

INTERVIEW – FRANK STRYGANEK

Frank served as Executive Assistant to Gil Folleher in the Western Regional office and national headquarters as well as Marty Lee, Executive Vice President. He was instrumental in supporting the development of new programs, conferences and many reorganizations. He was the glue that made the pieces work and shares stories about his experiences

INTERVIEWER: TERRI HUFF

NARRATOR: FRANK STRYGANEK
JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT
INTERNATIONAL

MS. HUFF: Well, for the purposes of this taping session, please tell us what your name is?

MR. STRYGANEK: I'm Frank Stryganek.

MS. HUFF: How and when did you become first involved with Junior Achievement?

MR. STRYGANEK: My Junior Achievement career began in Seattle, Washington, in November of 1976. I responded to an ad in one of the Seattle papers advertising for a clerical position. It wasn't until the interview that I was told the position was with Junior Achievement, Inc.

MS. HUFF: So, this was in Seattle?

MR. STRYGANEK: This was in Seattle.

MS. HUFF: Had you ever heard of Junior Achievement prior to this?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes. I was in high school, and one of my friends was involved in the JA (Junior Achievement, Inc., the national organization) company program. This was in the mid-'60s, and we attended a trade fair in Chicago. I was able to see the products manufactured by the various student-operated companies.

MS. HUFF: Wow! That's interesting. Well, tell us what your impression was of the trade fair setup?

MR. STRYGANEK: The fair was held at the International Amphitheater in Chicago. At that time, JA was only offering the after-school nighttime program for the students. All the teenagers were marketing their products to the attendees in hopes of selling their inventory. I remember buying a psychedelic paper flower.

MS. HUFF: Good for you! That's wonderful. So, you started then with which office?

MR. STRYGANEK: In the Western Regional Office of Junior Achievement, Inc. At the time I started, there were five regions and the western region was in Seattle.

MS. HUFF: Who did you work for?

MR. STRYGANEK: Gil Folleher, Regional Vice President of the Western Region, hired me.

MS. HUFF: Great. So, tell us a little bit about what it was like working in the Seattle office back then, when you just had the one Junior Achievement program?

MR. STRYGANEK: There were four of us in the office. There was Gil, who was the Regional Vice President, an Assistant Vice President, Executive Secretary, and myself. I was hired as the Administrative Secretary.

When I started, we had the nighttime program and Project Business, which is now one of the middle grade programs. One of my responsibilities was to compile the weekly student attendance report for the after school program. The region was composed of 18 major full-time cities and about 15 intermediates. Each Wednesday, I called the 33 cities to get their student attendance numbers, compiled the report, and distributed copies to western region office and the national headquarters.

MS. HUFF: So that had to be done every week?

MR. STRYGANEK: Every week. Yes.

MS. HUFF: So about how many were attending the company program at that time? Did you have a center? Before I ask you that, did you have a center right there in Seattle?

MR. STRYGANEK: There were several centers in Seattle. I didn't work at the local JA office, but there were about seven centers around the Seattle area where the students met at night.

MS. HUFF: About seven centers that you were taking weekly attendance for?

MR. STRYGANEK: I didn't call each center. My major source for obtaining the attendance numbers was through the Portland, Seattle, and the Salt Lake offices. It was the local area office's responsibility to take attendance, and they would give the numbers to me.

MS. HUFF: I see. It was critical to take that attendance for what reason?

MR. STRYGANEK: Good question. Just as today, JA Inc. was keeping records of how many students (participating in the nighttime program) were being reached across the country. A quarterly report would then be

published, highlighting how many students were being reached in all the operating cities, as well as how each region was performing.

MS. HUFF: Did you ever get to visit one of the centers?

MR. STRYGANEK: Not when the students were there. I would go to the local Seattle office on some business which was housed in one of the centers. No. I have never seen a JA company in progress that I can recall, because I didn't really deal with the students until much later with JA.

MS. HUFF: So, you worked in the regional office, not the local office?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes.

MS. HUFF: What were the main responsibilities at the regional office then?

MR. STRYGANEK: To help with – pretty much what the area relations team does now. They help with fundraising, hiring chief staff officers, with personnel matters. In addition, we assisted with coordinating regional staff conferences, and the annual student summer conference. Shortly after I started, there was a student conference held in Seattle, that consisted of all the cities in the northwest area (Seattle, Spokane, and Boise).

MS. HUFF: So, you had some regional meetings, though.

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes, there were annual staff and student conferences.

MS. HUFF: So, tell us about the staff conferences. What your recollection is.

MR. STRYGANEK: As the Administrative Secretary, I wasn't involved in staff conferences. My key role was to organize the conference materials together for Gil and/or Jim, his assistant at the time. I didn't attend my first staff conference until 1980.

MS. HUFF: Well, let's go through your illustrious career just as a list right now and then we will go back to each position and take a closer look at those kinds of things. Tell us, you obviously began in Seattle in 1976, and then where did you go from there?

MR. STRYGANEK: As previously stated, my career began in '76 as administrative secretary for the Western Regional office (Seattle). In September, the Western Regional office was moved to Denver, Colorado. Shortly after the move, Gil promoted me to the position of Office Manager. I had taken on more responsibility in the office.

When Gil first hired me, I was very quiet. I remember one time he told me, we were lucky we used to get a "good morning" and a "good night" out of you. I would come in, and go right to work. I didn't interact that much. I was very quiet and still am in a way. After the office relocated to Denver, I was more open and more, "We need to do this, we need to do that."

I held the position of Office Manager from '80 to '87 until the Western Region office was moved to Colorado Springs. In '87, I was promoted to Administrative Assistant.

In '92, I served as Manager of Operations providing support and assistance to the Regional Vice President, and the Directors of Operations. In '97, Junior Achievement Inc. went through reorganization, and I took on the position of Administrative Assistant. As part of the reorganization, the Western Regional Office was renamed the Resource Generation team. Part of the organization's realignment, I was promoted to Executive Assistant in the Resource Generation team department, working for the Senior Vice President. After holding that

position for three years, I was promoted to Executive Assistant reporting to Executive Vice President, Marty Lee.

MS. HUFF: Wow! That's a lot of wonderful changes. Very positive changes along the way. Moving up to the top, Frank. You certainly well deserve it. Well, tell us then, what was your impression of Junior Achievement during the time you first started in Denver? You made a big transition in your life, it sounds like. Your own personal life and how you approached things. There must have been some big changes in your perception of Junior Achievement as well.

MR. STRYGANEK: As demand for the in-school programs grew, JA expanded into middle and elementary school grades. We had project business, grades 7 & 8, and Business Basics grade 3. It wasn't until the office relocated to Colorado Springs that the organization expanded into all grades (K-12), and I got involved serving as a classroom consultant for second, third, and fourth grades over the last ten years.

MS. HUFF: Great! What was your experience in the classroom?

MR. STRYGANEK: My experience in the classroom? First, I was nervous because I wasn't used to small children. I thought, "There is one of me and 20 of them," but it worked really well. I started off in a second-grade class. I first observed one class, and then I agreed to be a classroom consultant.

I helped the local – excuse me – the local office here with volunteer training. After they got the consultants in, Vicki Marshall would call me up and say, can you come on over and help me with training and give the new consultants an idea what to expect in the classroom? I would help her and kind of calm their nerves a little bit and give them my experiences. What to expect in the classroom and things like that. It was good. I haven't taught a class this year, but I'm sure I will. I have done just about every year since – what – the last ten years, I think.

MS. HUFF: Wow! That's wonderful. Which grades have you gone into?

MR. STRYGANEK: I've done second, third, and fourth.

MS. HUFF: So that's your specialty?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes. I like working with the little kids, because they are excited about – when they first meet you, they are like, “Who is this person coming in the classroom?” But by the time you are finished in five weeks, they get to know you. It's like, “Why aren't you coming back anymore?” It makes you feel kind of sad.

They want to know who you are. They want to know what you do. I think they kind of like to look at the guys and see how you dress. I had a teacher tell me that she thought it was great watching her boys interact with me because a lot of them don't have a dad at home. Mom is doing both roles.

So, she liked to see the seven- or eight-year-olds interacting with an adult male and all that stuff. They kind of really check you out and ask all sorts of questions and stuff like that. It's really neat. I like doing it.

MS. HUFF: It is. Don't you think that that is one of the greatest contributions that Junior Achievement makes to students is to bring that role model into the classroom?

MR. STRYGANEK: I think it's great. I really do and we have talked about doing the – oh, my gosh. What was it now? Not the consultant online, but everything being on the computer and not having that face-to-face interaction and I thought, “No, it really is nice.”

For me I'm thinking, it gets me away from my desk for about an hour once a week and work with the kids and the teacher gets a break from the class for a while, but she is in the classroom. When I say “she,” I've

always worked with women teachers. I never had a male teacher. The kids kind of get a break, too, from their teacher and all that. So, it's great. It's really fun going there.

MS. HUFF: Good change of pace for everybody. Well, good. Before we leave that time frame, though, tell us some of your stories that you have to tell from way back when.

MR. STRYGANEK: Like I said, I was pretty quiet in the office. I think when Gil first hired me, he, and his assistant Jim Branscombe, who has been out of the organization many years, they traveled a lot. In fact, I don't think I met Gil until my second week after he interviewed me and I started that first week, it was just the Executive Secretary and myself and the woman that I replaced.

In the next week of employment, Gil came in and I think my third week of employment Jim came into the office. They were consistently traveling. These guys were always traveling and visiting the cities and visiting the programs at night and doing presentations to the area board of directors.

I think Gil probably was a little like, "We hired this guy, but we don't quite know how he is going to fit in here." The story was they hired me because I could lift the water bottle or put the water bottle in the cooler because I was the only male applicant. The joke that I was told was, "He hired you, Frank, so you could put the water bottle in the cooler."

MS. HUFF: What other stories then when you moved to Denver?

MR. STRYGANEK: Before I go onto Denver, there was one story. I don't know how long I had been with JA, but it was in Seattle. Our Executive Secretary must have been at lunch that day, so it was just the three guys in the office at that time.

Branscombe was kind of driving Gil crazy. Gil was trying to get some work done in his office and Gil's office was here. Jeanette and I would sit out in this area and then Branscombe's office was on the opposite side of us, and Branscombe kept going across the hall, across my desk, and was wanting to talk to Gil. Gil kept saying, "I want you to stay out of my office. I'm trying to get some work done."

So, he would leave, and he'd come back over and over. I'm sitting at my desk doing my thing and all of sudden I hear some noise in Gil's office and I hear this, "Uh." I get up and walk in and here is Gil on all fours on the floor and he's rubbing his head and Branscombe is standing next to him and I said, "What happened?"

Branscombe says, "He wanted me to leave his office and he started chasing me around his desk" and Branscombe went underneath Gil's desk. Gil followed him under the desk, got up too soon and banged his head on the desk. I remember Gil saying to Branscombe, "If you don't get out of my office right now, I'm going to fire you."

I couldn't have been there very long because I was freaked out. Oh, my God. We are all going to get fired. I can't afford to lose a job just yet. I went back to my desk and was really quiet for the rest of the day.

Also, Gil had a boat and a couple of times when it was quiet in the office, we would close the office down a little early in the afternoons and we would pack a lunch or something and he would take us out on his boat in the afternoon. It was great.

MS. HUFF: Fantastic!

MR. STRYGANEK: He thought we needed a break from the office.

MS. HUFF: How about the rain out there?

MR. STRYGANEK: Oh, my God. Rain. Jesus. It seemed like it rained about every day. With my first year with JA, I didn't have a car, so I was taking the bus to and from work. So, it seemed like I went through four umbrellas during that time. The wind was always wrecking my umbrellas.

MS. HUFF: Did you grow up in Seattle?

MR. STRYGANEK: No. I'm from Chicago originally. I got up to Seattle because of the military. I was in the Navy at the time. I was stationed down in San Diego and was transferred to Washington State with my ship. Then when I got out of the Navy, I was going to school and as I was finishing business school, I applied for the job at JA. So, I spent about five years in Seattle.

MS. HUFF: That's great! Went up in the Seattle Space Needle?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yeah. I was up there a couple of times. I had a second job over at the Seattle Center. It's funny because I got a part-time job working at the Seattle Center and a week later, I got the job at Junior Achievement. I kept both jobs when I lived in Seattle.

MS. HUFF: What was the Seattle Center?

MR. STRYGANEK: I worked in the concessions over at the – my gosh, I can't even think what the name is. Not the Seattle auditorium, not the Seattle Dome or the King Dome. I can't think. The Seattle Coliseum was over there, so I used to work rock concerts. Wrestling matches on Christmas day. That was part-time in the evenings or on the weekends and I was working full time for JA.

MS. HUFF: Fantastic! So, then you went to Denver?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes.

MS. HUFF: And you must have some stories about Denver. How long were you in Denver? It was a regional office?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes. We were still a regional office. Junior Achievement went through a reorg where we went from five regions to three, and they moved the Western Regional office from Seattle to Denver, expanded our territory 100 percent and thought that if we were in Denver we were central to everything around our region at that time.

I was in Seattle from September of '79 until May of '87. When I first moved to Denver, I didn't know anybody except Frank LaRoche and Gil Folleher. Who else? Just the three of us guys. Then we hired a couple of secretaries and brought in a couple of other folks to run the Project Business program for the region.

Actually, we were first surprised about the tax structure here, because in Seattle we didn't have a city tax, and a state tax. When we moved to Denver, we had the city tax, the state tax and that was money coming out of our paychecks. We also had a head tax because we worked in the city of Denver. It was like, "Wow."

My friend Joe was telling me, "Save all those articles in the paper about the cost of living," because he asked what I was going to use for backup when it came time for salary increases for me, because although I did get one before we moved to Denver, it quickly got eaten away by taxes. Cost of living is a little bit higher in Denver. Well, for me it was.

We survived. We did okay. Gil would have us over to his house every Christmas. We would start at his house, but then we usually went over to a really nice restaurant for our Christmas party. It was just basically the four or five of us that worked in the regional office and spouses and that was it. It was great.

MS. HUFF: Great! So, Project Business was just getting off the ground.

MR. STRYGANEK: When I started, yeah. It was a pilot in '76. Yeah.

MS. HUFF: How was that received in Seattle while you were there?

MR. STRYGANEK: Let's see. When I started it was a pilot in Salt Lake City. How was it in Seattle? Jim Hemak was the President in Seattle when I started, and he expanded the program quite a bit. Gil was President for the Seattle program before he took on the regional job, from what I'm told.

Jim ran it for several years. He expanded the program and they had great operations, as far as I know. At the time I wasn't involved in any of the programs and I was kind of in my own little world with the national staff.

MS. HUFF: Sure. So, you worked for Gil for quite a few years then?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes. From '76 until – we went to National about 1981, I think.

MS. HUFF: Tell us about Gil then. He had quite an illustrious career with Junior Achievement. How was he to work for and what were his strengths?

MR. STRYGANEK: He is a wonderful individual. My working hours back until I moved down here in '87, I would start at 8:30 in the morning until 4:30 in the afternoon with an hour lunch. So, basically, I was working seven hours a day and still getting paid for eight hours.

If Gil wasn't on the road, he would be in the office early. Sometimes he would be in like at five o'clock in the morning. I used to get in at eight o'clock in the morning or a little bit after eight o'clock and he would have the coffee made. Sometimes he would run over to Albertsons and pick up breakfast.

Of course, back when I first started, I was thinner than what I am now. Of course, he would say – Gil was always fighting his weight. Of course, he hires this skinny guy, and he would be in his office at his desk working and I would come in. “Good morning.”

“Good morning, and how are you doing?”

“I’m fine.” Chit chat about this and that.

“Oh, I stopped at Albertsons. Make sure you eat all those donuts before you leave today.”

So of course, at the end of the day I would say goodnight. He would say, “How many did you have?”

I said, “I had four or five.”

“Oh, you’re disgusting. Always trying to fatten me up.”

Now, I’m kind of fighting it a little bit. It’s kind of caught up to me. I was like the skinny, 160-pound guy.

But no, he was great to work with. He was always looking after you to make sure that you were taking care. Like I said, after we moved to Denver, we would talk about, “Are you getting by?” The cost of living was a little more expensive. The lines at the gas stations were backing up. The price of gas was going up and, of course, we were being taxed for this, that, and the other, so there were concerns about that. So, we did okay.

When I worked my first staff conference, which was at Keystone, Colorado in 1980, I got word that I got a very nice raise at the time. I guess I can say it now. I got a 20 percent raise. Well, now you have to go back a bit and say this is 1980 and you have to think at that time I

went from \$10,000 a year to \$12,000 a year. I got a 20 percent raise. “Whoa, this is cool.” So, it helped for a while. Yeah.

MS. HUFF: Wonderful. Well, those were the days. So, what were Gil’s strengths, because he has obviously gotten a lot of awards? So, you went through a lot of that process with him.

MR. STRYGANEK: He’s a people person. He likes to be around people. Like I said earlier, he just wants to make sure you’re okay. I think he thinks more of others than he thinks of himself. We still talk on the phone when he is looking for something or whatever. He says – I shouldn’t say it – “I know I can call you and you are going to find it for me or get it to me.” I guess it’s because he was my first executive.

MS. HUFF: So, you have now moved with the regional office to Colorado Springs? Did you all get assimilated into the national headquarters?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes. By that time we were called the Western Operations Office. When it was determined that Junior Achievement, Inc., needed a bigger facility and made the move to Colorado Springs, we were informed that they were going to move us here from Denver and not pay for a rental office 70 miles up the road.

I was asked if I could move here or I could pursue other interests if I wanted to. So, I decided to hang in there and make the move down here and I did.

MS. HUFF: Were you ever in Connecticut, in the national office there?

MR. STRYGANEK: No. Never went back east. Never saw the office. In fact, it wasn’t until the staff conference in 1980 that I actually met some of the headquarters staff executives.

Like Joe Francomano came out to Seattle one time and Marty Lee still worked for national, too. I think he was the National Project Business Director or something like that and came up to Seattle one time. But other executives, I didn't meet until they came out for the staff conference in Keystone in '80.

MS. HUFF: So, was the building complete when you came here first?

MR. STRYGANEK: This building?

MS HUFF: Yes. This building.

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes. We were supposed to move in May 1st and Jack Holladay, National V.P. Western Operations, who I worked for at the time, called and said, "Don't bother coming in. We don't have the occupancy permits." So, I was getting settled into an apartment down here. There were still some things that were going on here in the building but the furniture was in place. The files and all that and everybody was trying to get all settled in.

MS. HUFF: Great. Great. Now, did you actually work for the national office at that point or did you still work for the regional?

MR. STRYGANEK: Well, although I worked in a regional office, we were considered national headquarters staff. So even though I was in Seattle, I was still considered part of the national staff. We were on the national staff payroll.

MS. HUFF: All right. So that's how that worked. Then how many people were blended together here in this one building in Colorado Springs at that time in May?

MR. STRYGANEK: From Denver?

MS. HUFF: Well, from Denver and Connecticut...

MR. STRYGANEK: Well, let's see. By that time, Jack Holladay had joined us a couple of months before. Gary Bush, Dave Swincher, and myself. So, it was us four guys. It was always the guys. But Bush and Swincher were kind of new to the Colorado area. Jack had just joined that January and we moved down here four months later.

Yeah. It was just us four and we hired a secretary – well, I guess at the time we called them a secretary – then I still at the time had the title of Office Manager, but shortly after getting here we had to change that because there was some conflict with that title. Trying to be sensitive to my feelings about – the funny part after I moved down here I was no longer an Office Manager. I said, “Well, I understand that.” I would be an Admin Assistant. “That’s fine. I’m not worried about that.”

Then one day Jack said to me, “Well, Frank, I need to let you know you also need to work eight full hours. So instead of 8:30 to 4:30, you can either start 8:30 to 5:30 or whatever.” Okay. So, I did 7:30 to 4:30. After 15 years, I had to change my work schedule. Maybe not 15 years, but several years. It was so funny. Oh, my golly. I actually have to put in a full eight hours and my lunch hour.

MS. HUFF: Obviously, Jack had been here for quite a while with the organization.

MR. STRYGANEK: Yes.

MS. HUFF: What was his capacity when you worked for him?

MR. STRYGANEK: He was the Vice President for Western Operations, I think. There were three of them at the time. Jack had replaced my previous boss Jim Hemak, who left the organization to go into his own franchising. I admit, the first time I met Jack was in 1980 at a staff conference in Keystone, and Jack was the Hook Award recipient that year.

I was working in the conference office at that time, so I was coming across scripts and things like that that I had helped prepare. I think I met him at the time, but I didn't know some years later I would work for him. I worked for him from '87 until '97. Yeah. Until we hit the reorg and I was moved down to the Resource Generation Team. So, I worked for him for several years.

MS. HUFF: Quite a few years. Well, how was he to work for and tell us what his strengths were and what his –

MR. STRYGANEK: Jack also has some traits like Gil. He is a people person – he wants to make sure that the people that report to him are taken care of. He's great. He always likes to do things at his house also. Like Gil. When his mom would come up from Texas, he would always invite us over for gumbo at Christmas time. If he had some people here for training, he would host a dinner at his house and invite the staff to come on over and stuff like that. It was always kind of laid back. "Grab a bowl, get your gumbo," and stuff like that.

I have been to his daughter's high school graduation party and college and a wedding and all that stuff. I have known Jack and Louise Holladay for more than 15 years.

MS. HUFF: So, he is now head of the Area Relations Team. Senior Vice President. Do you still report to him?

MR. STRYGANEK: No, I don't. No. I report to Marty Lee and I'm also a part of the Executive Office team.

MS. HUFF: Right. Right. Before we leave that and go downstairs where you worked for which team?

MR. STRYGANEK: Resource Generation, teaching about alliances and volunteers.

MS. HUFF: Before we go to that area, tell us if you have any other stories that you want to preserve. Funny stories. Happy stories.

MR. STRYGANEK: Around here? Oh, I know the one I'm always reminded of around here was the day I quit Junior Achievement. We were getting ready for a staff conference in San Antonio and offhand I can't remember what year it was. Let's see, if we moved here in '87, it might have been around '90, '91.

Anyway, we were putting all the delegate binders together and, of course, we always had to keep everything as up to date as we could. Well, I was working on the roster of delegates and I get a call from the President in San Antonio saying, "Frank, add this person onto the list. Do it. Print it. Frank, add this person to the list. Put the person's name on there. Print it out. Frank, put this..." It was like, "Oh, man."

This kept going on three or four times. I kept changing this list. "I can't. I've got to get this thing done."

So, when he called again and said, "Add this person," I said -- I put it down and I just said, "That's it. I quit." I picked myself up, I walked out of the building and I guess Dave Swincher walked out of his office and said to Karen who was the secretary, "Where's Frank?" She said, "Well, he said something about he quit."

I was so mad I walked out. Didn't grab my jacket. Walked out of the building, walked up the driveway here and I guess they were watching me, from what I was told later on. I thought, "What the hell did I just do?" I came back, I walked in and went right back to my desk, and I remember Dave saying to me, "Bud, what's wrong?"

I went, "What's wrong? Let me tell you what's wrong!" So, they had to hear my bitching and moaning about changing this list and all that.

So, yeah. That was the one where I decided to quit JA and walked out of the building. I'm still reminded about that every once in a while. Irene Rose will sometimes remind me about the day I quit JA. So, yeah.

Just working with so many people. I don't mean to make that sound bad, but I have worked with so many executives. I'll start working on a list of who I had over the years. Some of them are still with the organization. Some of them moved on.

I'm just trying to think of some of the crazy stuff around here. We used to have Secretaries' Day. I don't think you were here yet. I think that first year or two I wanted to do something nice for us, but I also wanted to get involved in it.

So, I hired a limo and took like Ada Sanchez and Karen Ridinger, who I worked with, and myself and we took Cheryl Clark, worked in education, and Janie Verbest went with us. Jack Holladay gave us permission and he provided us with lunches from Bell's Deli.

The limo came to the building. Picked us up. We all went out to lunch. We went up to Green Mountain Falls. Provided two bottles of champagne. Shouldn't have done that, but it was great. We had a great time. It was just the five of us.

We got the okay from the bosses to do that kind of stuff. We would be gone for about two hours. It was great. We did it again the next year. We got a bigger limo and more people. But after that, we didn't do it anymore. It was going to be too much.

MS. HUFF: But you did other things and you always participated in a lot of cases. Orchestrated some of these events around the building. I've noticed that in you, Frank. You are always there to roll up your sleeves and pitch in.

MR. STRYGANEK: I try. Sometimes I feel like a little inundated on some stuff, but I try and do what I can besides teaching a class and getting involved in committees in the past. Santa Day and our holiday parties and other things that go on here in the building. We have our staff conferences and things like that.

MS. HUFF: In your job, Frank, as you look back in this wonderful, long career that you have had with JA, what are the strengths you think in the way of job skills and other transferrable skills that have really served you especially well in that particular job?

MR. STRYGANEK: Oh, my job skills?

MS. HUFF: What would you advise others who make take your place one day that they really need to do this job?

MR. STRYGANEK: Five years and 45 days to go now. I guess I want to say patience, but sometimes I don't have patience. But I'm finding that out as I get older. So have patience, and everything will be fine and all that stuff. I try not to sweat it anymore. Years ago, I used to sweat it all the time. I'd be so stressed. I think some people skills are good, definitely good.

MS. HUFF: What do you mean by "people skills"?

MR. STRYGANEK: Well, that you work well with others. Although, in the beginning when I started with JA I was very quiet and it was just the four of us in the Seattle office, but here I was this guy that they hired in a position, and I don't mean to sound degrading, but it was mostly a female-oriented environment and here was this guy.

Even at National I was the only guy for a while. I was the only guy in a position that normally is filled by a woman. Gosh. I can't figure out where I was going with this one now.

MS. HUFF: Your strengths.

MR. STRYGANEK: Oh, yeah. The strengths. I think how you interact with people. Also, your knowledge of who you work for and what you are supposed to be doing in your job. There are a lot of different things.

I would like to say knowledge of computers and I'm not too good about that one. Although, I think I'm not too bad. I actually was able to help Dave Eustis on a little question yesterday when James Finch was down there and I happened to be standing there in the doorway to ask Dave a question.

"Hey, Frank. I bet you know how to do this." Because Dave was looking for a division sign. He was working on a document. James said, "Well, just use the backslash." No. Go into insert, symbols. He found the division sign. Do insert. Close it. He goes, "Hey, it worked!" So once in a while I'm good for something.

I think how you present yourself on the phone. People skills. Knowledge of your job. Knowledge of who you work for. There are several things.

MS. HUFF: Well, you've obviously done that very well. So, I know many, many of us are very impressed with the way you do handle people, Frank. That's definitely one of your fortés. Describe the impact that Junior Achievement has had on people's lives.

MR. STRYGANEK: On people's lives? Well, in my experience with working with the kids – I'll go to the kids – I think it's been great. When I come into the classroom, I would hope I present a positive, good feel attitude and try to spend – I try and spend a little extra time with them in the classroom.

I know we are kind of confined to like 35-minute sessions, but if I can kind of spend five more minutes with them I will. Just so hopefully

something clicks in their minds when I'm explaining about the activity that we are doing that day. I do a review the following week.

The kids, they retain what it is. Well, this guy comes into the classroom and he wears a blue shirt and puts on a tie and that kind of stuff. It's just great to work with the kids. I know I have had a couple of classes that I wasn't really impressed with. The kids just didn't seem to be there. They were just distracted and hyper about some stuff.

One year when I was finishing up my last session with the kids, I felt bad. The teacher wasn't there. A substitute teacher was in the classroom and didn't know what I was there for. I had to briefly explain what I was doing. The kids were distracted. They weren't paying attention.

I passed out the certificates to the kids at the end and I basically was picking up my briefcase and I was glad. I'm just glad I'm done and out of here, and one girl came out of the classroom and she said, "Mr. Frank, thank you for taking the time to come and teach us Junior Achievement every day." Oh, my God. It just made me change. It's just great what we do for the kids and going into the classroom.

Some of the teachers have said to me, "Thank you for coming in and working with my class," and I've had one teacher tell me it's great that it was me that came in, because as I mentioned earlier, she would like to see her boys interact with a male. She told me that most of them don't have a male role model at home. So, she really was interested in seeing how they were interacting with another guy.

MS. HUFF: So important. So very important. Yes. Now, I forgot to mention or go back to when you went downstairs to work at Resource Generation. Who did you work for then?

MR. STRYGANEK: I was asked to work with James Sullivan, who was going to head up the strategic alliances and volunteers' portion of

Resource Generation. Excuse me. I knew James before because he used to work with our marketing team for a couple of years. So, I knew who he was, but I never really worked with him too much.

Basically, here at the office it was like, “Hi, Frank.” “Hi, James.” And that was it. I didn’t know his skills or anything like that. So, I was little leery at first. It was an entirely new team. I was a little upset about what was going on following the reorg, because there was another episode where I went to Marty and said, “I’m out of here.”

But anyway, I started with James and it was Tanya Walker, who I didn’t know beforehand. Then we brought on Sean Hough and it was the four of us for a while out on that team. James was great. I had a total turnaround about him when I worked for him, because he was another one that seemed concerned about how you feel about your job.

I feel he felt I was in an odd position because of the reorg and he was concerned about how I felt about that. He just was very, very good. He would just do things. He would come into work and he would bring us breakfast one day. There were times when we worked hard after the reorg and it was a new team and new ideas were going on. Building partnerships with Household Finance, it was constant go, go, go. I was like, “Man!” They were traveling a lot. I was the support person for them. There were times that it was a little rough and I was kind of getting a little discouraged, but I hung in there and things worked out.

In fact, when the position I have now opened up and I went to James and said I was going to apply for it, he said, “I know you are going to get it. I’m going to really miss you.” That sort of thing. Sure enough. I got it. But James has moved on to other things, too. So has Tanya.

MS. HUFF: Then you went to work for...?

MR. STRYGANEK: Marty.

MS. HUFF: So, tell us about Marty and what his strengths are.

MR. STRYGANEK: Oh, Marty. All these people are so, I feel, people oriented, because it was funny when I interviewed for the position I was interviewed by Eilene Burnley and Carolyn McDole. Marty was not involved, how it all worked out.

Carolyn and Eilene interviewed me and then Eilene is the one who called me into her office that they were offering me the position. It worked out really great at the time, because with the reorg, I didn't have a pay increase for like three years, which I understood because of the salary that I was making when I worked for the Area Relations Team at the time. They put me into an Admin Assistant position, which was brand new at a much lower salary range.

My first thought was, "They are going to put me down at this entry level salary." I thought, "There is no way. I'll have to leave." But that wasn't going to happen.

At the time, they said, "We are freezing your salary and it will not be increased for seven years."

I thought, "Oh, my God! This is going to kill me."

But after three years, when they offered me the job up here and Eilene said, "Oh, by the way, there is some money in that position, so we are going to give you a pay raise,"...that was kind of nice, and that happened at the time I was closing on my first home, so that worked out really good. I was going to need some extra money for the new house.

MS. HUFF: Fantastic! Well, it sounds like you have some really great mentors as you moved through these different positions and these people really took a liking to you, as well as wanting to see you succeed. So, would say that that's probably been a huge change in your life or helped you develop as you went through?

MR. STRYGANEK: They were great to me. I feel I may have let them down a bit, because I felt I didn't aggressively pursue to better myself to become a manager. Well, I did get bumped up to a manager at one point. But to go out to a director or to excel myself more. I think I was getting too comfortable in positions that I have had, the support positions, and I wasn't trying to get out of that. I sometimes feel that I should have pursued a little bit harder and said, "Look, I can do this if you give the opportunity." But I didn't do that.

MS. HUFF: But you have been a tremendous support to them, I have no doubt.

MR. STRYGANEK: I'll agree with you on that one. But I feel one thing – and I think there is a question here about – oh, when you say, "If I had to do it over again what would I do differently?" and that would be to be more aggressive and not sit back and sit comfortable. Yeah. I'm pretty good about how I feel right now and that's my comfort level. I just wish that I had pursued it more.

MS. HUFF: So, you believe that Junior Achievement is a place where opportunities exist?

MR. STRYGANEK: Oh, I think so. Yeah. When I first started, I was the only male in a woman-dominated field and when I started most of our area Presidents were male. We only had one woman President at the time in the organization. She was in Alaska. She was part of the western region.

The women – the women – women at that time were either a support, a secretary or they might have made it up to a Program Manager. I think it was pretty much a good-old-boy network when I started.

MS. HUFF: And you have seen that whole transition take place then in that very short period of time.

MR. STRYGANEK: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, I think the women are the predominant role models in their areas for area Presidents now. So, yeah.

MS. HUFF: Do you think that's a good thing?

MR. STRYGANEK: Yeah. My first woman executive was Jan Tesch in Denver and I can't remember when that was, but I didn't report to a woman until then and I think there might have been concerns about that. But I didn't have any problem with that. I knew Jan a little bit when she was in El Paso before she came up to Colorado and we had a great time.

I understand at her retirement she had a little program or a booklet and she sent me a copy and she mentioned individuals that had made an impact on her and I was mentioned in there. So, I was like, "Wow."

In fact, somebody told me that. LaRoche had mentioned my name at the retirement party and I am in Jan's program for her recognition piece. So, I was like, "Wow. That was really nice."

MS. HUFF: What do you think as you have seen kind of the picture and you certainly have an opinion on this, I'm sure, what do you think are Junior Achievement's greatest successes?

MR. STRYGANEK: Greatest successes? I think it's our programs, and I'm basing this on being a consultant. I think the materials we get are great, and I have been told that by the teachers I work with. I have a couple even call the local office and say, "We want Frank to come back and teach my class."

So, I think the materials we get. When I teach the class, I have just about everything I need for the class. Just have to get prepared for it. I think our programs are great. I think we have a lot of competition out

there. It's hard, but somehow, we still have more name recognition now than we have in the past. It seems like.

I know when I would meet people or I would be with friends and we would talk about jobs and we would say things like, "Well, who do you work for?"

"Well, I work for Junior Achievement."

What's that?"

Now, it's like, "Oh, yeah. I have had that..." or it's like they are more familiar with the name. They have seen it somewhere.

But there is still something missing. We still don't have that national recognition of who we are like with Big Brothers and Big Sisters and the scouts. There is something that they do that we are not doing. I think that's already well known around here about that. I just don't know what it is. I feel like we are always trying to get a big name to do something for us, but we just haven't succeeded there on that. So, our successes would be our programs.

I think we have a great staff. I know even in the field that there are some executives that we feel are a little high maintenance. We are all here for the same challenges and the same purposes of this organization.

I think in the last few years we've become – we had more awareness. More marketing. I think after the reorg there have been some bad points about that, I feel, and some good points. Since David Chernow has come on board, he is really trying to get that exposure out there.

I know we have had so much deadwood on the National Board and it's just like he is trying to get that moving because, boy, I'll tell you, there are times we can barely get a quorum for the national board meeting and

I know everybody is busy and I understand that. Who aren't these days, unfortunately?

But I just feel that we just need to attract the right people on our board and I would think also more women on the board. I can think of two board members that basically do nothing for the board for us anymore, as far as I'm concerned.

MS. HUFF: As we move into the future for Junior Achievement, do you see that as one of our biggest challenges is getting an active board?

MR. STRYGANEK: I think it's a challenge. Yeah. I think David is working on trying to get that improved and it just seemed like two years ago it was difficult. I think board members were just burning out. Maybe not only in their job, but they probably not only serve on a JA board, but they serve on other boards, too.

It's just a crazy, hectic world right now and some people don't have enough to do, and they see JA as some big social event. Get to go to some cocktail party and get to dress up and play hostess or host or whatever. I don't know. It's going to take a lot of doing and Dave has got his job cut out for him. I'll tell you; I think there is a lot of respect for him in the organization.

I think most of the areas have welcomed the change. I'm not saying anything bad about Jim Hayes. I think it was, "Bring somebody new to the organization." He is a great guy. I feel he is a great guy.

MS. HUFF: Great! So, what are the challenges you think that we have as we go into the new millennium?

MR. STRYGANEK: Probably trying to stay ahead of our competition when it comes to our programs and what we have to offer to students. I think trying to retain volunteers. That seems to be hard to do, and I

know I haven't taught a class yet this year, because I just wanted to take a break because I do other things.

You try to have a personal life and you also try to have your professional life. It's like, "No...I just want to kick back for a little bit and not be on a committee for a while and...just give me a break, please."

Trying to keep staff. I don't know about right now, but it seemed like a couple of years ago we were going through a lot of staff changes, not only here at national, but out in the field, too. I don't know if there seems to be so much that goes on that people say, "I just can't keep up with it anymore. I have to find something else to do."

So, I think it's going to be the people. It's going to be our programs. Funding, I think, is still a problem. Although I think we have done well this past year with funding and when we brought Tom Dewar aboard last July, I think he has made a big change in the funding.

I try and follow what goes on in senior management meetings and read what he is working on and stuff like that. Trying to improve relations between national and the field, because there is still that we-versus-us thing going on. Just trying to build a better relationship – build better relationships with other organizations, with businesses, with our own area offices. We have our work cut out.

MS. HUFF: We do. How about the operating agreement? Do you think that's going to be a continued challenge for us?

MR. STRYGANEK: The operating agreement?

MS. HUFF: Between national and the field offices.

MR. STRYGANEK: Well, do you know something that I don't know about this?

MS. HUFF: No. That's always been one of the challenges that we have shared, because the autonomy is kind of a double-edged sword.

MR. STRYGANEK: To be honest, I'm kind of ignorant on that, because I don't know all that's involved. It's probably they don't want to sign anything because like you were just saying, "I don't want to have to report to a headquarters" type of thing. It's hard.

MS. HUFF: It is. What's the secret to the success? People, right? Having the right people at the right moment.

MR. STRYGANEK: Yeah. The right people. Having good people on your boards, not only on a national level but the area level. They have their problems. There are several areas that have problems. What is it? One-third of our cities are running deficits.

You need good people to run your program. You need good people on your board to get out there and raise the funds to keep the programs running, and it's hard.

MS. HUFF: Well, Frank, so altogether you have been with Junior Achievement how many years now?

MR. STRYGANEK: Last week I started my 27th year.

MS. HUFF: Wow. Twenty-seven years. What an accomplishment. In that 27 years, what was your most rewarding accomplishment?

MR. STRYGANEK: My most rewarding accomplishment? That's one of those questions – did I ever get around to answering that question. I did answer this question. I felt coming to work every day. That probably sounds hokey. I talk with other people and friends, and acquaintances about jobs and stuff and it's just like – and maybe some people here won't agree with what I'm going to say, but this is how I see it.

I feel like we are blessed. We do these town halls about every six, seven weeks and we get a free lunch out of it. We set a United Way goal. When we exceed it, we get a day off. We had a baseball outing. Now, we are going to do movie days.

I said when I talk to people, they don't have anything like that. They are not even recognized for their jobs that they do and it's kind of sad. I talked to a really good friend of mine who is in health care and he told me a story recently where there was a Halloween costume contest.

They had a first, second or third prize or place. One of the women got second place, but she didn't – this sounds terrible – but she didn't get her award, because the administrator's kid was in the facility at the time and wanted that. So, he turns around and gives this gift to his daughter instead of giving it to the employee. This is so sad. What is this?

But anyway, thank God for most of my career I've been able to get a salary increase. We have awards. I try not to say that too much around other people that are outside of the organization, because I've already been told, "You are very fortunate that you work for people that appreciate you and do things like that for you." We have the Awesome Awards here.

I've told some people how that works and what the award is, and they go, "You are very fortunate to have that." There are people out there who just don't have that type of recognition from their peers or executives or whatever.

So, I just feel like we've got a place to work. Yes. At times we work very hard and at times I feel we kick back a bit. But we have a nice holiday party. Some people don't even have that. I just say the most rewarding is just coming here to work.

MS. HUFF: That's great! That's fantastic, Frank. What did we miss as we went through this wonderful discussion?

MR. STRYGANEK: What did we miss?

MS. HUFF: Yes. What else do you want to be sure that we add to this historic archive?

MR. STRYGANEK: I think that's about it. Really. I'm just looking at this. I think that's about it.

MS. HUFF: Well, this was really great, Frank. We thank you so much for your time and I know that you have many, many friends here at Junior Achievement national headquarters and in the field.

MR. STRYGANEK: You're being too kind.

MS. HUFF: You have impacted a lot of lives and the thing that I love about you the most is you are always positive. You can always see the positive side of things and you always have a smile for everyone.

MR. STRYGANEK: You are not here often.

MS. HUFF: When you do decide to retire, it's going to leave a huge void in our lives, Frank. So, you don't realize the impact that you have on all of us, even though we may not see you every day. Thanks so much for doing this for us and inspiring us to be as great as you.

MR. STRYGANEK: You are more than welcome. Please don't put me on a pedestal.

MS. HUFF: Thanks, Frank.