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CEO of Digital Consulting Institute plays role of coach

Don Staruk
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George Schussel, 60, founded the Andover-based Digital Consulting Institute in 1982. The company, which hosts high-tech trade shows for Internet technology employs 110 people and has expanded to include Web communities. "A trade show allows people to build networks for a week. A Web community extends that network for 365 days a year," he said. The company generates \$40 million in annual revenue

Schussel lives in Lynfield with his wife, Sandi. They have two grown daughters.



George Schussel, CEO of Digital Consulting Institute of Andover, climbs Mount Washington.

Salary: "In a good year, a lot. In a tough year like 2001, I'm often introduced to new employees as 'the lowest paid employee at DCI.' "

Education: Bachelor's degree in physics and math, University of California; master's degree in applied math and computer science, Harvard University, 1962; doctorate in marketing and computer science, Harvard Business School, 1966.

Awards: Dr. Schussel was awarded the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers Computer Society's Computer Entrepreneur Award for

1998. Other recipients have included Microsoft's Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer, Apple Computer's Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs.

How did you earn your first dollar? "Selling chewing gum door to door in Mansfield, Ohio, when I was 9."

Path to the top: A physics major at UCLA, he didn't want to be a technician and instead wanted to be in management, so he applied to Harvard's graduate school. There, a professor

convinced him to apply for the three-year doctoral program. "What I studied, basically, was the intersection between mathematics, computers and economics," Schussel says. He took a job in the aerospace industry, worked in information systems management for an insurance company, and taught on the side, including short courses on database management to people in the industry. "And, eventually, what was a part-time job became my full-time job," he said. Schussel's involvement with academia continues now with relationships at MIT. He serves on the Dean's Advisory Committee at MIT's Sloan School and in 1999 Schussel and his wife, Sandi, endowed a chair in management science at MIT.

How was the company established? "The best time to start a business is when everybody else is out of business in a recession," he says, and the recession that hurt so many businesses in 1980-81 became his opportunity. He started DCI in his home in Lynnfield in 1982 and moved its three employees to rented space in Wakefield after just four months. "We went from \$250,000 (in annual revenues) in 1982 to \$1.3 million in '83 to \$4.1 million in 1984."

Best advice ever given? He applied to Harvard graduate school for applied physics and was accepted. "I had applied as a joke really to see if I could get in." He really couldn't afford to go, but a friend told him, and he remembers the quote, "If you were accepted at Harvard and don't go, you will regret it the rest of your life.' I still get a lump in my throat" thinking about that, he says.

How do you see your role? "I used to be the key public speaker in the company. Now I'm a coach for others. Being a coach is more fun than being a quarterback."

What is the best part of your job? "The diversity of meeting a lot of different people, traveling a lot of different places and having a lot of different experiences."

The worst thing about your job? "The adrenaline rush when a serious problem comes up such as an air traffic controllers strike on the Sunday before a large event on Monday."

What is the most memorable moment you'd like to forget? "Hearing about the JFK assassination. I was a student at Harvard. That was like the dawning of the end of the age of innocence. That was just awful."

What one thing would you most like to do? "I have a different attitude. I have chosen not to postpone ... there's nothing left undone that I have to do. You never know when your time is

going to be up, so you better go ahead and do it."

What was your road not taken? "There was a time in the early '70s, my business career was not going well and I thought I'd have been happier in the field of medicine. We talked about it, but nothing ever came of that."

What is your favorite book? "Lately, I've read two books by Richard Feynman, former CalTech president and Nobel Laureate. I do most of my reading on the Internet now, where I keep up with computer news, financial news local news and national events. In addition there's always the 15 pounds of trade journals that I try to get to each week. For recreation, I prefer adventure. Movies and books like 'Into Thin Air' or about (Earnest) Shackleton's Antarctic adventure ('Endurance') fascinate me. Those are exactly the kinds of things my stomach wouldn't allow me to do."

How do you get away from it all? "We maintain a couple of homes, one on Lake Winnepesaukee and one in Key West, Florida. So I spend time in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Florida and occasionally visit family still in France."

The Corner Office is a weekly feature that spotlights business leaders from the Merrimack Valley. If you would like to nominate someone for inclusion in The Corner Office column, contact BreakTime Editor Don Staruk at dstaruk@breaktimeonline.com or Eagle-Tribune Business Editor Molly Manchenton at mmanchenton@eagletribune.com

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