

## **Pass It On**

by iPriority

Ron Baker is the president and CEO of Intouch Telecommunications, Inc., an Atlanta-based communications technology company. Intouch provides communications products and services such as business telephone systems, network-cabling infrastructure for voice, data, video, and fiber optic applications. They also provide switching technology, audio/video conferencing, high speed Internet access, and local telephone service.

### **How has your personal background contributed to your professional success?**

I go back to my early work experience. I remember being 10 years old and caddying for semi-professional golfers. That gave me an early exposure to a variety of people. Then I had other small jobs like working in a grocery store. I watched how the owner ran the store. It helped give me a sense of independence and what that's like.

I also used to love to read biographies, especially successful people. I read about Thomas Edison and the trials and tribulations that he went through. I remember reading about John Johnson in his book *Succeeding Against the Odds*. That led me to a great educational experience, which I think is extremely important. All of that prepared me for my first real corporate experience right out of graduate school, which was working for IBM.

### **What lessons have you found to be important for getting and staying ahead in business?**

First, you must have excellent products and services. When I started work with IBM, one of the projects I worked on was doing the market research for the grocery store scanning systems, which weren't available back then. Now you see them in every store. When I was working for the 3M company we sold early day facsimile machines. Now everybody has those. So, you need to have cutting edge products that everyone needs.

Second, you must provide value-added benefits in addition to the products and services you sell. People still have issues and concerns or problems that need to be solved. If you are good at identifying and providing solutions to those problems, then you are far ahead of the competition.

Third, nothing takes the place of hard work. If you outperform the competition, then that puts you ahead of the curve as well. Finally, I think business relationships are more important than ever. People do business with people that they like and trust.

### **How do you strike a healthy balance between your personal and professional life?**

Obviously, you need to work hard, but I think you have to find time for recreation and relaxation. You have to step back to rejuvenate yourself and reflect upon what you are doing, where you have been, where you are going, and what you want to do in the future. It's also important to remember to exercise both your mind and your body. It helps to keep you sharp and stay balanced.

You also have to prioritize. This includes putting your spiritual life in order. My grandfather used to always tell me to be careful not to lose my soul. What he was saying



was that I should maintain that closeness with God because at the end of the day that's the only reality that there really is. Family and friends are very important too because that provides the support that you need in times of crisis or adversity. When you are facing adversity you either grow stronger in faith or you move away from faith. If you grow stronger in faith, you will get through the adversity. And I want to grow stronger in faith.

## **What advice would you give to emerging leaders today?**

If you find something that is successful for you, pass it on to successive generations, to those people that are following you. It would be an unfortunate thing to know something special but leave this world without passing it on to someone else who needs that help.

When I was growing up mentors were far and few between but today there are lots of mentors out there. That is one of the things that I enjoy doing: giving back and working with the community and those people coming up behind me.

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