

Profile

The Landesmen of Lawson

By Susan Anderson

Ben Landesman made his debut at a screenprinting convention in 1956, David Landesman shortly thereafter. Today, the two brothers are about as involved in the textile printing industry as you can get; they are vice presidents of their family owned business, Lawson Printing and Drying Company.

"From the time we were small boys, five and six years old, we used to go to all of the screenprinting conventions," says David. "Ben went to his first one in 1956, when he was five years old, and we've been going ever since. We grew up with the industry."

The two young boys first performed by screenprinting at the shows. "I used to enjoy the printing," says Ben. "Gene (the boys' father and president of Lawson) would be doing the selling... David and I would just print the whole time. I got a great deal of satisfaction out of it." He adds, bragging a little, "And I was a pretty fast printer, too. I used to get offers all the time to take me away for the summer and have me print for them. I was only 12, 13 years old."

'People remember us. Sometimes customers feel that they watched us grow up. They feel, in a sense, that they are part of our family, part of our company.' —David

Both David and Ben readily agree that this kind of early initiation into the business has helped them not only in the learning of the business, but earning the respect of the industry. "I know growing up with the industry has been very helpful," says David. "There are just untold things that Ben and I have learned just through osmosis, by being around Gene, by growing up with the company, by going to all of the conventions since 1956, through customer contact when we were young.

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of our family, part of our company."

Ben adds, "And by the same token, we have seen them, their company, grow. We've seen their sons. We remember who we had seen walking around with their dad. It's very interesting that way."

"When it's in your blood," David says, "it's helpful; it provides that nourishment."

'It was important for me to come back. They needed me, and I felt I had something to contribute.'

—David

Though the brothers did indeed "grow up with the business," neither actually anticipated making a career out of it. Ben, who will be 30 next month, had been working for the firm for a few years before he "actually stole me away from my doctoral pursuits," says David. David, 24, has a bachelor's degree in management sociology, a master's degree in education and future studies and had been working on his Ph.D. when he took a "leave of absence" two years ago and went to work for Lawson. "He (Ben) asked me to come back full time. I had grown up with the business. Both Ben and I grew up with the business and ever since we were small kids, we were down here working and helping my dad, doing small odd jobs. From the time Ben was in high school, he had worked in production, and I was always involved in helping Gene out also."

David, however, had been contemplating going into the teaching profession when Ben approached him. The company had experienced substantial growth and, "so, it was important for me to come back," says David. "They needed me, and I felt I had something to contribute."

Though David had other pursuits in mind at the time, he says that he does not regret his decision to work full-time at Lawson. "I'm glad I came back to work here. I really enjoy my time here, and I plan to stay with it. It's fun because we are a young company, so to speak, and we are growing very rapidly. There's a lot of new projects going on."

David is in charge of sales for both Lawson Printing and Drying Machine Company and Lawson Screen Printing Supply Company, a division of Lawson, which manufactures screenprinting presses and dryers for the textile industry in addition to distributing supply items that are needed by the textile and garment printer.

Ben's job entails being coordinator. "I coordinate sales with the manufacturing department. I help coordinate our dryer department. I also handle customer service, which is one of my primary duties, and sales or specialty sales," he says. "A lot of my time is spent in production. I'm the guy you talk to when you hear banging in the background," he laughs.

Like David, Ben finished college with other pursuits than Lawson in mind. With a degree in education, he was teaching and coaching high school when his father approached him about a job. "Gene decided that he either wanted to start slowing down, hire some professional managers or possibly even consider selling the business," says Ben. "He then more or less convinced me to give him a year of my time, and see if I would consider taking over the business. A little over six years ago, I decided to give it a year's try; I stayed with it ever since."

Besides covering the areas of sales and production, both men work in the area of research and development as well. There they work with their father, Gene, who David explains "is really an inventor at heart. He (Gene) works in our research department quite actively, so he is still involved with the company, he is still acting president, though Ben and I run all the daily business affairs."

Though the tasks of research and development combined with their other daily affairs creates a heavy work load, David and Ben say they don't really mind, and they readily admit being workaholics. Their weekly hours extend anywhere from 50 to 60 hours.

Says David, "I work always six days a week, sometimes seven. We're both workaholics. If a person in our position wants to see the company grow, and wants to provide the ultimate service to the customer, then he has to be a workaholic. That's my opinion. I don't see any way around that. But the pressure is rewarding."

Ben adds, "A lot of the weekend type

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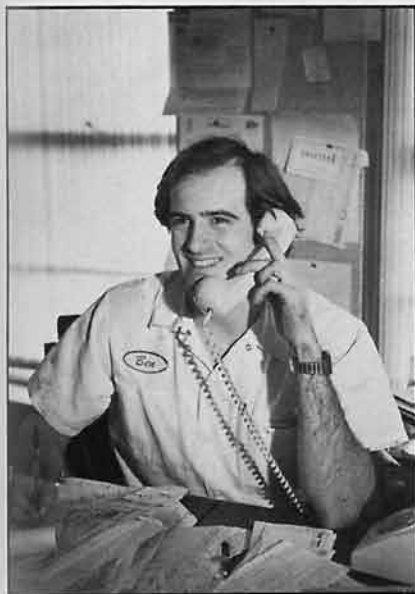
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of work we do is inventing work. We aren't disturbed; we have more time to do certain things without constantly being on the phone or whatever. And so, it's enjoyable work."

The question remains, however, do these type of long hours cut into their social calendar? "No," Ben assures, adding with a laugh, "But the board of directors have to approve a wife for either one of us. You know, so they can cut us down a few hours a week!"

'But the board of directors have to approve a wife for either one of us. You know, so they can cut us down a few hours a week!' —Ben

Though sibling rivalry tends to be a barrier in the way of some family operations, it does not seem to exist here. David readily comments, "I couldn't think of



anybody better to work with than Ben. You don't usually find someone who wants to work as hard as you do, in terms of working together and wanting our company to move forward. We work well as a team." He asks with a laugh, "Ben, don't you feel the same way?"

Ben explains his view of their relationship in more depth. "Through high school and even college, I used to work in pro-

duction and in different departments. And I guess, to a certain extent when I was younger, I gave a little more interest to the business than David.

"Gene never pushed either one of us into the business; he was a pretty good salesman to get us in, though, I will say that. But I had a pretty good background in the business before I came in full-time. And I think one of the reasons David and I can work so well together is because he wasn't programmed by a lot of Gene's

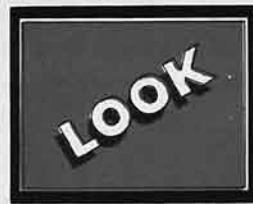
thinking in certain areas. We have a person who has a fresh approach to certain things; he doesn't have Gene's biases on certain matters. It really works, then, to our advantage that we can take Gene's good ideas and debate them; they blend together."

It is obvious that the men have learned a lot from their father and speak highly of Gene's successes. "One of the things the old-timers remember about Gene is that
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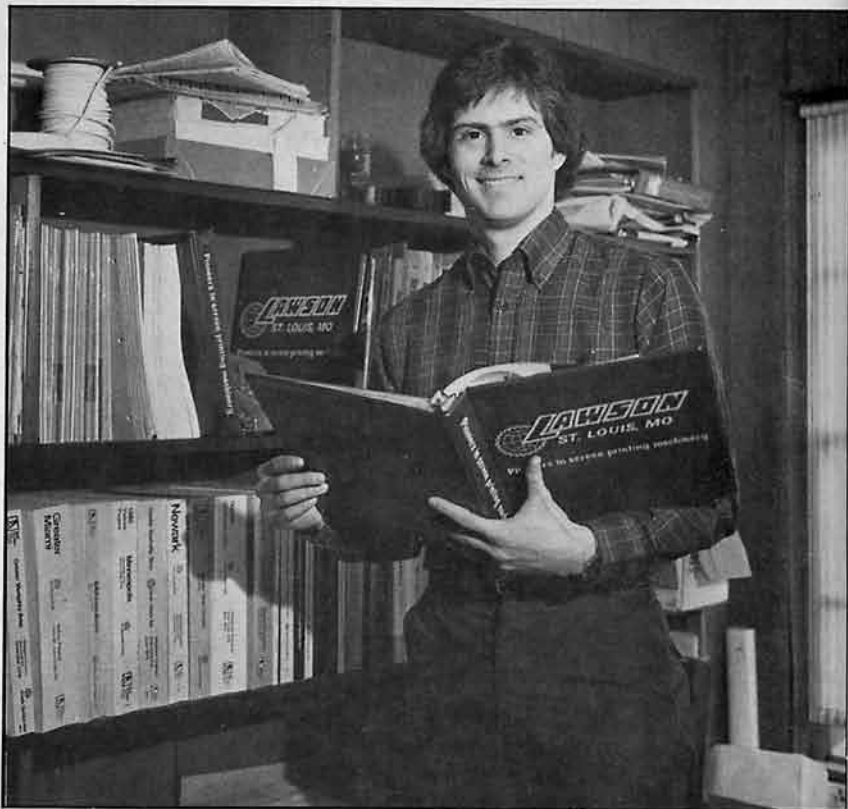
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Gene really was the first guy to come up with a power driven squeegee, which everyone has today," says David. "But in 1949, they really didn't have that. Gene was known at that time for developing it. Now people don't even think about it."

It may sound odd to hear David and Ben call their father "Gene," but David explains, "We call him Gene when we're at work. At home we call him Dad. When we're at work we don't want to go 'Hey, Dad, what about...'" he laughs. "After all, he doesn't run around, 'Son, Son, where's this?'"

Though Gene Landesman established the company in 1949, he did not name it after himself. David explains how the name, Lawson, originated. "Gene was quite known as an inventor. He had developed a reputation in St. Louis as an inventor." When he decided to go into the manufacturing business, the grandfather, who owned a reputable antique business, requested that a name be chosen which would not be associated with Landesman Antiques, "Just in case the business wasn't a success, he didn't want the name Landesman associated with it," says David. "So he suggested, 'Why don't you choose another name?'" Today, grandfather may rest assured that Lawson and

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the Landesmans, at least in our industry circle, are well respected.

But, where do two young successful men go from here? They have already earned positions in a company that many men only hope to achieve before they are 60 years old. So, where to? Into new ventures, of course.

Besides operating Lawson Printing and Drying Machine Company and Lawson Screen Printing Supply Company, the two also run Scotty Projection Company, and says David, "We have so many new ideas."

And, so their new ideas blend together creating new ventures under the Lawson name. Their ideas blend like their voices blend, voices which they say even their mother gets confused, and they sum it all up with, "My dad used to be in business with his two brothers."

"They manufactured crystal chandeliers..."

"They had a night club..."

"They had the machine company here, apartment building..."

"And they had an antique shop."

"So, we are used to having a lot of diversity going on at once. At dinner time, we have at least two or three discussions going on at the same time..."

"So, when you say, 'Where do you go from here...?'"

"Remember, we just keep our foot on the accelerator at all times!" ■

