

TALKING SHOP



Mark Chandler
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Q HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN THE BUSINESS?

I never had any intention of going into the furniture business. When I was 18 I worked in nightclubs and bars until the lack of sleep five days a week finally got to me! At that point, the family was expanding its residential portfolio and I spent some time painting and decorating. When that ended, I started helping out in the shop in the run up to Christmas, and here I am nine years later.

Q IN YOUR TIME, WHAT HAS BEEN THE SINGLE MOST DEFINING EPISODE FOR THE COMPANY?

Probably the current recession, after 15 years of solid growth, hitting an economic downturn has been a real eye opener. Just like every other business, we have had to take a look at all aspects of the business, evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and use that information to make decisions going forward. Although the recession has made business more challenging, we have identified a lot of strengths in our business model; these strengths put us in a good position to keep moving forward despite uncertainty elsewhere in the retail industry.

Q WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY?

To always evolve and improve. We aim to do everything as well as we can. From customer service to the efficiency of deliveries, we are always asking the question – "Can we do it better?"

Q WHAT DRIVES YOU?

I really enjoy creating the structure and environment to run a furniture store. I get a great deal of motivation from talking to our customers, and hearing their positive comments. It's a huge challenge to keep evolving the business without alienating your existing customers.

Q WHAT IS THE BIGGEST LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED?

Making mistakes is okay, providing that you learn from them, and keep trying.

Q WHAT IS THE KEY TO SURVIVAL IN THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES?

Know your business, know your marketplace and have the best possible team you can. You don't need to follow the pack. If you are confident in your team and maintain your overheads then you are more likely to survive and thrive.... oh, and never stop caring.

Q WHAT DO CUSTOMERS WANT? AND HOW HAVE CUSTOMERS' NEEDS DEVELOPED IN YOUR TIME?

They want to enjoy their shopping experience for furniture, from the time they enter the store to the time they receive their furniture. They expect to be walked through the buying process, be listened to and be given genuine, expert advice. Customers have always expected good customer service, but now they want outstanding customer service.

Q WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR RETAIL?

The retail market is big...big enough for everyone to have their share. I don't think that bricks and mortar stores have to fear the online retailer. Find good manufactures to work with and build strong partnerships with them. We must accept now that there will always be someone prepared to sell for less, what we must identify with is why we can sell for more. Can we add value to a customer's shopping experience? I believe that retailers that can add value, be it online or in store will be the future.

I hope that large bricks and mortar stores do have a place in the future as we have just finished expanding and revamping the showroom, one thing is for sure, the retail world is changing, move with it.

Q WHAT KEEPS YOU AWAKE AT NIGHT?

All of the above!

Feeling is believing

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