

Threading together ideas and passion

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What were your career plans when you first enrolled at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne?

When I first enrolled at IPFW, my career plans were in secondary education. Going through high school I always thought that I would become a teacher and coach basketball or baseball. My first year at IPFW, I realized being a teacher wasn't a good fit for me. So, I switched my major to business management. At that time I didn't have a clue what I was going to do with that degree, but I felt like there were endless possibilities that I could pursue.

What happened to change those plans? Where did you end up working?

When I switched to business management I was also working in my father-in-law's pig business. I had started working in that business as a high schooler in the summers. I did everything from working in the office to working on the actual farms. There were some opportunities within that business that intrigued me, to the point that I decided to put college on hold and go to work full-time in that business.

After the first couple of years I was provided an opportunity to manage one of the facilities. I managed that particular facility for 7.5 years and later moved into another management position for a couple of years within the company. I learned and experienced a great amount during my time there. It was a production-based business that was set on a pretty routine schedule. I was able to learn how to manage people, a schedule, deliveries, deadlines, quality control and customer service. One of my main takeaways I learned early on was to do whatever it took to get the job done and get the job done right. Working in the pig business created a work ethic in me that I can carry on forever.

What prompted you to get involved in a screen printing business in Bluffton?

Getting involved in the screen printing business was just something that kind of came out of nowhere. It wasn't something that I was seeking out by any means, but when the opportunity presented itself it was something I was immediately interested in. I thought it would be awesome to start creating T-shirts, jersey's, hats, etc. I have always had a passion and interest in design and art. So, I thought creating designs for apparel would be a really cool way to utilize that.

This was a family business that was put together in 2013 and I was one-quarter owner of the company. My initial role with the company was going to be geared more towards sales. I was also involved with some of the production at the beginning as well. By starting out in the sales part of the business I was able to see



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what customers were wanting, how we could best service them and zero in on certain markets. As the company grew I started to take over a bigger role within the company and started to oversee and manage the company as a whole. I was with that company for just over four years.

In the fall of 2016, I started to think about the possibility of either moving that company or starting my own in Fort Wayne. I live in Fort Wayne and the drive down to Bluffton was getting longer each day. Especially with my kids getting more involved with after school activities and games it was becoming tough to make it to all of their events.

What did you learn from that experience?

I learned a ton from my experience in Bluffton. For one, I am very thankful for that experience and every challenge that came with it. I was able to work with family and some good people that I still have relationships with today. I was able to gain experience on how a business can be run as a whole, other than just from the operations side of things. I learned a lot about customer service and building relationships with customers. I learned how to better manage employees and how to create a culture that hopefully everybody wants to be a part of. It also taught me a lot about who I am and where I want to be in this industry.

How did you come to open your own business in Fort Wayne?

I was able to open 18 Threads in Fort Wayne with the help of a lot of people. The main one being my wife, Mindy. Without her support and guidance I doubt I would have been able to make it happen. I also had a great deal of help from a friend and business mentor. He was able to guide me through the whole process and help me every step of the way. I knew what I wanted 18 Threads to be and had a vision of what it could do, that was the easy part. But, from establishing a new company from a start-up phase I had a lot to learn and am very thankful for his help. There are many others that have helped tremendously as well. Everybody that got involved with 18 Threads along with some loyal customers gave me the confidence that I could open this company in Fort Wayne.

Briefly describe what 18 Threads does. How does it differ from the business in Bluffton?

18 Threads is a custom apparel company. Yes, we screen print and embroider, but it is so much more than that. 18 Threads is different because we want to focus on the overall experience a customer has. We want to be able to provide each customer with an experience that best represents their school, company or their particular brand all while wearing something they love to wear. 18 Threads has a certain vintage style and a boutique feel to it. We want to be able to connect with the city and provide an apparel company people love to work with. Services offered are: screen printing, embroidery, custom designs, custom online stores, quick turnarounds, deliveries, etc. People can stop by our store anytime, have a cup of coffee, and we'll work through their entire order with them.

Where do you go for ideas and answers to business questions?

A lot of my business ideas come from customers and the feedback I get from them. I also am always trying to learn new things and research new ideas and techniques. I read a lot of business articles and listen to entrepreneur podcasts. "How I Built This with Guy Raz" is my personal favorite. I lean heavily on my business partners and their experiences as well as other people that know me best.

How have your partners/mentors influenced your business decisions?

They have helped put things in perspective. I think when anybody wants to start up an new business or they have a certain idea the excitement level can possibly lead them into some bad decisions. I was very fortunate to be able to partner up with a group of individuals that have a lot of experience and knowledge in areas that I do not. They have been awesome to work with along the way and I will continue to lean on them and their advice moving forward.

Where would you like to see the business go from here?

I want the business to continue to grow and evolve each and everyday. I want 18 Threads to be on the top of everybody's mind when they are in need of custom apparel. I would like to see the company start to take on an identity that represents who we are and what we do. You're going to have an awesome customer experience, we can provide that modern vintage feel to anything you need and we will work with you or your team to satisfy any order you are interested in. I want 18 Threads to be the brand that represents your brand.

By Linda Lipp. To suggest a "Career Path," email llipp@kpcmedia.com.