Bob" Parker, CEO of Repcon, Inc.

If someone were to ask me for my advice, I would tell them to plan, plan, plan. Planning involves setting goals and determining how to reach them. When choices have to be made, it is much easier to make them if a plan is in place to guide your decisions.

—Roby Shields of Louisiana Vegetation Management

To have a solid, successful business takes people qualified in a number of fields. You can't do it alone, so you must hook up with good people. And, you can't be afraid to hire people who know more than you. Once you have developed a core capability, you need to guide the team, but let them do their jobs.

— Gene Silverman, founder and chief technical officer of InTANK Services, Inc.

I have learned that everything takes longer than you think it will and that if you are working smart and hard, stay honest to your core principles, even when it costs you major money, you will succeed in the end. No one succeeds alone. You must have good business relationships, take time to help others win at their business and have a great team.

— Sean Guerre, founder at Stone Fort Group

Anyone going into business needs to have experience in that particular field. Research your area for a few years before you make any decisions.

— Merlin Hoiseth, president of Reactor Services International

Growing up, I had two exemplary men as role models. I looked up to both my father and my grandfather, and they taught me that everyone is worthy of being treated with dignity and respect. They also helped me to realize early in life the importance of family.

— Claude Barber, owner and president of Plant Machine Works

It's extremely important to let people know how important they are. Your success depends on them. If there's one thing I've learned, it is that the ability to get along with people is far and away the most important thing in your career.

— *Pat DeBusk, vice president of USA DeBusk*

When people know that you trust them and expect the best from them, they will deliver.

— *Dan Robinson, former president and CEO of Placid Refining Co.*

Establishing appropriate goals, developing a realistic plan to achieve those goals, and then realizing the satisfaction of successfully reaching those goals is exhilarating for everyone involved. It fosters pride and excellence in all aspects of work and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

— *Phil Hawk, former chairman and CEO of Team Industrial Services*

The best advice I can give to anyone is to do something you truly believe in with people you believe in. And always be true to yourself.

— *Carroll Suggs, former chairman and CEO of Petroleum Helicopters, Inc.*

Whatever you choose to be a part of, you have to have a strong commitment to what you are doing and a positive attitude. This philosophy, regardless of circumstance, will always enhance your performance.

— *Teddy Mansfield, president of Mansfield Industrial Coatings, Inc.*

If you're not going forward, then you're going backward. You have to continuously think of ways to better serve your clients and yourself.

— *Dan Persha, director of environmental risk management of Bowen, Miclette & Britt*

The key to success or failure is personnel. In most successful organizations, there is one individual who is the driving force behind the company. I try to hire people who are good at what they do and let them operate autonomously to make the company a success.

— *Sonny Anderson, founder of Anco and Basic Industries*

## Suggested Readings

- The Bible: New International Version
- Anatomy of an Entrepreneur: The Story of Joseph Jacobs, Founder of Jacobs Engineering, by Joseph J. Jacobs
- Nuts!: Southwest Airlines' Crazy Recipe for Business and Personal Success, by Kevin Freiberg and Jackie Freiberg
- Split Second Choice: The Power of Attitude, by Jim Winner
- Your Best Life Now, by Joel Osteen
- Who Moved My Cheese?, by Spencer Johnson, M.D.
- Walt Disney: An American Original, by Bob Thomas
- Winning Every Day, by Lou Holtz
- The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power, by Daniel Yergin
- You Are My Sunshine: The Jimmie Davis Story, by Gus Weill
- Minute Motivators for Leaders, by Stan Tolar
- The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing, by Al Ries and Jack Trout
- Guerrilla Marketing, by Jay Conrad Levinson
- The Happy Road to Success, by Fred J. Greer Jr.
- Communicate With Confidence, by Dianna Booker
- How to Become CEO: The Rules for Rising to the Top of Any Organization, by Jeffrey J. Fox
- The Millionaire Next Door, by Dr. Thomas Stanley and Dr. William Danko
- Confessions of a Management Consultant Turned CEO, by Anita Simonton
- Nonverbal Communications in Human Interaction, by Mark Knopp
- The 100 Simple Secrets of Happy People, by David Niven, Ph.D.

- Developing Tomorrow's Manager Today, by Francis Dinsmore
- Managing Growth: Keys to Success for Expanding Companies, by Gay Weismantel and Walter Kesling Jr.
- Onassis: Aristotle and Christina, by L. J. Davis
- Trump: The Art of the Deal, by Tony Schwartz
- Iacocca: An Autobiography, by Lee Iacocca with William Novak
- Memory: How It Works & How to Improve It, by Roy Gallant
- Flight of the Buffalo, by James Belesseo and Ralph Stayer
- God's Psychiatry: But God Can, by Chabo Allen and Robert Ozmont
- Chicken Soup for the Soul, by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen
- Best Speeches by Eminent Speakers, by Grenville Kleiser
- The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and Life, by Laurie Jones
- No Ordinary Time: Franklin & Eleanor Roosevelt, The Home Front in WWII, by Doris Goodwin
- The Courage to be Rich, by Suze Orman
- It Only Takes Everything You've Got, by Julio Melara
- In Search of Excellence, by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman Jr.
- Powerful Writing, by Richard Anderson
- How to Think Like a CEO, by D.A. Brown
- Leadership 101, by John Maxwell
- Secrets of Closing Sales, by Charles Roth and Roy Alexander
- Selling 101, by Michael McGaellery
- Soft Selling in a Hard World, by Jerry Voss
- You Don't Say, by Vernon Prizer
- AMA Complete Guide to Small Business Marketing, by Kenneth J. Cook
- Phillips and Duncan's Marketing Principles and Methods, by James M. Carman and Kenneth P. Uhl
- Marketing Masters, by Gene Walden and Edmund Lawler
- Dare to Lead: Proven Principles of Effective Leadership, by Byrd Baggett
- Entrepreneur Magazine's 303 Marketing Tips, by Rieva Lesonsky and Leann Anderson
- Mindgames: Phil Jackson's Long Strange Journey, by Roland Lazenby
- How to Close Every Sale, by Joe Girard with Robert L. Shook
- The Marketing Plan: How to Prepare and Implement It, by William M. Luther
- Secrets of the World's Top Sales Performers, by Christine Harvey
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