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John O. Dickinson

Summary: John Owen Dickinson started with junior Achievement in 1953 as company advisor in St. Paul, Minnesota. He then accepted a position as Program Director. From there he went on to the position of Executive Director in Indianapolis, IN, then Regional VP, Midwest region prior to becoming the President of JA in Chicago, IL. John led one of the largest JA areas in the country and was recognized in the Staff Hall of Fame. He was a winner of the Charles A. Hook Award, JA's most prestigious award for an outstanding staff leader.

INTERVIEWER: What is your name?

JOD: My name is John O. Dickinson. The "O" is for Owen. "Owen" is "John" in Gaelic.

INTERVIEWER: oh, is it really?

JOD: Yes, it is. So, I am "John, John."

INTERVIEWER: OK. John, for the record, how and when did you first become involved with Junior Achievement?

JOD: How and when? Well, it's a fun story. It was in 1953, I believe. I was a bachelor and I was staying with two other bachelor friends at White Bear Lake just outside of St. Paul, Minnesota. We lived on Shady Lane, which is not a bad name for three bachelors. We rented a little cottage from the people who had the local tavern—which wasn't a bad idea either, because we would run up a tab during the month and then at the end of the month we'd pay our rent and start all over again. So, they got us twice, but that's when I started Junior Achievement. Now how I got involved,

INTERVIEWER: What positions did you hold at that time?

JOD: I was a long-term substitute teacher for Minneapolis Vocational High School. See, when I graduated, they sent me out into the wild market for teaching, I went to a town called Spooner, Wisconsin. Now, none of you two know where Spooner is. The world doesn't know where Spooner is. Great fishing. And my first job offer was \$2500 dollars for the year. Now that's funny.

I thought well, I should be able to do better than this. I will put myself on a long-term substitute teaching in Minneapolis. I wanted to be in the big town, and moved to this place in Shady Lane. One of my bachelor friends was with 3M—Minnesota Mining and the other one was with the now defunct, Montgomery Wards. The gentleman who was with 3M was an advisor for Junior Achievement in St. Paul, Minnesota. They sent him on a three- or four-month assignment to London and he asked me if I would substitute for him. Well, I was a bachelor, didn't have anything to do, so I thought, sure I'll substitute.

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I went down to the center, met the kids and started to be an advisor. There wasn't much training in those days. It was "Hi, what is your name?" "John Dickinson". "Well fine, you're in bay six. I started out as an advisor, and I really, really fell in love with the program—the kids, the other advisors, the whole idea the young people learning as they were, and so I started to ask myself a question: do people work full-time in this? Because everybody I'd met was an advisor and they were part time. I found out there was a gentleman by the name of Jim Aldridge, who was then the Executive Director, that's what we were called then. I asked him if there was any way to get into this organization. He said "sure, we'll set up an interview with you." I asked how long will that take? He said I'll have to get a hold of Mr. Herman Gall, he's our Regional Vice President. At the time, JA had one Regional Vice President for the entire United States. That was it. One. Now he covered all the states and probably thirty-three cities, something like that. He didn't fly in those days; he came by train. He stayed in Fred Harvey's restaurant. Anyway, Herman Gall came up to St. Paul and we had a good chat. He said it looks like you would make a good person to be in Junior Achievement, and we're willing to welcome you aboard if your Executive Director agrees, which Jim did. They offered me the astounding salary of, \$3,800 dollars, which, in comparison to the money at Spooner, I am now a wealthy man. So, I accepted the position.

INTERVIEWER: And exactly what position was that, again?

JOD: Well, in those days you didn't have as nearly as many titles or positions as we now have. Most operations consisted of an Executive Director, uno number one, and a Program Director, and maybe an Assistant Program Director, a Secretary, and a Janitor. That was really just about our staff. We had 33 JA companies and we were on the second floor of a building in downtown St. Paul. That's where our JA Center was. And I was the Program Director.

INTERVIEWER: If you wouldn't mind going back just a step there, because I am kind of curious about this advisor position too. So that was really your entry level position, if you will, even though it sounds like it was for no pay.

JOD: Oh! Absolutely no pay.

Interviewer: What were the job duties of an advisor?

JOD: Well, I was the substitute sales advisor. So, I just stepped in and was the sales advisor. The name of the JA Company, I still remember it, is Red Spot. We made a little wooden piece about the size of a small eraser. It had a notch in it and a marble. You'd put it up on a wall or refrigerator and you'd put a towel in there and the marble would hold the towel. So that was our product. We were called the Red Spot Company sponsored by 3M. I was the sales advisor and it was my job to teach the young people the value of selling and the need to sell and how to sell and all the things related to the selling of the product.

INTERVIEWER: OK. Great! Then moving on to your Program Director Position, tell us what you had to do with that.

JOD: Well, the Program Director in Junior Achievement in the early 50s was really the combination of a Program Director/Janitor, (chuckles)... you just about did everything. You had

to. I can clearly remember, one of the first weeks on the job, Jim gave me a piece of paper. There were a whole bunch of machines on there like band saws, drill presses, belt and disc sanders, all kinds of wonderful terms like that. He said: "Now one of the things every morning that you'll have to do is go upstairs and make sure that all these machines are ready for tonight." Sounded good to me! So, I got upstairs, and I was up there for I don't know how long, and all of a sudden he yelled up: "John! Have you finished your job?" And I said: "Well I have a little problem." And he said: "What's that?" And I said: "I don't really know what all these machines are." He said: "Didn't I ask you about if you knew machines"? I said yes you did. "And what did you say"? And I said: "I know machines - hammers, saws, all that kind of stuff. Well, he said: "This is mechanical stuff: drill presses, belt and disk sanders. So, you're gonna have to learn how to run them, learn how to check them out and do some maintenance on them if we can." And he said: "You go back up there again, now, and start over and remember you look for the chuck key." It sounded pretty simple.

So, I'm up there for a while and he said: "John! What are you doing up there"? And I said: "Jim, what's a chuck key"? (John D. chuckles in the background). And he said: "It's a little key-like thing, that it has a lever that runs through and you put it into the band saw or the drill press and you tighten the apparatus to close the bit, or whatever it's supposed to hold. That's the chuck key and it's supposed to be chained to the machine." Now I said a lot of the time the kids like to take them as souvenirs, so the first thing you do is to look and see if there is one. If there isn't one, then you put one on. If there is one, then you tighten everything up so the machine is ready. And then, of course you also had to move the machinery. Because we weren't at the stage where we had money where we could have a drill press, and a band saw and a belt disk sander for every one of these bays where the students were. So, after they decided the product and decided the need of the machinery, then another one of my jobs was to take that particular piece of machinery and move it over to wherever they needed it. That way we got the maximum use out of the machinery.

So, it wasn't too long into the program when you got a pretty good knowledge of what the machines were, what the machines could do. It's most important how to move them. Well, of course wherever there was a machine, there's sawdust, or dirt, or something. Another one of these very, very, important tasks of a Program Director was to sweep up the room so it was nice and clean when the kids came. Now you might think this is not a very highly technical job yet-moving furniture and tightening things up with chuck keys, but that was all part of getting ready for the students that particular night. The Program Director also then during the evening would go from room to room I think mostly you would help answer questions, if you could. And you would motivate and cultivate, and pat people on the back, and congratulate the advisors, and try to get to know the kids' names. You really became a public relations person for the organization-which was fun.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned a number of rooms. How many rooms were there for the students?

JOD: Well, in this center we had 33 JA companies when I got there. We had eight rooms. And actually, we were on the second floor. Naturally, there wasn't an elevator, so most all of the supplies we had to carry upstairs. I remember, one time, with a company in St. Paul, we were

always looking for freebies. I mean that was..., Junior Achievement start-ups were freebies. There was a company that made a wood product and the end result was that at the end of their product they would have a perfect sized, laminated chopping block – that’s how we used it anyway. We put a handle on it, polished it all up and sold them as a nice chopping block.

This gentleman called me up from this company and he said: “We have some leftovers from our product, and if you are interested in them, we would love to give them to Junior Achievement and do what you like with them. So, I felt proud as a peacock, I said: “Send them on!” (chuckles) Well, about two weeks later, this truck pulls up and this gentleman came upstairs and he talked to Jim first, and he said, “John Dickinson said it was alright if we bring these extra wood pieces here to Junior Achievement and you folks would make good use of them. And Jim said: “Sure, how many are there”? And he said: “I don’t know, I guess the truck must have two or three thousand pieces in it.” (Chuckles, clears his throat). We got all the wood chopping blocks upstairs, and we had an awful lot of companies making chopping blocks.

In the evening, really, your important job was to visit with the advisors, not get in their way, but to visit with them. You could always tell an Executive Director who was on the ball, or an Executive Director who was a little bit worried, because if he, [pause] you have to know the advisor team, and there was a friendly relation – zoom! That would be the area that he would go to. If he got involved with an advisor team that might have nipped at him a little bit, because something wasn’t ready, he didn’t see that company very often. It’s just the way it was...

INTERVIEWER: Now you said that you worked for the school system, originally. How closely did Junior Achievement work with the school system?

JOD: It’s an entirely different thing now. The schools were the vehicle for recruiting the students. It wasn’t like it is today where the school is where the students are that are in Junior Achievement. The schools were our source of students, but we had to go to the school and recruit them. They would give us, what they called “assembly time,” and that would vary from half hour to an hour. You would have to plan your assemblies accordingly. Sometimes you could use slides, sometimes you could use film. Sometimes neither of the two were available.

A lot of the times you’d arrive and be placed in the gymnasium and they would have the bleachers out. It looked like they were ready for a basketball game. In one instance the Assistant Principal came down and all the kids were ready for the assembly and he said: “We’re going to give Mr. Dickinson a hand here, so let’s push those bleachers back.” Well, you know he turned several hundred kids loose on those bleachers and they went flying back to the wall like crazy. And then he said: “Now we’ve got to set up some chairs.” Now I’m looking at my watch because I have forty-five minutes to an hour and we, just all we accomplished so far is made a lot of noise and (chuckles) and, and the bleachers are out of the way and ready for the chairs. And the chairs were stacked, as you probably remember, maybe you don’t remember, but you use to have carts and they’d stack, so the Assistant Principal said: “Now, OK, let’s team up and bring out the chairs.” So, they brought the chairs out. “Now let’s set them up.” And one young man got the super-duper idea of sliding them across the floor to a friend at the other side and they’d set them up that way.

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Well, it was like a battleground. The chairs were sliding across the floor. The kids were catching them, setting them up. Noise! You never heard more noise. The principal came down: "What going on in here? Is this any way to treat a guest? Let's finish our job." So, they got all the chairs lined up. The stage was ready. Everything was ready to go. And he said: "Now..." And I'm looking at my watch, and over half of my time has been gone now. He [Principal] said: "Before Mr. Dickinson says anything about this fine program called Junior Achievement, I want you all to apologize to him. And if I had the time, I'd have each and every one of you line up and say you're sorry. But we don't have the time." [JOD is pounding on something mimicking the actions of the principal.]. So, he said: "What we'll do, is on the count of three, we'll all stand up. We'll bow from the waist, and we'll say 'I'm sorry Mr. Dickinson.'" Well, that set the tone for a really wonderful program. Kids loved me, but how did I get off on a story like that?

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's OK. That's a wonderful John, but now that you're saying all this, and you're painting a wonderful picture for us. Tell me, listening to you talk about the various, you know, pieces of equipment – band saws and all of that; were there any girls involved in this?

JOD: Oh Yes! Yes! And that's why we had boys. (Both chuckle) There's no question about it. Any JA Program Director, Executive Director or JA official, when he was recruiting in the high school, if he failed to mention that the program was for boys and girls and that there were plenty of cute young ladies, well, he lost half of his audience. We certainly took advantage of the fact that we had girls in the program.

INTERVIEWER: And how long had girls been a part of the program? Was that from the beginning of Junior Achievement?

JOD: Well, almost all; I can't go back to 1919 for you because then Junior Achievement was more of a club than it was a company. And there were boys, more boys than there were girls, but there were some girls.

But when we got to that stage where we recruited young people, then it was boys and girls. We recruited them to join a company and every company had a sponsor. It could be 3M; it could be Ford Motor Company. It could be whatever industries were in the town and were game to be what we called then a "counseling" firm. In most of our firms we looked for not only financial support, but certainly advisor support. Most of our companies were heavy industry type companies. Ford Motor, Chevrolet, General Motors, places like that. Where you had a company, where you can call on them to furnish you with someone from the financial department, somebody from the sales department, somebody from the manufacturing department.

INTERVIEWER: What part would those individuals play?

JOD: Well, each JA Company, normally had three advisors. One would be a sales advisor, or marketing, as you call them today. Another would be a manufacturing advisor, and a third would be a financial advisor who usually was the chief advisor. And those three advisors and fifteen to twenty young people made up a typical JA company.

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INTERVIEWER: What did you say to these kids to entice them to want to be part of Junior Achievement?

JOD: Well, like anything, you had to develop a pitch, and everybody, really... we didn't have the wonderful support services that you have now and sample scripts and all kinds of things like that. You pretty well traded things amongst yourselves. But you worked up a pitch that would fit your personality. We would do things that you wouldn't think of doing now-a-days. Like I remember I used the football a lot. I'd tell the kids: "If you really want to catch on to business," and I'd throw a football out into the audience. Well, believe it or not, you got the football back. Some days we threw the football into the audience in some schools we wouldn't get it back. But we developed a pitch based on why you should join Junior Achievement, what you get out of Junior Achievement, what are the values of being in Junior Achievement? Why should you take two and a half hours one night a week to be in the program? What are you going to get out of it? Where are the values? Things like that.

You had to develop a pitch, a story to interest the kids into joining. Of course, that was not easy because there were some kids that right away didn't even want to listen to you. And then there were some that wanted to listen to you. What you would try to do is identify, while you're on the stage, those who looked interested, because then toward the end of your spiel, boy this was important, you had to time this thing so that you could pass out your applications, have them sign them and then pass them in. Because if you left that school with just the applications passed out, or pick them up at the principal's office, you'd probably end up with a big zero, as far as the numbers of kids. So, there was a science to it; there really was. And there was a timing to it. If you could spot some kids that looked like they were the leader type, were on the ball, and get an application in their hands first, then you'd see the other hands go up.

INTERVIEWER: Which hasn't changed much

JOD: No. And then you would take the kids who showed interest right away and you'd say: "Well, will you help me here? I've got a lot of kids to visit with here, and I've got a lot of applications to pass out, so would you give me a hand?" Well, you'd then pick some leaders and others would take would take it from there. Some people would pass out an application to everybody and pass them down to the end of the row. Some were filled out and some weren't.

It was really an interesting gamble. You never knew, when you left the school, for sure, how many students you had signed up. And then the students you signed up; you never knew for sure how many would show up. And of the ones that showed up; you never knew how many would stay in. It was really wonderful! It was a challenge from the beginning. I can clearly remember, these things happened to lots of people. You'd mail out the applications which were normally two pieces: a hard section that we kept as a permanent record, and then a tear-off piece that was inviting the student to join Junior Achievement on a certain night, in a certain bay, and a certain time.

I can remember at one of the centers at St. Paul we put a bunch of the applications, postcards, which is what it really was, in the mailbox. Opening night came along and the first night went pretty well. Second night, the place was almost empty. Couldn't figure it out; where did the

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kids go? Well, we had found out that the Tuesday night applications, when we dropped the applications in the mailbox, many of them stood upright against the mailbox inside. So, when the postman put his hands in there to make the grand sweep he missed (chuckles) some of our applications. The ones he missed never knew they were invited.

INTERVIEWER: Well, on a good night, how many kids could you expect to sign up?

JOD: Everybody had different ideas in those days. It was really an entrepreneurial type of experience. JA was very entrepreneurial. The people in it were entrepreneurial. We didn't have lots of set rules, guidelines, you must do it this way or this is the only way to do it. We looked at a typical company and of course, the size of the room depended on a lot of it. We hoped that we would start out with somewhere in the area of 18 to 22 students; 15 to 18 students, as we knew immediately the second night that we'd have drop outs. You had to plan for that. But you don't know how many were going to drop out or who were going to drop out or what room they were going to drop out of.

You knew you needed three advisors, and hopefully an alternate advisor to fill in, in case one of the ones couldn't make it. Then shoot for anywhere from 18 to 20 to 22 kids. That was, in my opinion, a nice group to start out with. Because you knew you'd lose some right away. They'd get down the first night and it wasn't what they expected it to be. They didn't get along with the other kids, their friend went into room five and they were assigned into room 4, and why can't I go into room 5, why did you put me into room 4, and, ... We called them bays then.

INTERVIEWER: Now as I think about the centers, because I've heard quite a bit about them. That must have been wonderful experience for these kids. And they developed, no doubt, a strong bond with one another, and obviously were learning a great deal. What did they bring to the table, that many of these kids have shop experience? As I recall, back in those days, most boys were required to do those industrial arts, so they probably brought some good skills to the table.

JOD: Oh, there was no question; there was some natural talent in every JA Company. And there were always some kids that took drafting or printing or mechanical drawing. There were always some kids that were very handy. They turned out to be the production crew. Then there were those that were really good at talking and selling. They became the sales people. Then there were those that had the know-how for figures and they became the accounting department and the financial end of the company.

You see, the company started out with any number of kids, but then it had to turn into a company. You had to have a sales department, a financial department, marketing department, and manufacturing department. We had to have places. Each of those places had to have managers. You developed kids who became a production manager, or the sales manager, or the financial person. And then they would elect their company president, company treasurer, company corporate secretary, etc. There were plenty of jobs. But you developed from nothing to something.

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You know, there were kids that thought if they bought up some extra stock, they might maneuver themselves into a higher position in the company-funny little things like that. Every member had to buy a minimum of one share of stock.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a maximum?

JOD: Yeah. There was a limit but I forget how many there was, maybe it was three, maybe it was five. But everybody had to buy one share of stock. And that is what we did. JA was a lot of "bodies." But to get sales experience, we would pair kids off, and they would sell one another a share of stock. That was maybe for the first time the start of some sales experience for some kids right there. And then you'd have the sales advisor watch and listen to the kids sell one another a share of stock and from that he could start the sales crew. The thing was very solid. It wasn't a game. It was well thought out.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds like the sales advisors had to have good observation skills too to find out where the kid's strengths were to put them in the right place.

JOD: No question. And it wasn't so much a matter, they had to be careful how they did it because we didn't want the kids to think that the advisors were running the show. That's why we called them advisors, and not the principal or something like that. We had to be very careful. Advisors had to really "advise" to convince, get to know the young people and work that way and not tell them what to do, and how to do it, when to do it, where to do it, why to do it.

INTERVIEWER: So, was the whole idea was to foster leadership skills?

JOD: No question. And one of the toughest positions to get that across to was the manufacturing advisors. Naturally they came from a plant or they had their job in manufacturing, and they were more... they would lean more to telling somebody what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and then they'd forget the why. The sales advisors were more the other way. They would take the kids closer together and work them into a team, and.... Everybody was a salesman at JA. That's one job that every kid was supposed to do was sell. Out of that would come a group that did the best job, but every teenager was supposed to sell.

INTERVIEWER: So, they sold both the stock and the product?

JOD: Right. Every teenager was supposed to buy a minimum of one share of stock. Now, not every teenager, thank God, did we say had to produce a product. Because people just would have lost a lot of fingers, I'm sure.

That's the remarkable thing about JA, even when we were at its peak, say 255,000 kids, which is nothing in compared to the number that you service now. But our accident ratio was extremely low, which spoke very highly for the advisors and the training and the observation, and the watching. The kids had to wear goggles, and were supposed to... although you will see pictures around sometimes where the kid is over a bandsaw and he doesn't have a pair of glasses on, and things like that. In every company there was supposed to be a safety director; it was a well thought out nomenclature of what this company should be made up of. And the idea was is that

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everybody would have a job of some sort. You might be the assistant bookkeeper, or the bookkeeper. You might be the safety director or the manufacturing director. You might be a sales manager or the salesperson. But everybody should have a job. But everybody was supposed to sell.

INTERVIEWER: Great. Just one more thing on the center, as you were talking about recruiting these students, you said something about a slide presentation. What would be in the slide presentation?

JOD: Well, it went with the years that you were recruiting. This you would not remember, but there was a time when in this country capitalism was a dirty word. Business was a dirty word. Communism was bad, and I can remember one recruiting film we had... This wasn't a slide; this was a film. We had 16mm, I don't think they make it anymore, but the film opened up, and there was: "Crack! Growl! It was red and there were lightning flashes. And there was barb wire, and: "Rat-a-tat-tat, tat, tat, tat, tat, tat. Machine guns going, soldiers coming underneath the wire. And the whole theme was that if you joined in Junior Achievement you would learn about the private enterprise system and its advantages, and you'd be helping to defeat communism. It was not hidden or veiled. That's it. It took on that theme for a while.

INTERVIEWER: And when you mentioned slides, if you used them, those would be photographic slides, as opposed to PowerPoint slides that we have today?

JOD: Oh Yeah, there were no PowerPoint slides and the program director, or the executive director took pictures for the slides.

INTERVIEWER: Were they pictures of the students at work at the centers?

JOD: the pictures were of students at work at the centers. Right. That would be the program director's job, or the executive director's job; whoever was best with the camera. It was a long time before we had the national organization developing slides that anyone of us could use. And maybe that was OK because we wanted to use our own kids.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you want to tell us about the centers?

JOD: Well, yeah. The center was Junior Achievement. It was the office. It was the factory. It was the home. It was the heart. It was the pulse of Junior Achievement. It's where the kids came. It's where they learned. It's where they disagreed. It's where they agreed. It's where they argued. It was the factory. It was the plant. It was the office. It was a miniature entrepreneurial scale business. And so, it was a vital part of Junior Achievement. It was not, like in the YMCA or Boy Scouts or something. It wasn't a troop thing, or anything like that. It was a company!

That room, on that night belonged to Red Spot, counseled by 3M. That was their shop, their factory, their office, their place to learn, their place to get to know one another, and their place to develop a company that hopefully was successful. The goals were the same as they always were, to make a profit--that never changed in JA.

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I don't think it's as clear, now-a-days. We learn about profit in our in-school programs, but I don't think we learn as much about profit as we did when we started from scratch and picked a product, elected our officers, appointed our managers, set our companies up for success or for failure. There were companies that failed, many of them. They'd go from 18 to five and six kids. Believe you me, it was very hard as a program director. It was fun to walk into the company that had 18 kids and lots of buzzing and everybody was happy and smiling. And then the company that had five or six kids and they were down and grumbling, and uh, it was a whole different world. But it was a real world. And our job was to try to also let them know that there are successes and there are failures. And that you learn from failure as you learn from success. Sometimes you learn more from failures than you do from success.

There were an awful lot of things that you could do in those two hours, if you were on the ball and really with it. But teenagers are teenagers and it was a lot more fun to be in a company that was rolling along and making their products and making their bank deposits and meeting their payrolls and stuff like that verses the company that hadn't had any sales yet, and yeah it was, the Center was the center of Junior Achievement.

INTERVIEWER: And I've heard, John, that you had a whole basement full of some of their products along the way, and that you donated now to the Archives. What was the most unusual products, you ever saw, come out of the Center?

JOD: I wasn't at the center it came out of... but probably the most unusual product of all in Junior Achievement was made in Detroit by the Dodge Motor Company. The advisors and achievers sold enough stock that they rented a garage and they put together a car. They bought the parts from the Dodge Motor Company and the car was named the Royal Achiever. We've tried to trace the car. We don't know if it's scrap someplace now, but it was owned by several people, a couple of movie stars owned it. It traveled around; it was a neat automobile. And it took people from the Dodge Motor Company, as they called it then, to be the advisors to this company. It was unique because it met, not at a center, but it met at this garage and they bought the parts and assembled it, and painted it, and did the whole works. It was a year-long project.

INTERVIEWER: Now how about a product that you saw in your experience that did the best in sales?

JOD: The one that did the best in sales was when I was the executive director. See you had an executive director--that would be the equivalent of today's president. And then you had a program director. That could be, kind of the equivalent of today's executive director. But anyway, Western Electric had a huge assembly plant in Indianapolis. The advisors and achievers came up with the idea to make a pen set out of a miniature phone. They had to rent some space and they sold about \$35,000 worth of these phones. It was a going business. The kids had to come down on extra hours, and uh, that's the biggest in sales that I've ever had.

INTERVIEWER: Well, describe this pen that looked like a phone.

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JOD: It did. This was a phone that sat on the desk, a typical phone with a handle and, it was plastic. We had a mold and made a miniature phone. Then we drilled a hole in the handle and we put a pen in there. We had a pen set. Western Electric, then, must have had 15,000 employees. Well, when it first went to the factory, everybody in the factory wanted one. And then all up and down the state there was a lot of Indiana Bell operations and it took off like crazy.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. So the phone, itself, was not operable. It looked like a phone though,

JOD: Right.

INTERVIEWER: It was really a pen holder.

JOD: It was a pen set; A pen that you put on your desk.

INTERVIEWER: Did it have they names on it? A name plaque?

JOD: No. A decorative phone, you put it on your desk and away you go.

INTERVIEWER: Fantastic. What did those sell for?

JOD: I remember about a buck seventy-five [\$1.75], two and a quarter. Something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Wow. How about the car? What did that sell for?

JOD: Oh, gee. I've heard many prices, \$15,000, \$20,000.

INTERVIEWER: Whoo! That's great.

JOD: But those are the unusual things. The most popular of all products ever made in Junior Achievement were anodized aluminum hangars.

INTERVIEWER: Oh yes. Tell us about those, John.

JOD: I don't think there was a JA Center in the United States that didn't have at least one company making anodized aluminum hangars. And they normally were manufacturing companies that counseled, like Ford Motor or Chevrolet, or General Motors, and they were just a beautiful, heavy duty, anodized hangar. And they came in pink and gold, and silver. They were great. I must have 50 in our house alone. They never wear out. They're just terrific.

INTERVIEWER: How did that compare with what was being commercialized at the time—in the way of hangars?

JOD: Oh, you couldn't compare it. Most JA products, if they were good, you couldn't compare them with what was being sold and manufactured by industry. Because our kids were paid 50 cents an hour.

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INTERVIEWER: That's great. OK, Let's go back to making sure that I cover all your positions here, John. I know you were an advisor; I know you were a program director, and where did you move to next?

JOD: Well, I was a program director and then an associate director in St. Paul. Then I had a wife called Sam, and Sam had our first child in St. Paul. In those days training was different. Your executive director was your trainer. The national organization would pay the executive director if they hired him to go someplace. Now I say "him" because when I started out there were no women in JA. God love women. I sure do. But we had no women, other than secretarial, administrative people in JA.

If you look at old pictures of old conferences, where you take the group picture, you won't find a woman unless some waitress has gone by (laughs) and puts herself in the picture. We just didn't have any women in the picture.

INTERVIEWER: Why was that, John?

JOD: Why? It wasn't a rule. Most of the advisors were males. There were some females. But all of the executive directors were males. And there were a few female program directors.

I don't think it appealed to women. You know, it was a lot of stuff that women don't like to do so much. Well, you know, you had to clean toilets, sweep floors, clean machines, and you just did a lot of things. I mean the Junior Achievement was in its infancy. It could have died, but it took people to keep it going.

But then, my two years was up. That was my training. Now some people laugh at that, today, even. But I'll tell you, if you started with the right executive director, and you spent two years with him, and you recruited kids, recruited advisors, worked on fund drives, managed centers. You knew a helluva lot about your job in Junior Achievement when you came out of two years of actual experience—a lot more than the classes you invite me down to, where we have 45 minutes and up we got to go to another subject. You lived it. You learned it. You loved it.

That's where you separated people. People either fell in love with Junior Achievement and said: "I'm not going to make any money here, but I sure love this program and I believe in the free enterprise system. I believe in capitalism. I believe in people getting a head start. So, you became infatuated with what you were doing and what you could do. And money then, believe it or not, and that's not true so much nowadays, and I understand why, it was really, ... We griped about low wages. We didn't strike. But money wasn't, it wasn't the first thing on the list.

It was seeing young people with bright eyes and smiles, and learning about business and asking questions, and things like that. So anyway, my wife was pregnant, and my time was up. I was supposed to go to Wichita, Kansas. Now that sounded good to me. We didn't have choices or things like that. We had this one gentleman, Herman Gall, and he would open up a city, or cities, and you had to find somebody to run the city. So, they sent me to Wichita, and put me up at the

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Lassen Hotel; Great Hotel! Mr. Lassen was a member of the Board, and I had temporary quarters there, and my wife was back home with the baby.

I had my little fundraising manual; we did have a fundraising manual. Of course, we did have to start from scratch. In fact, most Junior Achievement Programs started in debt. Now that's not the way to start a business, but that's how we started Junior Achievement. All of us were in debt as soon as we got there—right off the bat. [Bangs on the table loudly:] We were in debt.

And I met with Mr. Mueller. He was the chairman of the board and president of the huge Ready-Mix Concrete Company there. Good German guy; big man. And I was in his office and he said, "John, well, what do we do first?" I said, "Well we got to raise money. [quotes Mr. Mueller] "Good! How are we gonna do it?" And I smiled. I said, "I have my fundraising manual here from National Headquarters. [quotes Mr. Mueller] "Let me see it." He shuffled through about a hundred and fifty pages, [quotes Mr. Mueller] "Ahh, that's not the way to raise money. Of course, that was the only way I was trained to raise money. He said "we'll do it my way."

And I said, "Pray tell, what is your way?" He said, "We're going to have a good old-fashioned barbeque, and I'm gonna invite my friends that have money and I'm gonna tell them up front you bring your damn checkbook. And you'll be fed, like you've never been fed before and you'll have enough beer to last you for a long time. And we'll have a fundraiser. And we'll raise all the money you need John, in one night."

Huh! I was, you know, eighteen, no I was 28 years old, 27; I'd never heard of raising money that way. This was Wichita, Kansas. But I did ask him a question. I said, "What if it rains?" And he was a big German guy, nice guy. Big guy; he looks at me, right in the eyes, he said, "It does not rain in Wichita this time of the year." (laughs) OK. Well, you know the rest of the story; it rained cats and dogs.

So, we got together the next morning, and I said, "well I've got my manual and I think it best if we put together a fund drive: get a chairman, vice-chairman, solicitors, goals, ... [quotes Mr. Mueller], No. I told you we're gonna have a barbeque. Well, I said "We just got rained out." He said, "it'll never rain twice. (laughs). So, we had another barbeque. And you now know the rest of the story; it rained out.

So, by the time we fooled around with all of this, Wichita did not open up that year. So now, I'm out there. I really have no job. My wife just had a baby. Jim Aldridge, of course, stole my spot immediately. It was only a three-person staff. Now where am I supposed to go? And thank the Lord for the national organization; they said, "hang tough. We'll find you a place to go, and then we'll find you an Area somewhere." And I called my wife and told her. And Sam was not thrilled about this (chuckles) very high-class way of selecting where you're going to work.

But anyway, there was an opening in Indianapolis. Now Indianapolis is a great city, good size city and somebody should have been applying for that. I couldn't figure out how I got the job without even interviewing for it. What happened was, the man that they hired had two business cards. One was for Junior Achievement of Indianapolis. And he had a center; ran a nice program there. Then he would go around the state of Indiana to Muncie, and to Fort Wayne and

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cities like that. He'd put on programs for the Rotary and Kiwanis to raise money to bring Junior Achievement to their city. Then he passed out his Junior Achievement of Indiana card.

Well, obviously he raised money, and didn't use it for that purpose. So, the founders of Junior Achievement in the, in Indianapolis took the keys and sent him back to New York. That's why I got that job, absolutely by default. I should not have had that job. The city had too much potential. It was too great of a city. I had too little potential, experience, but nobody wanted it because it had such a bad name. So, I took it.

I remember that Eli Lilly is still the main company in Indianapolis—pharmaceutical company. Truman Humer was the gentleman's name. And there was a Board of Directors set up. The Ernst and Ernst leader was the head man. That's where I had the nicest office, I have ever had in Junior Achievement - in his offices. I had a meeting and they went around the table pledging what they would do to get JA re-started.

Everybody looked to Lilly, because that was the barometer. What they did, the rest of them followed. Truman was a wonderful gentleman. He said, "Well, number one, we'll help rebuild the center here. We'll make a center for John and his advisors and achievers that we're all proud of. And we'll give you some advisors that'll be the best in the country. But we're not going to give one cent of money until we find out if this Dickinson is honest, or a crook." And that's (chuckles) how our funding started. Well, I was fortunate to turn out to be honest so it got off to a good start. So, then I became the Executive Director for Junior Achievement in Indianapolis.

On the wall here you have a gentleman by the name of Dave Hicks. Dave was the first man I ever hired in Junior Achievement. I was so scared. I had an office on the second floor of this garage and the ceiling was flaking, and I noticed this white stuff on his jacket. (chuckles) I didn't want to say anything. I was sitting on a nail keg with a pillow and a desk that we'd bought at a hardware store. Four sets of legs, and I talked him into being my program director.

Second session:

Interviewer: John, we are very excited that you're back again for the second half of the John Dickenson interviews with the archives project, so if you would for us, please state your name and what you did originally and what are some of the roles that you had in Junior Achievement, just very, very quickly.

John Dickinson: Well, thank you for inviting me back. It must mean the first time I failed, but what I, things that I've done before I went into Junior Achievement, I taught Problems of Modern Democracy in a vocational high school which means that's where they send all the bad kids, and I had the seventh hour detention class which really means that's where they sent all the bad kids. I sold Creamettes and Mother's spaghetti, that's how I got the nickname Johnny Noodle. I worked on an oar boat, I worked in a florist shops, I worked in a cement company, I shoveled flax out of grain cars. You name it. I've had a lot of jobs in my background before I went into Junior Achievement.

Interviewer: That's great, but then you were a center manager for a while and then?

John Dickinson: Well, I started as a Junior Achievement Program Director. That was the big second honcho in a two- or three-man staff. In the early-on days boards had a very strong opinion that they should hire people who were strongly orientated toward youth, of course, but towards the program. They felt that the JA professional should have the expertise in the program, then it was a single program, and the board would then raise the money, build the buildings, and do those kinds of things, but that just did not work. The boards were volunteers and they found that they didn't have the time to do such a thing, and so really, when you think of a staff and you think of a board, there are two identities. The staff should handle the everyday operations of Junior Achievement regardless of where he is or she is, and the board is governance and policy, and the two should not overlap. The board should stay with their responsibilities and the staff should stay with their responsibilities. When we have problems is when the board thinks that they are the Program Directors and the staff thinks that they're the board.

Interviewer: Right. That makes a lot of sense. I also know that you were a President of Chicago there for a while. Can you tell us, I mean, that's a pretty important position, John, and I know that things have changed in JA quite a bit over the years, well, can you tell us having walked in those shoes, what you would advise a new President today are their responsibilities? What's their role in Junior Achievement?

John Dickinson: Well, may I add that after the word Program Director, the next Executive Director was the name of the number one, uno person in the operation, then it was changed to Executive Vice President, then it was changed to President, and at one time Presidents could only have that title, and Junior Achievement of Chicago gave me the first title of President. That didn't mean anything to me. It was nice. The reason they did it was that all of the other not-for-profit organizations in the town of Chicago, whether it was the Boy Scouts or whatever it was, their leaders were called President. Chicago being a town that's ahead of the curve, so to speak, felt that at that time they weren't going to call me an Executive Vice President, they just said, you're the President.

That was the first title of President, was in Chicago, and then it started spreading because when I went to the meeting they'd put Executive Vice President on my nametag, and I let it stay that way, and one of the board members showed up at a meeting where there were other areas and I had Executive Vice President, and Chicago was a pretty independent group of business leaders, and big ones, he stood up and said, you have the wrong name on our leader. He's the President, not the Executive Vice President, and so that title sounded pretty good, and it grew from there, and at first you had to be in charge of a major metropolitan area.

Then, as we do nowadays, which is a weakness of our system, somebody got the idea that if only the larger areas the top executive could be called a President, that that would do damage, it would hurt the younger JA leaders, and that there would be kind of a chaos in the ranks, why is he a President and I'm an Executive Vice President? They missed the focus of that. The focus was supposed to be that the President represented a major portion of the Junior Achievement through being the head of the largest areas. It also set up a competition that if you wanted to

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grow in the ranks of Junior Achievement you go to a bigger area, and if everybody is President, then what's a President? It's everybody. Now, some people think that's very fair in today's world. I'm sure there's a lot of people who would agree that's the only thing they should have done, everybody is a President, but take a look at American industry. Not everybody in every company is the President. They might be a general manager, plant manager, but there is a President somewhere. So, that's a long way about how that came about.

Interviewer: Okay. So, back to the roles then, do you see a different role for somebody who is in a smaller area as a president today and in a larger area?

John Dickinson: I think the roles only change in the amount of the activity. I think the major role of any President, any size area, is to do three or four things. One, to develop a board of directors. That is the first and foremost thing, or reorganize the board, but you can't go anywhere without a top board of directors. Another main job of any President in any area is to recruit volunteers through means, of course, and the third one is to raise money. So, I've always marveled, in training we have manuals and manuals and manuals, and we spend hours and hours and hours, and there really is only three things or four things we need to concentrate on, is board development, fundraising, recruiting and training volunteers. That's the whole package. That's it. You do those three things, and you do them well, and you're going to be successful. Now, it's nice to know about all the other things that we throw into training, but sometimes I think we spend an abnormal amount of time on the other things.

Interviewer: Well, good. So, how would you mentor a new President, then, if they were just coming in? What are some of the first things you would tell them in the way of developing that board that's obviously one of the first, the first most critical step?

John Dickinson: Well, you have to look at...if he's stepping into a brand-new area, there are initial steps you take that you wouldn't take if he's stepping into an existing area, and then if you go to an existing area, there's different steps if it already has a high-level board or if it doesn't have a high-board. So, there's an assessment there. If it's a brand-new area and there's no board there, I would rather do that. I would rather start from scratch. If it's a successful area, that's more difficult because then you have to work to make it more successful. If it's an unsuccessful area and you don't change it, then you've lost it. If you lose it, you lose it.

I would tell him that you have to make an assessment of the board and you don't make any damn excuses. You can't use the time-worn Junior Achievement excuse, everybody is too busy, I've asked so many people, and as soon as somebody tells me, I've asked so many people, then I say, what about your board? Who are they asking? What do you mean? The board should be involved through a nominee committee in the development of the board along with the President. Sometimes staff get to the point where they feel they should do everything and the board does nothing but come to meetings, and then soon they lose the high-level board because if I'm a top-level man in a local area from a top industry and I come to a board meeting or committee meetings and all I do is hear reports or hear from the local staff person, you're going to lose me. I didn't come to get lectured to. I came to offer my talents, my skills, my company's resources to build a program called Junior Achievement. Now, you use me or you lose me, and it's as simple as that. You use me or you lose me.

Interviewer: Are you talking from the point of view of a board member?

John Dickinson: Right.

Interviewer: Okay, which leads me right into this next question that kind of correlates with all of this, what is the role of a board member, then? What would you tell them as you were bringing them onto the board?

John Dickinson: I think you have to say first it's governance, it's policy. That's really what the board is for, and they do it through the different skills that they bring. Of course, for instance, you'd want a key lawyer from a key law firm. Well, then he would bring his personal and professional skills and all the weight and background of his firm and resources to Junior Achievement. So, you fill the individual jobs that you need for a governance on a board. You're not going to have the board go out and recruit schools, recruit teachers, train consultants. That's all operational. So, what I would again say, the staff, regardless if they're the administrative staff or they're the key staff, they are the daily operations of Junior Achievement. They carry out the policies of the board, local and national, and the two do not and should not overlap, and it's a difficult job because many times the board members would like to be in the program, and many times the staff would like to be the board, but it's a team. It's a coordination of the two main function. One is governance, policy, making sure that the resources are there for the staff in terms of money, consultants, facilities, things of that nature. The other is to get the resources that the board has opened the doors for, do the training, do the recruiting, do the placements, do the fundraising, and those areas.

Interviewer: Okay, and I like your approach, it's very straight forward as far as you certainly want a lawyer on the board. What else? What other kinds of professions would be beneficial to a board?

John Dickinson: You know, you can almost go to the Yellow Pages, but you want a cross-section of your community. That's first and foremost, and a cross-section of the community would be their service industries, so a law firm would be a service industry. You want somebody from the communications industry, that could be radio, it could be television, it could be newspaper, it's a big area, it could be all three. You want somebody from banking, then you want somebody from the major industries, and you just go right through the town that you're in and pick the people from whatever the town is made up. It could be a difficult town because there are many not-for-profits here and you wouldn't want a whole number of not-for-profit leaders on a not-for-profit board, so you've got to be careful here that you get out to the MCIs and other things like that, but you take your community, you've got to do a thorough inventory of your community, you've got to learn what companies are there, what types of companies are there, and then you recruit people from those various industries, service or manufacturing, to fill the positions on the board.

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You go for the top person. Are you always going to get him? No, but are you going to get him if you don't try? No. Go for the top person. Is he busy? Certainly, he's busy, but any board that I've had, I want the busy people on the board. I don't want the board member who is not busy, because if he is not busy, there's something wrong.

Interviewer: Very good. A little while ago you mentioned training. How important is training and how is it different today than it was back in the early days?

John Dickinson:

Training back in the early days, I'd have to say certainly wasn't as good as the training is now in many areas. It wasn't as professional, we didn't have the technical advice, equipment, things of that nature, but it was a shoestring type of training. You did it by the seat of your pants. You learned by doing. You created your training. You were cooperative in your training. Maybe one area had a President that did a very good job of taking slides, say of advisor training, and then he would make those available to all of us, and training was not the same from one area to another.

There was a time early on when we had only the JA company program that many areas had their own Junior Achievement company manual. One of the big steps forward was when we finally put together a group of executives and we made a company manual that could be used by all, and we made an advisor guide that could be used by all.

So, training really came about by necessity and training came about by initiative. Early training was crude. Our strategic planning, for instance, I can remember clearly in some of our meetings when they would just say, all right, we have a big blackboard up here, and we want each of you to come up here and put down the number of companies you're going to have next year, and we'd all march up single file and write down 75, 100, or whatever it is, and then next year at the end of the year they'd tell us how we did. So, it was that simple. There was no book, there was no policy to it, it was just here's what I know I'm going to do. Myself and my staff and my board, we're committed to having 100 Junior Achievement companies in Chicago, in Cleveland, or St. Louis or Los Angeles, and by God, we're going to get them, and you believe me, and then next year when the year was over and we'd come to the national meeting, those numbers would be on a big board, and if the number you said was the same, great. If it was better, super. If it was under, what have you been doing? We had no real plan other than just a commitment.

So, training was a lot of, like I said, flying by the seat of your pants. It was a lot of commitment, it was a lot of taking initiative, it was stealing ideas from other people, it was learning from companies what they were doing with their employees and putting some of that into your training. I guess the key thing, you were responsible in your shop for your training. The national organization early on did not have major training meetings and did not have major training tools to send the area to be successful, and when I think back, there really should be a balance between the two. If you make it too easy, then it isn't going to happen the way you want it to. If you make it too hard, there isn't enough time, but there was a lot of difference.

There was a lot of sharing of ideas like there is today, but the sharing of the ideas was very sincere, very honest, and we did it in front of each other and we were very open. If we didn't think it was a good idea, right at the meeting we would tell the individual that, well, if that's the

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way you want to do it, good luck, but it was that kind of an entrepreneurial type of spirit that we had because we were small in number, mighty in compassion, and we just knew that we were going to do it. We didn't know how we were going to do it, but we were going to write the book. We were going to pave the way for the rest of the people to follow us.

And I guess that would be how life is in most organizations, that there's an initial group of people that are not polished professionals with all kinds of degrees and all kinds of sophistication, they're just good, plain old entrepreneurs, and when you think of that, that's what Junior Achievement is. It's entrepreneurial, and when you think of this nation, this nation is made up of more small businesses than large businesses, and the small businesses all put together are larger than the large businesses, and it's always been that way.

The entrepreneurial spirit is what has built this country to be what it is or what it isn't. It's the entrepreneurial spirit that's going to get this economy back on track again. It's the people who are going to take a risk and start a company and put ten people to work, ten people over here, and twenty there, and not be laying off 5,000 or something like that. Those, that's going to be the savior of this economy once more, and that really was what made Junior Achievement start to grow.

We were very competitive amongst ourselves. We were great friends, but we were very competitive. Like I said, very entrepreneurial. If we didn't have it, we created it. If we didn't have it, we'd steal it.

Interviewer: It sounds like there was a great spirit of cooperation rather than competition. Do you think that's changed today?

John Dickinson: Yes. I don't see the competition today that there was then, and I can't say whether that's good or bad. I am guessing that it's not as good because there isn't the competition between staff that we had earlier on, and I think that's because we're so much bigger, we have so many more activities, so many more programs that there aren't the opportunities to be competitive that way, and we don't come to a meeting thinking of being competitive as such. We come to a meeting to learn and put the skills to use in our area, to build a Junior Achievement program.

I don't really know which is best. I know what is most fun is being competitive. I mean, you don't win a football game by sitting on the bench, and I'd rather be on the team, playing on the field than sitting on the bench, and I look at being creative and competitive as the zest of life, the reason that the Good Lord gave us a good mind is to use it, and I have always said, and there is an old saying, if you don't use it, you're going to lose it, and that's true.

Interviewer: Well, you bring up a good point too about the changes that have taken place with all of the additional programs that we've had. How does the advent of the in-school programs, how has that affected Junior Achievement then? Certainly, it's changed the training aspect and the way we approach everything because let's face it, the first 55 years of the organization, there was only one program and now we have 23, so it does that make training a little more challenging?

John Dickinson: It does.

Interviewer: What else does it do to change the organization?

John Dickinson: Well, this is not bad, and maybe it's not good either, but as a rule, people do not work as long as they worked before. Now, I'm talking about hours on the job. When there was only the JA company program and a smaller staff, the President or chief executive or the uno, honcho, whoever he was or I say he, we'll talk about that later because then it was a good old boys club, the advent of women came along later, and that's too bad because women really should come first, but yeah, the fact that it affected the program, we worked longer because you were there usually eight, eight thirty, no later than nine in the morning, and you stayed there through the day doing the things that an executive should do in the day, recruit the advisors, recruit the schools, train the advisors, train the teachers, raise the money. Those were all daytime things. Get the center ready for the people at night.

Then bang came the night program, and the night program was what we had, but that was a whole different life. Then you spent your time making sure people were there, making sure that the machinery was ready to go, making sure that there wasn't chaos in the center, and then all of a sudden it was nine o'clock and the building closed. Well, you didn't jump in your car and go home to see your wife and kids because the Monday night advisors who you cultivated and motivated, and in the early days and every day we should be great motivators and cultivators, we would get together and go down to the local tavern and have a bunch of beers, and that was great for the Monday night advisors. They thought that was terrific. John bought us some beers and we had a hell of a time. So, ten thirty or so you'd get home. But then came Tuesday night, so you'd go out with the Tuesday night advisors, and then came Wednesday night, and you'd go out with eh Wednesday night advisors, and then came Thursday and you'd go out with the Thursday night advisors.

Friday was your night off, and then came Saturday. So, what did we do? We punished ourselves. We created things like trade fairs and events that took you all day Saturday, and they became successful, so then we extended the trade fairs to the whole weekend. So, we successfully got it to the point where we work all day, all night, and almost every day of the week. That's one of the big differences when the in-school programs started, the change there.

But one of the big changes that people don't talk about because there aren't many people that have experienced, there were troubles. I can remember and others can remember that, and I'll say this in all sincerity, that there were teacher unions at first that thought we, Junior Achievement, were trying to replace the teachers by coming into the classrooms with the programs. They didn't understand that we were bringing these programs with the human resources of person who is skilled in that part of the program to the classroom, we were furnishing the textbooks, we were furnishing the individuals, we were giving this to the schools, but you know, here we go, there was a fear that Junior Achievement had in the back of its mind that it was going to take over the classroom, replace some teachers. Nobody in Junior Achievement ever even thought of that idea,

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wouldn't even think of it, so many of us had a job to convince teacher unions and individual teachers of the hardcore group that we were here with an added service that we could have never had before, and we're offering it to you now.

So, that was one of the big things we had to do, was now selling the very people that we created the programs for that it was a good idea. It was not automatically accepted, and anybody who tells you that it was an instant acceptance, they're not telling the truth. In some cases, sure. Smaller organizations, smaller towns, but take big cities, New York, Houston, Chicago where they have big unions and tough unions and stuff, they kept an eye on JA for a while. They wanted to know what we were doing.

Interviewer: I bet they did. Well, we probably have time for a couple more questions here, John, so you just mentioned a little bit ago when women came in things changed quite a bit. Tell us about that change.

John Dickinson: Well, it was nice. It was excellent. I mean, diversity is great because it was all men except for administrative staff, and I think the first woman in Junior Achievement was Julie Hubbard, and she was involved in the Project Business Program. Now, I may be wrong, there may have been one or two ahead of her, but she was certainly one that most people remember did an excellent job, and the in-school programs, really started to bring women into Junior Achievement, and I bet you nowadays, and I don't think I'd be wrong, if we counted, whatever way we counted, we take the total population of Junior Achievement, all jobs, national and local, I bet there are more women than there are men. If we now count the Presidents, I bet you there are more women than there are men.

Interviewer: I believe it's at 80 percent right now.

John Dickinson: Eighty percent. So, we went from zero to eighty percent. Now, is that good? I don't think so. I think certainly there is a place and a fine place and a good job and profession for women in Junior Achievement, but I think we need to kind of keep a balance. I'd hate to see the day when it was like all men again, and I wouldn't want to see the day when it's all women. I think there's...you need a mix, and this is a tremendous profession for women and good-paying jobs and exciting futures, and wow.

Interviewer: Well, interesting that you bring that up. What would be the difference in the salaries from back then and now? The benefits, fringe benefits. Were there any fringe benefits?

John Dickinson: If you created them there were. There were not uniform fringe benefits. There were some areas where insurances were paid for men and not for women. Of course, that's a no-no, and thank God that's no longer in place.

Getting money to sell your house if it doesn't sell, there wasn't anything like that. Having two, three, or four trips to the city to look the city over to find a home, regardless if you had a wife or two kids or whatever, those kinds of things didn't exist. The first really fringe benefits as far as going from one area to another was when we got the moving van. That was really a step forward because for a long time we were encouraged to hire a U-Haul, and they'd pay for that. So, we

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went from the U-Haul to the moving van. That was a big step forward, and then we went from one short three-day visit to the city and you can't take your wife because that takes extra money, you look the city over, you pick out the house you think she'd like, and then...and wives don't go for that. So, there was a lot of those kind of things.

Fringe benefits were varied from area to area, and the way they grew is that we would tell each other. I remember one, I was in Cleveland and Karl [Flemke] was in Pittsburgh. If he got a raise then he'd tell me, then I'd go to my board and say, or vice versa. We did that. We had to; you know? We would put sheets in front of the board, here's the ten largest cities in the country and here's the salaries of the top person, and if you were in the middle or the lower part or the bottom, that really spurred your board on. Well, we can't have our guy down here. We've got to get him up here. But that, there wasn't anybody looking out for us and saying, be sure you give Dickenson or whoever a raise, we fought for it ourselves and we got it, and soon it became the norm. So, that's the entrepreneurial spirit again.

Interviewer: Very good. That's one way to do it. Well, if you were to say that Junior Achievement has lost one thing, what would that be?

John Dickinson: I think the biggest thing that we've lost, two things, I think we've lost a passion for Junior Achievement that we had because we were entrepreneurial and because we were competitive and all of those good things, and that's not saying people aren't competitive nowadays or don't have any passion, but I think we lost the passion for Junior Achievement.

And then as an event, I think losing the Annual Youth Conference for Junior Achievement was the single biggest loss that we've had of all the things that we've lost. The opportunity to have 3,000 to 3,500 outstanding youth leaders together in one place for a week and to build another layer of leadership and things like that, and for us to just say, with the in-school programs and all the things that we have to do, we just don't have time to have the conference, and that's really what happened if we're honest with ourselves. It was too damn much work on top of the work we already had, but it wasn't too much work when we had it. Being there alone fueled your engines and you got all revved up for the next year. I would like to see somehow, some way. We have so many committees, and that bothers me, but I'd like to see a group of people get together and brainstorm how to recreate a youth conference. It can be a different name, it can be a different size, it can be a different place, but you don't build the same loyalty and passion for Junior Achievement from the young people in the in-school programs as you did from the company program.

So, that's absolutely missing, and people say, is that important? Well, do we want Junior Achievement to end up being a delivery system where you create the programs, you deliver the programs to the schools, and the schools do the program? Is that what we want Junior Achievement to do? Maybe we do. Is that what I want Junior Achievement to do? No, but I'm only one. I won't be around that long anyway, but I think it's something that we've got to think about.

Interviewer: I think it's a great idea, and I can imagine that that group of people who make those sorts of decisions would have to consider the fact, though, that kids today aren't in a center

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and they wouldn't be able to use power tools and actually build or create their own products quite as easily as they could back then.

John Dickinson: Oh, there would be many challenges, many challenges, but that shouldn't stop us. When President Kennedy said, I want to be first on the moon, the United States...that was a hell of the challenge. I mean, he didn't say, I'd like to be, have our country first, or let's try to be, he said, we're going to be. So, we've got to say to ourselves, we're going to generate a new youth conference or conferences and do it.

Interviewer: I think it could be very beneficial, John. I think just hearing about the excitement from those days, it's just so absolutely wonderful.

John Dickenson: Well, if you would have been at the Bloomington Airport at Bloomington, Indiana and seen the number of private corporate jets that flew in there, that was the busiest day of that airport's life, and out would step these top business leaders, and right out into the conferences they would go, and they'd go into the groups and sit on the grass, fold their legs and talk with the kids on a one-to-one and a group basis, and eat with them at the mess hall. They didn't have their own private dining room. They'd grab the tray and sat down with the kids at the table from their delegation. You know, it was their delegation.

And it created a lot of student leadership and a lot of that student leadership is out there, and we've lost where they are, and a lot of them are out there that are extremely successful. Every once in a while, one pokes up their head and we try to corral them, but we didn't have enough insight even to track those kids. A foundation gave a grant to hire a staff to follow the kids that were in the conference, and we let that go to the wayside. It became an extra thing, you know? But if we would have done that, we'd be raising money now that we're not raising because a lot of those kids don't know that Junior Achievement can use some money.

The Achievers, they had an in-born system at the conference that built leaders on top of leaders. The best of, let's say the 3,500 or 3,200 or 3,000, the very best of the group then became what we called counselors for the next year's conference, two or three hundred would be selected. So, now that became a top-notch group. Then the counselors for the second year were the best of the first year, and the counselors for the third year were the best of the second year, and the counselors for the fourth year were the best of the third year. By the time you got to the end of the food chain you had some really top people.

Interviewer: Wow. That's great.

John Dickinson: And there is a way to get these kids out of a classroom into a conference. There has to be.

Interviewer: It's something we need to work on, for sure.

John Dickinson: We need to look at other organizations to see how they pull. Future Farmers of America. They go 10 or 15 thousand or whatever it is to Kansas City, and they're in small groups all over the place. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the successful youth organizations, and I say

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Junior Achievement still is the most successful and the most needed and the most powerful, we are the only one that doesn't have a student gathering.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, good. We're going to need your advice on all of that, John, I'm sure. Well, we have time for one more question, and I think it's really important because you certainly have a lot of background in understanding this. Sometimes we have a philosophy in the organization where we have a national office and we have the area offices, and sometimes you hear a lot about we and they. How do you prevent that sort of thinking? How can we change people's paradigm to help them to look at the us of the organization?

John Dickinson: Well, first of all there always was we and they, but it was the degree and it was how we were we and they were they. In the older days at conferences and things like that there was the we and the they, and there was the national and the local areas, and we disagreed and so on, but we disagreed in a, like a parliamentary fashion. If there was...we always had a meeting, a general meeting or general meetings where new ideas came to the floor, and we all had the same vote, and we would discuss it and discuss it, and maybe we won, maybe they won, but it was the degree, and we would have fierce competition between the we and the they, and we would talk about the we and they and how they're useless and we're not useless, and they don't help us, and we don't help them, but at the end of the day, we'd get together and have a few cocktails and we were friends until tomorrow's meeting when we'd start all over again.

But I think there's still too much we and they. Simply stated, and I'll say this, you cannot have a strong Junior Achievement nationwide movement and have a weak national headquarters, and you can't have a strong Junior Achievement organization and have weak areas. They don't mix, and if people would only remember that, and if there are people that think they're power grabbing then we've got to recognize who they are and kind of inform them, straighten them out, that this is still a team, and we've got to remember, like the board has got to remember, they're governance, the staff has got to remember they're the programs, we've got to remember that the national organization is basically a service and leadership organization. That's what they're supposed to give to Junior Achievement. The areas and their boards and staff are supposed to deliver the product to the students in that city.

It's all so simple. There's not a complicated thing about it. We make it complicated because we don't talk like we're talking just now. We hide it. We meet in the corner and we discuss what a bad guy this guy is or bad girl this girl is or why did they hire her? What does she know about it? That's how you build that anti thing. Open discussion. That's the way to do it. It's very simple. Junior Achievement, even with its many in-school programs, is still not complicated, and the authority of the board and the authority of the staff, we went through that, those things, they're not complicated, they've been the same and they'll always be the same because that's what the staff should do, and this is what the board should do, and we finally have agreed that that's what we should do, but we don't always do it, and we know what we and they mean, but we don't try to prevent the we and they by recognizing that we have the we and the they, and we work it out of the system by that simple thing that I said to you, you can't have a strong Junior Achievement with a weak national headquarters and you can't have a strong Junior Achievement with weak local areas, and if the two don't believe that they've got to get along together and work together, then you're always going to have we and they and they and we.

Interviewer: Well, John, the operating agreement right now is in place. How soon did that take place? Did you have an operating agreement like we had today?

John Dickinson: I don't know. We had an operating agreement as long as I can remember in Junior Achievement. It was not certainly as detailed and as complicated as the one now because we weren't worried about lawsuits and things the same way that we are nowadays, and that's not Junior Achievement's fault, but we had a manual of operations back as early as the early forties, and we had a good one. Joe Francomano was the author of the first book. I'll bring you one. I have several copies and as chairman of the archives that's giving my copies to the archives, but you know, we have that.

But we didn't use policy as the reason to be alive. We used it as a guideline and we used it when it was necessary. We didn't make it the reason for having something. We made it for the reason of solving something, but we didn't hold it over each other. You're going against policy. That wasn't our way of thinking, but we knew that policy can unify and is needed. So, I say it's just not complicated.

Interviewer: It's the spirit.

John Dickinson: It's spirit, it's passion, it's common sense, it's working together. It's no different than a coach and his football team or a lady and her tennis team or swim team. It's simply working together because we have the greatest program in this country of all the not-for-profit programs. We are part of the fabric of this nation and we will continue to be that way if the people in it let it be that way and make it that way. Success just doesn't happen. People make it successful. The organization doesn't make it successful. The local area doesn't make it successful. The national organization doesn't make it successful. It's the people in the organizations that make it successful, and we've got to remember that whether we're national, we or they again, it's the people in the jobs that make it successful, and as long as we can build on those people and get those people excited about what they're doing, you're only on this world for so long, you might as well enjoy your job and have some fun and do some things with it rather than gripe about it. If you want to gripe, then find another job.

Interviewer: Well, we have a lot to give and we need to start thinking, I think, in relation to how much we have to offer these kids.

John Dickinson: And we've become so departmentalized, which is good in some ways and also bad because then this department thinks it's overworked or it has more to do than the other department. It is the reason the JA is successful, they don't look upon the fact that there is, say ten departments and the people of the ten departments really make up the national organization, and the same with local staffs, you know. One JA President isn't going to make successful Junior Achievement operation. If it's a larger operation and he has an Executive Vice President or she has an Executive Vice President and other departments, they make it a successful organization. It's the people again. It's the People.

Interviewer: Is that your favorite slogan for JA?

John Dickinson: It's the people. Always has been, always will be, and we come in all shapes and sizes and some of us are quiet and some of us are loud, but you can tell somebody who has a real belief in this program, a passion for it over somebody where it's just a job, and of course the world is different now. We have five, six, seven jobs in our lifetime. In my lifetime and in my father's lifetime there was great pride in being with Western Electric for 40 years or being with Junior Achievement for 40 years and a 15-year pen meant just wow, and a 20-year pen was wow, wow, and you know, that's people.

Interviewer: Well, that is a beautiful note to end on, John. I know our time has come to a close, and it's always sad to have to end one of these sessions with you because our fireside chats are so absolutely wonderful. You are a world of information, and you certainly have the passion for JA, so we appreciate you so much and we're looking forward to having you out here to meet our new Presidents coming on board in just another week.

John Dickinson: Well, thank you for inviting me and thank you for letting me talk to the new Presidents because I have nothing technical to share with them, I have only my love for Junior Achievement and the people in it.

Interviewer: And that's so obvious, John, so thank you so much.

John Dickinson: Thank you.

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