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REPPS HUDSON



ON THE JOB

ST. LOUIS AT WORK
THE PERSONALITY OF BUSINESS

"My job is to minimize damage. We're in the business of salvaging things. We're not in the business of replacing things." *Jeff Owens*

Entrepreneur has simple credo: Take care of the customer

Firm founder Steve Malyszko finds success focusing on a niche engineering market.

BY JACK NAUDI
Of the Post-Dispatch

Steve Malyszko has a simple message to fellow engineers: Dare to dream, because you can become an entrepreneur without earning an MBA or taking man-

agement classes. He preaches the message because he's lived it for the last 10 years. It was unsettling when he left a secure job and income at a leading engineering firm to start his own company, but Malyszko knew he could succeed. Indeed, by most measures, his company — with a phonetically gentler version of his last name, Malisko Engineering Inc. — is successful. It has grown from a one-person operation to a 20-person

shop with annual sales of \$3.5 million. The founder has done so by focusing on a niche engineering market: developing systems that automate production and manufacturing lines. Even a steady decline in manufacturing has not deterred Malisko's growth. Malyszko, 50, has managed to guide the company without formal management training. "I'm a geek engineer," he recently told a group of chemical engineering students at *See Malyszko, C3*



DAVID KENNEDY

Dan Ethridge, production manager at Western Plastic, a customer of Malisko Engineering, says a worker can be trained in a couple of days to make a batch of plastic using the computer.

Steve Malyszko: Title: President, founder, Malisko Engineering Inc.
Year founded: 1994
Company address: 707 North Second Street, Suite 650, St. Louis

Annual sales: \$3.5 million
Key customers: Mead Johnson, Nestlé Purina Pet-Care, Anheuser-Busch Cos., Nestlé SA

Education: Bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from Colorado State University
Previous work: Raiston-Purina until 1982, French Gerleman until 1994

Malyszko

He soaks up articles, books, pearls of wisdom

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Michigan State University, where he was invited to speak about entrepreneurship.

"If you think you want to run your own company, you can do it. I'm living proof," he told them.



Malyszko
Keeps things simple

publication in 1980. The article lists key elements for engineers to follow if they own their own businesses.

From "become the best engineer" to "remember that success will stem from self help," its nine components have served as Malyszko's blueprint. Periodically, he rereads the list to make sure he's not straying.

Running a business "doesn't

have to be complicated," said Malyszko. "I'm a simple person. I think in black and white. I try to keep things simple."

Which leads, of course, to another of his adages: KISS, for Keep it simple, Stupid.

The simplest principle is finding an engineering niche without a lot of competition. For Malyszko, that wasn't difficult. Long able to move between computer programming and engineering, his forte has been developing software to automate production lines.

In 1994, when he left his last employer, French Gerleman in Maryland Heights, he knew it would be foolish to head into other engineering specialties. For that, he credits Peter Lynch, the famed former manager of the Fidelity Magellan fund.

Lynch has stressed in several books that people should invest in things they understand.

"If you want to succeed, be the best you can be, but stick with what you know," said Malyszko, paraphrasing Lynch.

An admitted Type-A personality, Malyszko rarely slows down. A three-sport athlete in high school, who last year was inducted in the Bishop DuBourg High School in St. Louis sports hall of fame, he won a football scholarship to Colorado State University. While there, he picked up skiing, which quickly became a passion.

When Malyszko isn't putting in 60 hours a week, he oftentimes can be found on a Colorado mountainside.

His energy also helps as Malyszko follows a critical axiom: keep the customer happy.

"I can spell success in two words, repeat business," he said. "As corny as it sounds, I've always believed that if you take care of the customer, the rest will take care of itself.

Relationship-building has been a cornerstone of Malisko's growth. Virtually all the company's business comes from existing customers like Mead Johnson & Co. and Nestlé Purina PetCare Co., or from referrals by satisfied customers.

That's allowed Malyszko to spend less time on sales and more time as an engineer.

"Even though I know I have my presidential duties, and all of that, 95 percent of the hours I put in every week is billable," he said.

As for the future, Malyszko said he doesn't have difficult goals. But he said he will continue to strive for excellence.

"I don't want to fall into the trap of some other engineering companies I have seen who have really fallen on tremendous hard times in an economic slowdown because their work was perceived as mediocre."

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