



FROM THE DESK OF BOB WILSON

CEO to CEO Newsletter
May 2003
Some Thoughts on
17 Years of Bob Wilson & Associates

Dear Fellow CEO:

April 21st of last month was Patriot's Day. I only recognize the day each year as it is the day of the running of the Boston Marathon. While Patriot's Day is only widely celebrated in the Northeast (if it is widely celebrated anywhere), there is one person who, at the least, notices it in Indiana – me. Why? It was on Patriot's Day in 1986 that I signed my original contract with Arnold Daniels (the founder of Praendex) to buy a license to market Predictive Index.

On that day, 17 years ago, the path of the Marathon wound past the offices of Praendex in Wellesley Hills. Arnold and I shared breaks watching the race progress from a fire escape overlooking the path of the runners. At one point, we were watching both racers flying by (this was a downhill portion of the race and the wheelchair racers really did fly) and the slower paced runners working hard to add another mile to their ultimate goal of finishing.

Having the marathon occur on the same day as the contract signing made it even more special. I can still feel today the excitement felt 17 years ago, much as one can recall the smell of a special time, place or person. It was a thrill. Dana (my wife of 23 years) and I had determined (maybe she wasn't totally convinced, but, she didn't say no) that we had enough money put away to jump into the world of entrepreneurship.

The business would be a success. I knew it. I really didn't know how or what it would turn into, but I was convinced I could make a living working with Predictive Index. The tape was cut and the race was begun. I had no idea where it would take me but I knew every step would be an adventure to look forward to.

Little did I know then, that the marathon I had watched intermittently on the first day of the businesses existence would serve as a fitting metaphor for what running the business would become. Today, at the age of 51, it's as though I've run 17 miles and I know I've got at least another 9 to run. But will that be the end? I can't imagine wanting to quit today, but, at 60, at least theoretically, I can imagine deciding whether or not I've got another mini in me or if it's time to declare the race over and look for another race to run, at a slower, more fitting pace. But for now, the race is being run and the finish line is nowhere in sight. But, it's both a measure and a weird kind of fun to count the miles / years as they go by and look forward to the next ones.

Is 17 years a long time? For me it is. Until having my own business, I'd never worked at a job for more than nine. For you, our clients, it may not be. Many of you manage 2nd or 3rd generation family businesses. I know there are several businesses among you that have been around for more than 50 years and I would not be surprised to find a few beyond the century mark. But, for me, 17 years is a long time.

Should an anniversary or birthday be special? That's a matter of opinion and those opinions seem to be very much profile based. Dana, my wife and a highest C, is one who is an anniversary believer. From her perspective, all birthdays and anniversaries should be celebrated with friends, dinners and whatever revelry can be mustered.

Dana will tell people we have had four children, one every two years. They'd look back kind of worried as they only see the three pictures of our boys on the wall – afraid of some past disaster that didn't happen. She'd continue the story saying we had Jacob 21 years ago, Brandon 19, the business 17 and Reid will be 15 in September. It does make some sense to describe it this way, given the course of our lives.

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We do celebrate the birthdays of each of the boys in what seem to inevitably develop into weeklong extravaganzas. That has become a part of our shared tradition – a history and memory to preserve and extend. Something that they would each dearly miss were it not there – because it's important to them. I couldn't imagine it any other way.

And Dana expects the same. I learned my biggest lesson 8 years ago. The boys and I sat down for dinner on a weeknight and at the time grace was usually said, Dana began by saying, "It was 14 years ago today, minus two hours and twelve minutes, that your father and I..." You can figure out the rest. Oh boy, was I in trouble. With Dana, birthdays and anniversaries are only to be forgotten at one's peril. They are to be celebrated.

This year, at Dana's birthday, I made up for the past anniversary faux pas. I secretly gathered together almost all of her female friends from various stages of her life for a surprise birthday party luncheon. Several of these women had been her friends for more than 25 years, some for just a few. Dana and I walked in to the restaurant to find this large gathering at our table with only one seat left and it wasn't for me. She tells anyone who will listen that this birthday rivals the day we got married and the days she delivered our three boys as the happiest days of her life.

As you can see from Dana's perspective, an anniversary or birthday should be special.

But to me? A birthday at 51 years? The business at 17? I don't think so. Highest A's are generally uncomfortable with personal event celebrations. I prefer birthdays and the like around me to be quiet and almost unobserved. That doesn't mean I don't continue to count them though.

Maybe an anniversary should be special at 50 years. The 50th anniversary of Praendex is coming in 2005. That will mark a half century that Predictive Index will have been available in the marketplace.

That will be a special time. Likely, Praendex will plan an event or series of events to mark the occasion and the time will definitely be worthy of celebration. Histories and stories of Arnold and the business will be recounted over dinners and cocktails. P. R. activities of all kinds will be generated. Praendex, Licensees, clients and P. I. analysts will all share in the festivities. All will toast to the success of 50 years in the business.

But, on whatever Monday the festivities end, everyone will go back to work and look to track another mile, another year, another success. 50 years will be worth celebrating, but the race will continue.

Bob Wilson & Associates, the business, doesn't care that we don't mark the date with a party, a toast or a special celebration. I think both it and I are content to watch the miles go past with each new year bringing the excitement of never quite knowing where the next year will take us.

Thanks for sharing a part of those 17 years. And, thanks for reading too.



Bob Wilson, President
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