

# *Foreword*

## *by Scott A. Wolstein*

**M**y father could sell ice to the Eskimos. How? First, the Eskimos would take a liking to him and they wouldn't want to disappoint him. Second, my father would convince them that the ice he was selling was something they couldn't live without. And, finally, he wouldn't take no for an answer.

After all, is selling ice to the Eskimos so hard when you have sold 1,000 homes in Twinsburg, Ohio twenty years before its time, or when you have sold thousands of season tickets and dozens of sponsorship packages to an indoor soccer team, or when you have sold sites for hundreds of luxury homes and country club memberships to a golf club on the site of an abandoned seminary in North Canton, Ohio? I could go on and on. Suffice it to say that my father is the most effective salesman I have ever witnessed.

What enables an individual from humble beginnings and no real advantages to become so effective? What are the ingredients that enable someone to fashion such a remarkable career as an entrepreneur? This book provides some insights and answers to these questions, but first, allow me to share my own views from my own very unique perspective.

First, what is an entrepreneur? According to the dictionary, an entrepreneur is "one who organizes and directs a business undertaking, assuming the risk for the sake of profit." My father is surely this, but he is also so much more.

On a lark, I also looked up the word "charisma" and I hit the nail more squarely on the head: "a special quality of leadership that captures the popular imagination and inspires unswerving allegiance and devotion." That is my father: a charismatic entrepreneur. It is this

charismatic quality, combined with an incredibly intense passion to succeed, that has enabled my father to accomplish such great things. When he sits in a meeting, he controls the room. He commands respect and attention from everyone at the table. When he speaks, people listen.

My father has always been able to assemble a team with “unswerving allegiance and devotion.” He builds a team, not based on their knowledge and experience, but rather on their desire to succeed and their willingness to learn. And many have blossomed under his tutelage, and have produced for him.

Many believe that the success of an entrepreneur is primarily derived from a unique “idea” or invention. To be sure, my father has had some innovative ideas in his career. Arguably, he is the brainchild behind the modern community shopping center anchored by a discount department store. After all, he was the first to convince Kmart (the Wal-Mart of the 1960s and 1970s) to locate within a multi-tenant shopping center, which was revolutionary at the time. But in my father’s case, I don’t think his success has derived from his ideas, but rather from his extraordinary execution of those ideas. He’s never picked easy projects. Often, he embarks on new undertakings solely on instinct or a feeling in his gut that they can be successful, rather than on extensive research or analysis. In fact, in many ways I think the bigger the challenge, the more he enjoys it.

No, his success is a result of execution. He is quick to make decisions and he has the courage of his convictions. Once he has set his course, he will not be deterred. He pursues success with an unbridled passion and an absolute refusal to fail. Failure simply cannot be tolerated. To say he is relentless is an understatement. No task is beneath him. His business is his life. Whatever deal he is working on consumes him 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. His friendships nearly all come from his associations in business.

Even when he is on vacation on the other side of the world, my father demands that his employees track him down and keep him informed. Even that is not enough. After a week or so, he can’t wait to get back to the office. And when he travels with my mother, he is never really away from the office, because my mother is intimately involved in every aspect of his undertakings. In fact, she is an integral part of his success. She brings a unique sense of style and an absolute demand for quality to everything they do together. It is this quality and her pursuit of perfection that combines with my father’s unparalleled intensity that creates spectacular projects. Their relationship

is truly extraordinary. They are soul mates in every way and they make a remarkable team.

What fuels my father's intense drive to succeed, this refusal to fail? I think it derives from his childhood, from growing up on the other side of the tracks. His entire career has been about proving to everyone, including himself, that he is just as good as the "other guys" who grew up on the right side of the tracks. The great irony is that he is not just "as good." He is better. Unlike them, he has done it the hard way. He started with nothing. He overcame great obstacles.

The further irony is that if he ever felt like he was truly accepted and appreciated by the "other guys," the establishment, he would probably lose his remarkable intensity. Like Samson after his famous haircut from Delilah, the power that drives him would be gone. While he claims to crave that acceptance and appreciation, deep down I think he really prefers the pursuit, and he revels in the opportunity to prove himself over and over again.

So his career is in many ways like Sisyphus, the character from Greek mythology who was condemned to pushing a rock uphill knowing that whenever he reaches the top of the hill, the rock will roll back down the other side and the pattern will repeat forever. But unlike Sisyphus, my father thrives on pushing the rock uphill. He takes great pride and derives great pleasure from tackling challenge after challenge after challenge. If he ever stopped at the top of the hill to take in the view, he'd be miserable.

This aspect of his personality is manifest in his hobbies: golf and Ohio State football. What sport could mirror poor Sisyphus more than golf? Year after year, round after round, you think you've found the secret to better scores, but over and over again you find yourself back at the bottom of the hill. My father loves golf and he plays often. His other great passion is Buckeye football. Week after week, when the Buckeyes take the field, they put everything on the line. My father is always there, living and dying with every play, sometimes even pacing up and down the sidelines himself, like a coach. He even once gave a locker room pep talk to the Ohio State team before a critical game. And, of course, they won!

He pursues each challenge in business like a football coach in a championship game. Just like the coach, for my father everything is black and white. You're either with him or against him. If you're with him, he is incredibly loyal and extremely supportive. If you're against him, he is a very tough adversary. He is perceived by many as very "tough." That is the great contradiction, because in fact, my father is

very sensitive. While he thrives on challenges, he hates conflict and confrontation. He will not back down from a fight, but he really does not like to go to battle.

This sensitive side of my father is manifest in his extraordinary generosity and philanthropy. Many of my mother and father's major charitable gifts are well known and high profile: the research building at University Hospital, a magnificent facility to support undergraduate business education at Case Western Reserve, the headquarter facility for United Cerebral Palsy, the armored bus for children in Israel, the playground at Boulevard Elementary School where both my father and mother went to school, and many more. But what is less well known is the private gifts and loans to friends in need. It is these gestures that speak volumes about the type of person my father is.

This is the person I know so well. As a child, I didn't spend much time with my father on a daily basis. He often worked long hours and weekends. But we had great family vacations and my sister and I spent many weekends in the back seat of the car as he inspected his projects. During those weekend excursions, I observed his phenomenal work ethic up close. But as hard as he worked, he was always there in the bleachers at all my athletic events, cheering me on and insisting that I pursue success on the field with intensity and desire. When I graduated from law school, he was supportive of my decision to pursue an independent career, sharing the hope that we could someday work together. And we have worked together and have accomplished some great things. And while we haven't always seen eye to eye, I have great respect for him. He has been a wonderful role model for me throughout my life.

While it is difficult to capture the man and his remarkable career on paper, this book provides the reader with a glimpse of the "rags to riches" career of this extraordinary, charismatic entrepreneur, with insights into the ingredients behind his success. In so doing, I hope it provides an inspiration for those who choose to pursue the entrepreneurial path to success. In the words of that familiar Frank Sinatra tune, my father did it "his way." He has created a legacy of remarkable accomplishments, many very special projects, incredible gifts to his community and to the world, and a son who loves him very much.

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