LIFE IS A POKER GAME

By James A. Kandrac

It’s called “theatre in the round.”

May I suggest regardless of the path you choose: you can’t get where you’re going if you don’t know where you want to go. Young men and women’s goals can certainly change over time. Unexpected turns can create completely different and unanticipated outcomes…and life, as a poker game, continues to roll.

The compelling theatre.

A basic plan. Work it. Be flexible enough to change it. Nothing too detailed or exotic. Remember, Southwest Airlines started on the back of a cocktail napkin and of the U.S. majors, is the only profitable airline.

The beginning.

At the age of 12 I began molding my plan. I wanted to work for IBM. Back in the mid 1970’s, IBM was a growing company in the technology field. That’s all I knew. I wanted a good job, wanted to sell and make money! After completing undergraduate studies at Cleveland State University in 1983, I entered graduate school and successfully started my dream with an internship at IBM. I quickly became disenchanted. IBM may be challenging and rewarding for some. I found it to be extremely political and not an environment I would prosper in and enjoy, long-term. Politics was part of the game and I didn’t want to play. I was born to be an entrepreneur and control my destiny, but didn’t know where to go.

After a six-month search, the president of an entrepreneurial $18M computer leasing firm brought me on board as his assistant. Within 12 months, I was promoted to sales and helped grow the firm to $125M in three years. We went public and soon thereafter, the environment changed from entrepreneurial to political. Additional layers of
management were created, territories and commissions were reduced. The company needed to appeal to Wall Street and shareholders, and unfortunately for me, the firm became a “mini-IBM”.

In June 1987 I went home to my wife of two years and six month old daughter. In December 1987, at age 26, I founded United Computer Group, Inc. (UCG) with $30,000 in savings, and gave myself six months to make it.

Catch perfect.

Today, UCG (now UCG Technologies), is a successful and growing company and has been for nearly 30 years. This is not because I am overly intelligent, but because the UCG team has focused and worked harder than our competitors. People and great clients are your most important assets.

Require them to work hard, be honest, take pride in what they do and have fun at it. A marriage of any kind isn’t easy. Go after your dreams and do not give up.

My most important asset, valued over everything else, has been the never-ending support of my wife Pam. Excitement, challenges, successes, and even failures.

I controlled my destiny.

Remember: Life is a poker game. You can’t get where you’re going if you don’t know where you want to go.

Lessons learned over three decades—1985 to 2016.

- Grades are important but not necessarily indicative of a person’s ability.
- ‘A’ students usually end up teaching and ‘B’ students end up working for ‘C’ students.
- Always maintain a positive attitude.
- What goes around comes around.
- The harder you work, the luckier you get.
- If you work for a company, realize why you are there.
- The ‘other side’ isn’t always greener.
- Bigger isn’t always better.
- There is no replacement for face-to-face marketing.
- Life is a poker game. Play your five cards the best you can.
- Nothing is forever.
- Differentiate yourself and be unique.
- The customer is always right – even if they are wrong.
- Focus on the positive.