

BUSINESS

Eisenhower High graduate helps businesses with crisis management

Editor's note: The following edited feature on former-Hopkins resident, David Lanners, was written by a freelance writer from Texas.

By Marjie Mugno Acheson

During his teens, David Lanners was offered a job — \$1 for each bicycle he assembled at Earl's Cycle Shop in Hopkins. Within two days, he had set up a production line and was assembling six bikes an hour.

When he was a junior at Eisenhower High School in Hopkins, a substitute teacher was having difficulty explaining some complex concepts, and Lanners volunteered to help. Stepping to the chalkboard, he fielded questions from classmates for 30 minutes.

And when he was a senior, Lanners enrolled in a basic swimming course. Before the year's end, he was certified to teach advanced courses for the Red Cross.

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These youthful happenings in Hopkins were early evidence of the ingenuity, drive, creative leadership and public-speaking prowess that have contributed to Lanners' success. Now living in Dallas, Texas, Lanners, 41, is president of LCS International Inc., and a crisis-management consultant with clients throughout the country and Canada.

Lanners, who earned his master's in business administration from Harvard, has

been making a name for himself because of his ability to analyze a company's strengths and weaknesses. Of equal importance, associates say, is his ability to adroitly present his multifaceted findings so they will be of maximum use to corporate executives and investors.

Saying that much of his career has been spent "cleaning up other people's messes," Lanners prefers thinking of himself as a crisis-prevention manager. Most companies, he said, call him while operation problems can still be corrected and the company saved.

"It makes me very sad that so many companies today 'solve' their problems by simply going through bankruptcy. That is not a solution. That is a cop out. And it's disgraceful," Lanners said.

Sometimes the challenges Lanners addresses are the result of rapid growth of a company or product line. When he worked for IBM (first in Rochester, Minn., and then in Boca Raton, Fla.), Lanners created and managed the installation of a dock-to-line inventory-control system that improved inventory turns more than 300 percent.

When he was with Holmberg Electronics in South Carolina, Lanners implemented and managed a system that reduced the overall manufacturing cycle time 94 percent. He also orchestrated an improvement in product quality that increased sales by 20 percent.

Managing a major new

business-systems selection and implementation program for an aerospace manufacturer — under budget and ahead of schedule — was among Lanners' accomplishments while working for Coopers & Lybrand in Dallas before becoming president of LCS.

Last summer, Lanners directed a comprehensive turnaround of an aluminum die-casting manufacturer in Canada. The company had 325 employees, \$35 million in sales, and numerous problems.

"The dramatic quality improvement brought back the company's largest automotive customer. It restored business, rejuvenated the company, and hundreds of jobs were saved," Lanners said.

Only three days after beginning the project, the holding company selected Lanners to serve as interim president as well as general manager.

Lanners said that team-building is an important part of his managerial style.

"I accomplish my goals without destroying good people. I have an innate sense of how much my subordinates can handle, how much I can delegate, and how to get people to work together. This goes back to when I was a surrogate father to my eight brothers and sisters. My siblings showed me just how hard they could be pushed before they'd rebel," Lanners said.



Eisenhower graduate David Lanners and his spouse, Donna, help organizations avoid unpleasant surprises. (Photo by Ron Roach)

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"I was only 13 when my father left me in charge after the local newspaper closed and he had to leave us behind on our 160-acre farm while he went to work for the Minneapolis Star & Tribune — 140 miles away. It was six months before my father was able to bring us to the Minneapolis suburb of Hopkins," he said.

Lanners said that the patterns he developed helping his younger brothers and sisters develop are still part of his management style. "It is not a paternalistic style. I treat subordinates more like siblings than sons or daughters. I treat subordinates with respect and give them creative leeway," he said.

Lanners said he was shy as a youth and in the bottom third of his high school graduating class.

"My grades declined steadily after we moved to Hopkins, not only because I was working part time while going to school, but because I lost the incentive to get good grades. With nine children, my folks couldn't afford to send me to college. In fact, they told me to learn a trade or enter the service," Lanners said.

After graduating from Eisenhower, Lanners spent the summer teaching handicapped children to swim at Camp Courage and then worked as a busboy at the Hopkins House. Early the next year, he enlisted in the Air Force.

Though offered a vice-presidential appointment to the

Air Force Academy in Colorado, Lanners declined the opportunity soon after he met his future wife, Donna Marie (Oczak), while home on leave. She is from St. Paul and was a manager at the Hopkins House restaurant when they met. They married in 1970, and spent three of Lanners' six years in the service stationed in Thailand and Japan.

After his discharge, Lanners went to work for Rosemount Inc. in Eden Prairie. He later joined the Alexander Proudfoot Co., responsible for implementing productivity-improvement programs. Two years later, he became an inventory analyst for the John Deere Co.

While working for John Deere, Lanners took courses at Normandale Community College and then received a bachelor's degree in business from the University of Minnesota.

On Lanners' entrance application to Harvard, one of his university finance professors, J. Peter Paulson, wrote, "David's intellectual capacity is immense. He seems very willing to explore new frontiers of knowledge and to investigate potentially creative, yet untried solutions to problems. He easily comprehends and manipulates diverse and complex quantitative and qualitative concepts and facts. He definitely is capable of a higher purpose in life."

How prophetic.