

BIG IDEAS

Entrepreneurs talk about what they do and why they do it...



ERNEST DWIGHT

Founder and president, SouthWood Corp..

DETAILS, DETAILS

Business: Plans, designs and manufactures signs and sign systems

2006 revenue: More than \$5 million

Web site: www.southwoodcorp.com

Age: 58

Education: B.A. in economics and business, Belmont Abbey College, 1970

Experience: Founder, SouthWood Corp., 1970

Career advice: Find something you like to do and build a career around it. If it feels too much like work, it probably isn't the right thing.

Big Picture

Essential business philosophy:

Dependability and persistence are critical.

Best way to keep a competitive edge:

Stay focused on the clients who depend on you and the people you add to your team.

Guiding principle:

Anything worth doing is worth doing well.

Yardstick of success:

The growth that comes from repeat and referral clients.

How you grew your company:

Niche specializing and marketing and public relations.

Biggest accomplishments in the last 18 months:

Solidification of core management and account-management teams. Opportunity and selection/development of quality people.

How you defined your market:

Those who want to do things well, to whom image and identity are important and who have large or multiple projects.

Goal yet to be achieved:

Further development and growth of selected individuals on the SouthWood team.

Judgment Calls

Best business decision:

Staying focused on core business and minimizing dilution of our efforts and our positioning.

Toughest business decision:

Letting go of qualified and productive employees who didn't have a customer-service and teamwork attitude.

Biggest business lesson learned:

Stick with good clients who demand service and quality. "Price buyers" can cause you to forget what good clients are looking for.

Mentors:

Charlie Fazekas and Perrin Thompson. Both are deceased business partners who influenced me in my early years.

True Confessions

What gets you up in the morning:

Being able to leave things (and people) better than I found them through my influence.

Like least about job:

Tough personnel decisions.

Pet peeve:

People who don't keep their promises.

Three greatest passions:

Family - wife of 37 years, Vicky, four children and three grandchildren; travel; antiques, auctions and furniture.

Predilections

Favorite quote:

"At least I know I tried."

Most influential book:

For Those I Loved by Martin Gray, the story of a World War II concentration camp survivor who lost two entire families, yet persevered out of obligation and respect for their memories.

Favorite cause:

Food For The Poor - A Florida-based charity helping to feed and house the poor in the Caribbean region.

Favorite vacation spot:

Europe and the Caribbean.

Favorite ways to spend free time:

With my wife, traveling, going to auctions and refinishing furniture.

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