

Requiem For A Heavyweight



BY JIM PREVOR

A man is dead. He was not famous. His life was not glamorous. But he was my friend, and in important, if often unappreciated ways, he influenced the kind of produce industry we have today and will have tomorrow. His life stood as an example of many things to his friends and loved ones, but to all human beings, his life stands as an example of how broad and deep the influence of one man can run if he is only willing to give his all.

Stan Silverzweig liked it when I would quote economists and other theoreticians in my columns. We spent many a night reflecting on the lessons taught by Joseph Schumpeter and that economist's recognition of the importance of continuous destruction to the creative rebirth of an economy.

How I wish I could see the creative destruction in this terrible loss.

Stan was a soft-spoken man, and when I think of him I am reminded of another economist, John Maynard Keynes, who once wrote that "Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist... It is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil."

Stan lived and worked in the realm of ideas, and as such, though no store carries his name, no produce label celebrates his image, the influence of his ideas and methods serves as a daily monument to his life. Thousands who never heard of him work daily in service of the principles he taught them.

Of course, for some people, the interaction with Stan was intense. Hundreds of individual family businesses, mostly independent supermarket chain owners, worked with Stan at the D'Agostino/Silverzweig Entrepreneurial Institute, which Stan founded jointly with Nick D'Agostino of the New York supermarket chain. In this venue, these families wrestled with significant issues such as succession planning. There

are, without a doubt, businesses and families that thrive today because they went through this program, where otherwise the business would have failed and the families would have known only disharmony and rancor.

Others worked on projects with Stan and me, when, some years ago, our company, Produce Solutions, Inc., developed projects for companies and associations great and small. How I remember the joy people felt when we completed a strategic planning workshop and people came away empowered, recognizing their own ability to lead a different life.

Many had the opportunity to work with Stan and his wife, Mary, who together did countless projects. Mary is the Mary of "Minute in the Kitchen with Mary," a pioneering effort in in-store video, still seen in supermarkets across the country, in which Mary promotes the benefits of many fresh produce items. Under the Silverzweig Associates umbrella, Stan also did countless consulting projects for everyone from the smallest retailer to giants such as Wal-Mart and Sun World.

Yet there are thousands of people all across the front lines of the industry who were, to no small degree, trained by Stan Silverzweig though they never even met. For Silverzweig Associates was the developer of PMA's extensive video-based retail produce clerk training series which was funded by a grant from Chiquita and remains to this day the industry's most widely used retail training tool. Utilizing highly progressive programmed instruction techniques, Stan weaves his magic. Indeed, in addition to actually producing the tapes and the accompanying workbooks, Stan participated in countless "Train the Trainer" sessions in which he taught supermarket personnel how to use the videos and workbooks to train their own staffs.

So, next time you are in a supermarket and a clerk does something right, remember there is a good chance that Stan Sil-

verzweig's life just made yours more pleasant. If you are in the produce business and so depend on the ability of retail clerks to market effectively, know that Stan Silverzweig's life made yours more profitable.

Stan's great gift was an ability to teach without ever making the student feel inadequate. His professional and personal method was to teach a student, or a friend, by making them aware of their own value. Not long after Stan met Mary, she assessed their relationship: "After 28 years of being alone and lonely, of searching for the man I'd daydreamed of since I was 10, of sorting, appraising, and rejecting men of various shapes, persuasion, and types, I felt that I had finally found the missing piece to the puzzle of my personality. Stan was any number of things that I was not and never could be, yet he made me realize in a very short time I was much more the kind of person I wanted to be than I had ever imagined. I didn't want to lose him."

Neither did I.

**Stan Silverzweig
was a true
champion in
the produce
industry.**

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