

**Business Advantage, May, 2006**

## **SECRETS OF CENTENNIAL FAMILY BUSINESS**

### **The Findlay Publishing Company: Integrity Through the Years**

**By Donald Levitt**

Isaac Newton (I.N.) Heminger came to Findlay, Ohio in 1886 to enter Findlay College. He was the campus reporter for one of the local newspapers, and became a fulltime reporter after graduation. His parents had died when he was young, and I.N. was persuaded by the editor to invest part of his inheritance in the newspaper. I.N. eventually became general manager of the paper and, through a series of mergers, acquisitions and stock purchases, The Findlay Publishing Company – owned by the Heminger family -- became the only newspaper in Findlay. I.N.'s grandson, Edwin (Ed) Heminger, currently serves as Chairman of the Board and his great-grandson, Karl Heminger, is president of the company which now includes two newspapers, seven radio stations, internet services, and commercial printing.

#### **Secrets of Success**

*Secret #1: Allow the next generation time to mature and grow*

I.N. Heminger's son Russell became president when he was 50 years old. Russell's oldest son Harold became president when he was 44 years old. Harold's younger brother Edwin became president when he was 57 years old. Edwin's oldest son Karl became president when he was 46 years old.

*Secret #2: Utilize non-family executives*

When Edwin Heminger moved up to Chairman in 1988, an internal non-family executive was named as president and served in that role for 14 years until Karl Heminger became president.

*Secret #3: Sell shares back to the company*

"Family businesses can have problems when there are family owners who are not active in the business," notes Ed Heminger. "In our case everyone has always been loyal to the family and been willing to sell their shares. My father's sister owned one-third of the company and she sold her shares back to the company. My brother sold his shares back to the company when he retired. We now have buy-sell agreements, but before that it happened just out of mutual respect and a sense of family."

*Secret #4: Build the business on integrity*

"My grandfather and father both had strong personal and business integrity," says Ed Heminger. "No one was ever making a grab for power. When my father quoted a price to his sister to buy her shares, she said 'Anything you say is fine. I respect you.' We

have had honesty and forthrightness; never bending the truth; respectful of other people and employees; and above board in business ethics. Running a newspaper is not the most popular thing in town. To be a fair dealer and not abuse that power takes integrity. We inherited these qualities.”

*Secret #5: Give to the community*

“It is not just my great-grandfather and grandfather,” notes Karl Heminger. “My father is the epitome and standard within the community. People reach out to him for his wisdom. He is someone who can bridge gaps and work through issues. He has been president of the Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, the United Way – he has a sense of community and provides leadership in the community. We are blessed to be in Findlay, and blessed to be able to give back to the community.”

*Secret #6: Be in a successful industry*

“The newspaper business has been strong for many years,” says Ed Heminger. “We are entering a new era, but for many years the newspaper played a constant role in the community. For economic reasons, most towns evolved into having just one paper. This gives you a monopoly – and a greater obligation to do things right.”

*Secret #7: Learn from parents and grandparents*

“My grandfather lived with us in our home for ten years and helped raise me,” notes Ed Heminger. “I have a masters degree in journalism, but I learned more at the dinner table from my father and grandfather about newspaper problems and how to handle them.”

Karl Heminger had the unusual opportunity to grow up with his father’s father and his mother’s father who were *both* running businesses which eventually became centennial family businesses (the other centennial family business being Rieck’s Gallery which is also in Findlay). “I saw my mother’s father working outside into his seventies – teaching me about hard work and that nothing comes easily. My father’s father was still active writing editorials for the paper until two days before his death.”

***Donald Levitt, president of Levitt Consulting, helps family businesses to succeed as both a business and a family. More information about this month’s topic, and other family business issues, can be found at [LevittConsulting.com](http://LevittConsulting.com).***