



## **Peter Schottland**

President and CEO of American Packaging Corporation

*"All who have accomplished great things have had a great aim, have fixed their gaze on a goal which was high, one which sometimes seemed impossible."*

*Orison Swett Marden*

If Peter Schottland's success is easily distilled to a single core attribute of his, it would with certainty be his ability to turn a bad situation around to work in his favor. Beginning with his earliest days, it could be said that Peter had more than his share of challenges. It was his ability to overcome difficulty that has determined the outcome in each situation and he considers each one of these challenges a turning point on his road to success. As we'll see, with each one of them, Peter has become a stronger person.

To begin with, when Peter was six years old, his mother became ill and was hospitalized for months. Peter was not allowed to see her and it was a stressful time for a little boy. Soon afterwards he was diagnosed with psoriasis. In order to treat this, he had to wear cumbersome plastic gloves and make near constant use of a medicinal cream called Salva. As anyone with public school experience could probably guess, Peter was the victim of endless harassment by his peers.

During his sixth and seventh grade years, he was actually transferred between schools no less than four times in an attempt to find a better learning environment for him. In his seventh grade year he was sent to a private school, but then asked to leave due to poor performance after only seven

weeks. As the youngest of three siblings, with a father who was constantly working, Peter found that he had little choice but to “figure things out for himself”.

Despite these difficulties, Peter said that he learned three critical things from the experience. Firstly, he became fiercely independent. Secondly, he developed the ability to quickly make friends, something that would prove invaluable at his first job some years later. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, he developed a thick skin and the ability to persevere. As he himself puts it: **“Taking rejection became my specialty.”**

*Although he finished high school ranked near the bottom of his class (195 out of 220), he defied the projections made about him, fought his way into college and graduated with a degree in business. Peter came to realize something from his time in college, which was that although he hadn't begun from the best set of circumstances, there was nothing inhibiting him from setting and meeting realistic goals. In short, there was nothing to hold him back from success. As he puts it:*

*“I came home after my freshman year in college thinking I had done well with a 2.3 GPA, but in reality I had greatly disappointed my father. I made a decision that I was going to get a 3.5 GPA, because I wanted to and found that if I set my mind to it, then I would achieve the goal. This taught me I can do anything I want if I put my mind to it.”*

Shortly thereafter, he secured his first job as a salesman with a Wall Street firm known as Kidder-Peabody. He recalls feeling that it was something of a dream job, as they sent him to Manhattan to train him, during which time he experienced a very glitzy and luxurious lifestyle. What he wasn't quite prepared for was the actual nature of the job, which consisted of making several hundred cold calls a day in an effort to generate sales. At first, Peter had a difficult time of this and even wondered if his hard-won job was in jeopardy, when he experienced a breakthrough that changed

his entire way of thinking; that qualifies as the second of his major turning points.

During a call to a potential client, he recognized the person as one of his neighbors and said so. As soon as he brought that up, he noticed that the person became much more receptive to his calling and he was able to get his pitch across much more clearly. His sales took an upturn and Peter caught on to a new tactic. Drawing on his schoolyard ability to quickly make friends, he introduced himself to nearly everyone as "someone who lives in the area", or "a neighbor", and was genuinely amazed at the change in attitude it inspired in people. Within no time at all, he was one of the top sellers in the firm, and it was a joke around the office that Peter lived within 1 to 2 miles of every person in the Philadelphia area.

At the age of 29, however, Peter left his successful position at the firm for an opportunity to join the family business. The company, American Packaging Corp., had an office in Rochester and before long Peter found himself shipped off there from Philadelphia. He was to run the plant, which at first was an exciting prospect, but he quickly realized that **there is more to a deal than meets the eye**. The previous management had serious quality and productivity issues. The plant was staffed heavily with ex-convicts, and a severe drug and alcohol problem existed. As Peter puts it, it was "like walking into the wild, wild West".

Nevertheless, Peter was used to dealing with difficult situations and devoted himself to turning the situation around. Despite considerable stumbling blocks, including threats on his and his family's lives and explosive demolition of their mailbox, Peter eventually succeeded in his vision, and his Rochester plant became one of the most successful in the whole company.

Between 1996 and 1999, the family business began to fall on hard times. Because of his successful track record at the Rochester plant, Peter was elected as the company's CEO in December 1999. At first, he was quite pleased with the outcome, but like most things in Peter's life, he was soon faced with difficulty and incredible obstacles. No more than

two weeks after his appointment and promotion, the bank that had financed the business pulled their loan. Peter was faced with the prospect of finding the money to pay them off and the massive task of keeping the business afloat in the process.

This being one of his greatest challenges, Peter felt the pressure of the entire family counting on him for survival until his wife Susan, with a few subtle words, reminded him that he had already faced and overcome worse obstacles than this. "What's the worst that could happen?" she asked him. Peter said, "We can sell all the operations, except for Wisconsin, and survive." Susan's response was "No problem. Just let me know when you want to look for homes, and we'll sell everything here and move." **What Susan had done was to remove the fear of failure and taken much of the pressure off of Peter's shoulders.** For the first time, Peter took an objective look at his circumstances, and not surprisingly, found a way out. In the end, he did pay off the loan and turn the business around.

Without a doubt, Peter has faced significant difficulties throughout all areas of his life, both personal and professional. Nevertheless, thanks to the lessons he learned and took to heart as a child, he has always faced them with courage and conviction and found ways to overcome them. Bolstered by his turning points, to this day, Peter continues to challenge himself and expand his horizons with business ventures, confident that no matter what challenges arise, he will prove to be more than a match for them.