



by Jay Goltz

Goltz On Business

Lessons From My Father

There is no common denominator when it comes to people's backgrounds before they got into the picture frame business. For some it was the family business. Others left careers in various fields. Some are artists. No matter what we have done in the past, there is usually some experience in our background that could be transferred to the picture frame business, whether it's on the art side, the design side, or the people side.

Since I was born, and until he retired 10 years ago, my father owned a dime store right around the corner from where I started, and still have, my business. His store was the old kind with the wooden floors, tin ceiling, and, as the name, denotes—a lot of stuff for a dime.

He worked with my grandparents, my uncle and aunt, and my mother. I worked there on Saturdays and during the summer helping customers and restocking merchandise. Before I had an accounting degree, before I was a framer, I was weaned as a retailer. I am a retailer. That is the blood that

flows through my veins.

In retrospect, I look at how my father's valuable lessons prepared me for the picture frame business. Many people had the pleasure of meeting my father at a speech I gave in Montana a couple of years ago, and were able to see my roots in person. To that end, I am dedicating this column to my 81-year-old

father who I am fortunate enough to still be able to learn things from.

After much soul-searching, I discovered that my father had given me seven invaluable lessons that were either taught, learned through observation, or I received genetically.

Work ethic. My father is reliable. Every morning out of the house. Stayed at work all day. Came home. I cannot recall one day in my entire childhood that my father did not go to work.

Management. Though I couldn't learn much about management from my father since the dime store was a family business, he used to counsel me as I was growing my staff—and

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struggling every step of the way.

My father flew 30 missions during World War II. He used to tell me, “The officers don’t eat with the enlisted men.” When I was 22 and working with people of similar age, I didn’t quite understand it; it seemed elitist. I now painfully understand. There are certain situations and employees in business that require the separation between management and hourly employees. Some people need to have a clear distinction between the boss and co-workers. Hence, officers don’t eat with the enlisted men.

The boss is always a jerk. What does that mean? It means that no matter what you do, as the boss someone is going to call you a jerk because you’re the boss. You need to accept the fact that you cannot make everybody happy, especially future ex-employees.

Control. As my business was growing, my father used to tell me, “You have to have control.” I didn’t know what that meant. Now I do. It means knowing what’s going on and making sure what you want to happen happens. When you’re a small store it’s easy. As you get bigger, it’s something that you struggle with.

Respect. In all the years I worked in my father’s store, I saw him take care of every customer, whether they were nice, not nice, long-time customer, first-time customer, big customer, little customer, rich customer, poor customer—it didn’t matter. He showed them respect because they were *a customer*. They came in to spend their money. We never took that for granted.

“**Do what you have to do.**” Over the years, I heard my father say it many times. No matter how miserable the situation. No whining. No hesitation. No psychoanalysis. Forge ahead. Do what you have to do. Is this a sense of responsibility that has been whittled down over the last couple of generations to where it’s now, “Do what you want to do”? Too heavy to ponder. Can you

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tell I have teenage children?

Compassion. I really can’t tell you that I have a lot of vivid recollections from my childhood about particular situations. But there is one that had a profound effect on me. This scruffy guy came into the store regularly. He was the neighborhood drunk. (He wasn’t the only one, but he was *my* neighborhood drunk.)

The big red nose, beat up looking, seemed much older than his age, I’m sure. He was not the loveable character of Otis on “The Andy Griffith Show,” but a sad casualty of life who was just getting by day to day. But he was a regular. I remember looking up at my father and saying, “Boy, that guy’s really a mess,” or something like that. To which my father replied, “If you had his life, you might be a mess, too.”

That is my father. Respectful to other people. Never condescending or arrogant. Doing what he had to do. Enjoying the gift of helping people. My father was not the most successful businessman on earth. Sometimes he put people before profit. The big business lesson here is that life is not only about business. It’s about being responsible. It’s about providing for your family. Being a good citizen. And being happy. Ten years after my father closed his store, people still come up to me and ask how he is. That is success.

Being in the business world I am regularly exposed, whether in print or person, to very successful people. Some of them have been obsessive, sometimes mean, frequently unhappy, “successful” business people. I’d rather be the son of a dime store owner.

Thank you, Dad. ■

Jay Goltz, Business Editor, started Artists’ Frame Service in 1978 fresh out of college. AFS employs over 80 people at its main framing operation in Chicago, IL. Goltz is also the founder of FramerSelect. He has received numerous business honors and is best known for his straight talk on how to succeed in business. He has taught at the National Conference.