

Orthopedics

This Week

THE PICTURE OF SUCCESS

Marc Viscogliosi

By Elizabeth Hofheinz, M.P.H., M.Ed

When he had a heart attack at the age of 17, Marc Viscogliosi, now a Principal at Viscogliosi Brothers, LLC, and the founder of over 20 companies, deeply questioned the meaning—and the duration—of his life. Viscogliosi, who has just been named a winner of the '40 UNDER 40 M&A Advisor Recognition Awards,' had a youth centered around family and community. As he entered the world of work, Viscogliosi set out to bring these values into the business world. It was also during his youth that Marc Viscogliosi learned to take what many perceive as a deficiency—hearing loss—and turn it into an asset.

Marc Viscogliosi's sense of how human bonds can sustain and enrich grew out of his original community—his family. "My dad came to the U.S. from Italy in 1956, and although my mom was born here, her family arrived from Italy the year before her birth. My whole environment consisted of the strong family support network that my parents created for my two brothers, my sister, and me. When I was diagnosed with hear-

ing loss in both ears my family rallied around me to teach me how to speak and read."

As he moved forward on the career path, Viscogliosi held on to how the right family, partner, and/or community can provide a foundation for success. "Being surrounded by people I trust gives me the strength to deal with daily challenges. Knowing that you're not facing your struggles alone lays a foundation for you to consider problems more thoroughly. Having such people in your life also means that you can rest assured that there will be no politicking or hidden agendas. At Viscogliosi Brothers (VB), which I run with Tony and John, all of our interests are aligned, and we are much stronger as a unit than as individuals."

When it comes to winning, Marc Viscogliosi knows that it involves hard work...and that one's success shouldn't be at the expense of others. "I watched my parents work 20 hour days. They taught us, 'As long as there is righteousness in your approach you will be re-

“I watched my parents work 20 hour days. They taught us, 'As long as there is righteousness in your approach you will be rewarded.' This means that taking shortcuts is unacceptable.”



Marc Viscogliosi

warded.' This means that taking shortcuts is unacceptable. My bottom line: I never get involved in any project that could put a patient at risk."

With ethics as his guide, Marc Viscogliosi and his brothers have built a number of impressive businesses and introduced numerous highly successful products. "While we are most well-known for Spine Solutions and Pro-Disc, which is the market leading total disc replacement worldwide, we also founded Ascent Medical (which Stryker recently acquired). John, Tony, and I were also deeply involved with Spine Next, which Abbott acquired."

“Over the last 10 years, the funds that VB has managed have returned to its investor-partners 4.5x net cash-on-cash and a net annual IRR of 85%. We are also proud that we have been directly responsible for commercializing 100 different and new products which have been implanted in more than 250,000 patients worldwide.”

“Working with a stellar group of like-minded investment partners, VB has invested more than \$70 million of its capital in several orthopedic device companies. Six exits have generated more than \$1 billion in exit proceeds to VB and its investor-partners. Over the last 10 years, the funds that VB has managed have returned to its investor-partners 4.5x net cash-on-cash and a net annual IRR of 85%. We are also proud that we have been directly responsible for commercializing 100 different and new products which have been implanted in more than 250,000 patients worldwide.”

Marc Viscogliosi the seasoned business icon muses about a time when little about his life was certain. “In my 17th year of life things seemed to come to a sudden halt. Having a heart attack at that early age was surreal...you’re not supposed to think about dying when you are so young. I went from having a long-term perspective to having everything turned upside down in one day. In the same period I was diagnosed with Graves’ disease, an aggressive form of hyperthyroidism that was linked to my heart attack.”

A former political science major, Viscogliosi was at that time on track to

make his mark in the diplomatic world. “I was accepted into a summer internship program at Georgetown University with Henry Kissinger. Then, my brother Tony asked me if I would like to work with him in New York for the summer. Given my health issues, my life was pretty tumultuous at the time...and I felt the need to be around family. Knowing that I would have much to learn from Tony, in 1992 I accepted his offer and put any thoughts of a political science career behind me.”

Three years later Marc Viscogliosi would have a chance to give something back to his brother. “In 1995 Tony was diagnosed with Cutaneous T-Cell Lymphoma. I was enrolled at the University of Michigan, but decided to transfer to New York University. I couldn’t let Tony be without family in New York.”

Marc Viscogliosi’s sense of compassion and ethics was born of a history of trials...and gifts. “The most valuable lesson that I have ever learned is something that my parents taught me...that my hearing loss is a wonderful advantage. So, I have always thought that whatever you have in life is a gift. When I remove my hearing aids I have an enormous ability to focus—there is

no distraction of hearing what is going on in my environment.”

And while Viscogliosi makes no claims of clairvoyance, he does have a certain gift. “My hearing loss means that I can pick up on the nuances of human interaction such as body language and other types of ‘subconscious communication.’ The way someone shifts in his seat, or how the person’s focus shifts if they change how they hold their heads, for example. If you know someone well, and are attuned to these behavioral nuances, then you can see when something outside of work is bothering them. And most importantly, you can talk to them and try to help.”

“Also, if you’re discussing a contract, for example, you can notice when the inflection of someone’s voice changes, as well as the strength of their word choice. To this latter point, as most people communicate their issues, they will choose the strongest language for those issues about which they feel most intensely. But there are people who do the opposite—as they take a firm position, they pull back and become less passionate (disconnected) and their word choice isn’t as strong. You must know whether you’re dealing with an emotional person who will correlate that with what they say.”

“The most valuable lesson that I have ever learned is something that my parents taught me...that my hearing loss is a wonderful advantage. So, I have always thought that whatever you have in life is a gift. When I remove my hearing aids I have an enormous ability to focus—there is no distraction of hearing what is going on in my environment.”

“I don’t believe the axiom, ‘It’s not personal, it’s business.’ People use that to justify unethical and/or callous behavior. There are things that a business must do to be successful and grow, but these can be done in an ethical manner. Egos always arise in business, and individualism is important. But we must be the bosses of our egos.”

For Marc Viscogliosi, success means not leaving your values at the boardroom door. “I don’t believe the axiom, ‘It’s not personal, it’s business.’ People use that to justify unethical and/or callous behavior. There are things that a business must do to be successful and grow, but these can be done in an ethical manner. Egos always arise in business, and individualism is important. But we must be the bosses of our egos.”

Surely the master of his own ego, Viscogliosi says, “I fail every day. If something goes wrong and we must cut back on staff then I take that personally and thoroughly evaluate what I did wrong. I think constant self evaluation is a critical ingredient of success. The key is to then apply that new knowledge in your future interactions.”

Viscogliosi also succeeds every day... all around the world. “There is no better feeling than knowing that our work and products benefit millions of patients around the globe, and that I have fostered entrepreneurship and surgeon innovation. This is what I will leave behind.”

A deep, broad, and flexible thinker, Viscogliosi says he still has much more

to learn. “I know finance and accounting, but business success is predicated upon choosing talented and like minded people to work with. The more in touch I am with human nature the better business decisions I will make. Yes, the numbers have to work and the market has to exist, but the most important element—and where businesses stumble—is in the people realm.”

When Marc Viscogliosi began this journey with his brothers, it was as someone who had seen not only stumbling, but people who regularly tripped others. “For years I worked at investment banking and Wall Street research firms, but in 1999 my brothers and I decided that we were tired of the Wall Street ‘churn and burn’ dynamic. We set out to establish a business in the legacy of the old European merchant banks where you build a business on trust and foster the creation of an industry. I am very proud that the surgeons we work with today are many of the same people we worked with 10 years ago. Another testament to what we have built is that many people who have worked here in the past and left, have come ‘home.’”

“When we started Viscogliosi Brothers I was 24 years old. I thought, ‘What do

I need to build a firm that will be here for my children and grandchildren?’ One of the best things I’ve ever learned is that a leader should hire talented people, give them clear directions, and liberate them. You get much further than if you take a controlling approach. I say to people, ‘What barriers can I remove for you so that you can do your job?’”

For nearly 15 years, Marc Viscogliosi has had someone who understands what his life’s work means to him. “My wife knows that because I care passionately about my job, there really is no division between my home and work life. She is originally from Colombia, and it is helpful that we have similar values—a shared work ethic, for example—that come from being raised in immigrant families. We now have two little ones, ages four and two. We hope to grow our family to four or six children and thus have the same large, warm family experience that we had.”

Marc Viscogliosi...finding and creating meaning for himself and his community every day. ♦

Orthopedics This Week is published 40 times a year by RRY Publications LLC, a subsidiary of Robin Young Consulting Group.

116 Ivywood Lane, Wayne, PA 19087 877-817-6450 www.ryortho.com

Reprinted with permission of RRY Publications LLC

© Copyright 2010 RRY Publications LLC