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The Curious Case of Benjamin Printer

Staff Writers

Q&A with Benjamin Printer.

Editor's Note: Italicized phrases in the fictitious interview portion of this article are direct quotes from the movie "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

Benjamin Printer came into his business under rather unusual circumstances.

From an outsider's perspective, it seems as if Benjamin has a magical ability to stay in front of changes happening around him. He somehow moves forward faster—always in advance of the competition. He appears to be on the leading edge when it comes to innovation. He often has industry peers asking for his secret to success. Benjamin says simply, "It's really nothing anyone can't do."

When Benjamin opened the doors of his printing business on the morning of January 24, 1984, the first thing he did was invite nearby merchants over to see a high tech design device.

"Not sure what it's for," quipped one of them, "but I like that logo. Creative!" Benjamin smiled. Several visitors noticed the serial number on the machine was 000-0001, which they found almost as intriguing as its unusual name: Macintosh.

In the 1990s, Benjamin became one of the first printers to install a digital press, and from the start identified how to make it profitable by providing shorter runs and faster turnaround. Several upgrades later, today the talented team at Printer's Printers uses state-of-the-art technology to design sophisticated marketing programs that drive recipients to personalized websites. As a trusted business partner, clients consider Benjamin a pearl of wisdom.

During last month's 25th anniversary celebration, Benjamin—surrounded by his wife and three employees who have been with him since the beginning—said, "Looking around this room, I realize just how blessed my life is." Everyone in attendance thought, "I'm blessed for knowing you, Benjamin."

Recently, this reporter spent an afternoon interviewing Benjamin Printer at his new 8,000 square foot location, attempting to discover what makes Printer's Printers unique. The following is a portion of the transcript of that conversation.

The Interview

QP: *Benjamin, here we sit in New Orleans, so it seems appropriate to ask if there's some sort of voodoo that gives you insight on what moves to make with your business. Can you confirm or deny that?*

Benjamin Printer: "Hadn't heard that one before. *I guess you never know what's coming for you*, but the truth is I just spend a lot of time thinking about my business. The printers I meet seem to have more knowledge about equipment than about their customers and financial statements. I leave equipment details to our employees who use them, and focus my efforts on finding out how we solve problems for customers at a value that keeps us profitable."

QP: *You've been in business a quarter century and married 35 years. Yet, you don't look a day over 40, Benjamin. How does that work?*

Benjamin Printer: "That's the darnedest thing. When we moved back here, Daisy says, I was a lot older. *It's a funny thing about coming home. Looks the same, smells the same, feels the same. You realize what's changed is you.*

I promised myself when we opened that each day would be an opportunity to learn something new, and I guess that keeps you getting younger."

QP: *If you were delivering the keynote at this month's NAPL Top Management Conference in Tucson or at On Demand in Philadelphia, what message would you want to share with your peers?*

Benjamin Printer: I'd tell them to stop listening to all the negativity out there. Yes, the economy is tough, but that just means folks need more help right now.

You know, Along the way, you bump into people who make a dent on your life. Some people get struck by lightning. Some are born to sit by a river. Some have an ear for music. Some are artists. Some swim the English Channel. Some know buttons, some know Shakespeare. Some are mothers. And some people can dance. Those are your customers and prospects. Get out there and talk to them.

QP: *Anything else you would say to that audience?*

Benjamin Printer: Yes, see yourself as an organization that helps your customers communicate with their customers.

And, as long as you asked, David, I'd tell them, It's never too late, or in my case, too early to be whoever you want to be. There's no time limit; stop whenever you want. You can change or stay the same; there are no rules to the thing. We can make the best or the worst of it. And I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things you never felt before. I hope you meet people with a different point of view. I hope you live a life you're proud of. If you find that you're not, I hope you have the strength to start all over again.

Not exactly Zig Ziglar or Tony Robbins, is it? It's just the view of a guy who believes life is meant to be lived.

Benjamin Printer is the most unique person I've met in the past decade. He is invigorated by finding creative ways to connect Printer's Printers' expertise with customers' and prospects' unique needs. He appears to be getting younger, while the challenges and changes inherent in this industry seem to be making everyone else grow older. Maybe Benjamin's philosophy to spend time engaging with those outside his business—and allow the folks inside to do their jobs—is the fountain of youth.

Back Story

Somewhere around 1921, perhaps in a rare moment of sobriety, the great writer F. Scott Fitzgerald found motivation in a single sentence written by the previous generation's legendary humorist Mark Twain: "It's a pity the best part of life comes at the beginning and the worst part at the end."

Those words inspired Fitzgerald to pen a short story for *Collier's Magazine* that would, nearly 90 years later, serve as the basis for an Oscar-worthy blockbuster about a man who lives his life backward: being born old and growing young. That film—especially many of the quotes borrowed for Benjamin's interview—inspired this fictitious tale of the printer you might choose to be.

David Handler is the founder of Success Handler, LLC, an executive coaching firm that helps clients explore possibilities for achieving what they desire in business and life. Many reviewers derided "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button." However, David found it to be a lesson about the importance of growing younger each day. Perhaps that's why he's a coach and not a critic. For inspiration on how to achieve the future you want, send an email to coach@successhandler.com or visit www.successhandler.com.

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