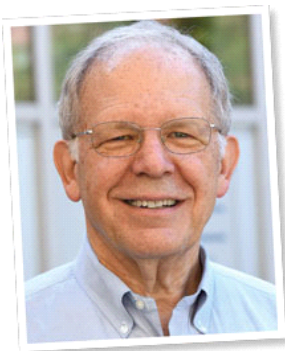


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How It All Began

Bill McCurry



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For many years I've made my point by telling illustrative stories from my beginnings in business. "You should have a blog!" is the usual response. My reply has been, "I have a monthly column in *Green Profit!*" However, I've realized you read my suggestions every month without knowing my background. I've been asked to share with you some earlier sources of my business strategies. Ideally, these experiences will help you approach difficult situations, shorten learning curves and, hopefully, avoid the mistakes I made along the way.

I got my first "job" when I was five. Back then, schools and churches rented 16mm movies shown at assemblies, carnivals, etc. They were used as fundraisers, entertainment and/or education. My family owned McCurry's Camera, a chain of stores carrying everything needed by photographers, both amateur and professional. They also rented out those films. McCurry's mailed a monthly flyer, filled with miniature movie posters, alerting renters to availability.

My older sister and I were "hired" to put the 3-cent stamps on the pre-addressed flyers. I got a nickel for every 100 flyers I stamped. My dad immediately spotted which were mine and which my sister had done. Her stamps were straight and looked professional. Mine were slap-dashed onto the flyer, as if by an inebriated sailor. My dad taught me how to soak the stamps off without damaging the paper and then reapply them with glue. Why? You wouldn't trust a company to get the movies to you on time—and in good condition—if they can't get a stamp on straight. At five, I learned to do it right the first time or be required to redo it.

My maternal grandfather had been a Navy electrician during World War I. After the war, he distributed electrical appliances, while also taking care of commercial and residential wiring. In the 1920s, many people didn't understand home electricity. When the lights stopped working, they fetched an electrician. Back then, customers weren't accustomed to paying tradesmen who traveled to the job site in a truck with tools. Grandpa needed the customers to pay for his truck cost and travel time, so he charged the princely sum of \$2 a call.

Usually, a fuse had blown. A competent electrician could locate and replace the fuse in minutes, making it hard to collect the \$2 service fee for "a minute's worth of work." One of his electricians had no complaints about the cost. He told Grandpa his secret. First, he told the homeowner, "To save you the cost of two men, can you be my helper?" Everyone said "Yes." He then sent the owner into an area where the lights worked. From the fuse box he'd yell, "Tell me when the lights go off," while unscrewing fuses. The homeowner would see the lights go on/off in various rooms and yell out their status. After five or six minutes, the homeowner was in the blacked-out area as the lights came on. "I think we've solved the problem," the electrician would say, before attempting to explain how to not overload the

circuits and how to shut down the power if the line is overheated.

Grandpa said the electrician never got complaints because he took the time to involve the homeowner in the solution. I learned that lesson early.

A few decades later I worked with Jay Conrad Levinson, the author of the very popular “Guerrilla Marketing” books. Jay summarized what I’d intuitively learned: “Everything your customers see, feel or hear from your company are marketing messages that impact whether or not your customer will relate to you.”

Look back at your business history and see if you have stories like these. We can learn as much from early experiences as from those that come later and turn us into old pros. If you have stories to tell, please share them. I hope my experiences will give you “aha! moments.” **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.