

The Legacy of Jim Russell

An Authentic Leader Who Made a Lasting Impact

By Ron Price

Once in a while you encounter a great leader whose authenticity shines through in every decision he makes. W. James “Jim” Russell was such a leader. He was a man whose work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit helped him start and grow several successful businesses. But Jim was much more than a successful leader who was focused on maintaining the bottom line. He was a leader whose positive impact extended throughout his organization. He led by example and his leadership cues were easy for his entire team to follow.

Jim began his career selling business forms out of the trunk of his car. He eventually started three corporations: RBF, Inc. of Lansing; Arbor Press Printing of Royal Oak; and AM Press of Royal Oak, serving as CEO of their head company.

Jim had many of the characteristics of a complete leader, but there were several that stood out.

Jim was a clear thinker who had the ability to visualize what he was trying to accomplish. His favorite quote was from author Peter Drucker, “It’s more important to do the right things than to do things right.” He used that quote to guide his business decisions. His clarity was felt throughout the organization as managers and employees alike followed the motto and ran the business accordingly.

Jim constantly participated in continuing education. He craved additional knowledge and was able to improve processes and even management principles due to the things he read and the lessons he learned.

He was also excellent at managing himself. He knew the importance of discipline and how to save time, energy and effort by managing oneself well. Jim set a standard for self-management throughout his companies with his discipline and military-like attention to self-management. (This shouldn’t have been surprising, as he did serve in both the Korean War and World War II.) His attention to self-management could sometimes be intimidating, but ultimately it was inspirational to his team.

Jim was a caring leader who was able to see the value in every member of his team. He held his employees to a very high standard, and because of that many of his employees became high achievers. Jim was invested in their career and

life success, and they reaped the benefits of his elevated benchmarks and his belief in them.

As mentioned before, Jim was authentic. He was a great leader who drew from the feedback of others, yet who instinctively knew who he was. He was proud to lead his business in an ethical way, and completely devoted to his philanthropic efforts. He was known for speaking the truth, no matter how controversial the issue or unpopular the stand. He never failed to articulate his views on moral matters.

He and his wife Phyllis started The Amy Foundation in 1976, which was named for their youngest daughter. Jim inspired writers throughout America to share their viewpoints on spiritual issues in the mainstream print media. He was a quiet man who eventually became a towering figure in religious journalism.

Jim received the Doctorate of Humane Letters from Greenville College in 1995. He spoke at various functions on the subject “Awakening the Giant,” which was the name of his first book. He was a regular on PrimeTime America on the Moody Broadcasting Network.

Four qualities necessary for leadership excellence:

- Clear thinking in an increasingly complex world
- Leading yourself to develop strong teams and results without excuses
- Leading others through transcending results to achieve lasting impact
- Authenticity in who you are and who you want to become

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