



KEEP SWINGING

*An Entrepreneur's Story of
Overcoming Adversity & Achieving
Small Business Success*

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BREAKING AWAY

Surviving Professional Divorce

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I hang up the phone and sigh. Another phone call with my business partner results in yet another disagreement. In hindsight, I think, things would have been so much better if I had never brought him into the business. The stakes are getting bigger and his mistakes are starting to cost us. We started the business together but it seems like we want different things out of it today. I'm beginning to dread each and every time we have to talk. I'm sitting here in Memphis, a city of a million people, where our employees are, where potential million-dollar customers like Fed Ex and Auto Zone are. He's out there in Murray, Kentucky – way out in the country – because he's a small town guy who wants to be close to his family. While I respect that, it is not what's best for the business. We need to be here in Memphis to grow, to recruit both employees and land new customers. Why can't he understand that? I sigh again. We just aren't on the same page anymore. I wonder - Would I be any better on my own?

When I recruited my friend from ATS back in 1996, it just made sense. I am first and foremost a sales and marketing guy. My role is to bring the

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energy, the sizzle. I wanted to start a technology business, so I knew I needed to team up with a strong, experienced techie guru to make sure we were operating on the cutting edge and who could install the sophisticated equipment I was selling. I needed someone who could provide the steak. This was the second time I had hired my friend: I tapped him to be my first video systems engineer for ATS. He was a crackerjack when it came to these video conferencing and networking gadgets I had such high hopes for.

Like me, my partner was always a family guy. He was a Kentucky man through and through. After getting his degree at Murray State, which was housed in the town he insisted on staying in, he stayed on for seven years, helping expand the university's network around the state. He further developed his expertise working on networking projects for the U.S. Navy and the states of Alabama, Virginia and Georgia. In other words, he was a real pro at video networking as well as the associated hardware and software. I also thought he was a good guy, someone I thought I could trust to start a new business with. I started talking to him about my idea for a company, thinking he would be the perfect partner to start it with. And, looking back, if it hadn't been for his dad co-signing that loan with the People's Bank in Murray, ISI might not exist at all.

The tradeoff, of course, was that my partner worked from a second office we set up in Murray. That meant that, right off the bat, we had doubled

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the overhead and the challenge of coordinating communications between our technical base in Murray and our sales headquarters of sorts in Memphis. At the time, we felt that having two offices would enable us to go after customers in two states. The idea was that I would sell out of my office and my partner would assemble the products in his then travel to Memphis when it was time to do the install. Whenever he was in Memphis, or I was in Murray, it was assumed we would stay at each other's house. It didn't take long before our long-distance relationship led to some trouble.