



Legacy & Leadership

George Hutson began his career in the dairy industry in 1969 with a milk packaging machinery manufacturer after serving for 11 years in the U.S. Army, where he attained the rank of major.

In 1982, Hutson started his own company, Filtration Engineering Company Inc. Over the next 30 years, Filtration Engineering would be instrumental in pioneering the design and manufacturing of membrane processing equipment for the global dairy industry.

Hutson's company developed a continuous ultrafiltration membrane process that allowed for the production of high-protein concentrates, such as whey protein concentrate and whey protein isolate, and gave cheese processors a system that fit into the normal dairy processing operation.

Filtration Engineering, also developed "Ultra-Osmosis" which is a registered trademark of Filtration Engineering, for demineralizing whey products; this process is now known as nanofiltration.

Hutson has received many industry awards throughout his career. In 1994, Filtration Engineering was awarded the Department of Commerce "E" Award for export excellence for selling its membrane equipment in both Europe and Australasia. Hutson also was presented with the American Dairy Products Institute's Award of Merit in 2010. In 2011, Hutson was presented with the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association's Distinguished Service Award.

In 2012, Filtration Engineering was sold to Tetra Pak. Hutson retained the near infrared (NIR) analytical controls division and launched a new standalone company, ProSpect Analytical Technology Inc. Hutson retired earlier this year after selling Prospect Analytical Technology Inc. to AMATEC Inc.

Q What advice would you give someone going into a leadership position for the first time?

A I believe there are three major areas that a new leader should remember when deciding on a course to take.

1. Nothing is as good as it seems, or as bad as it seems.

2. Time is your ally.

3. The leader is responsible for everything that happens and doesn't happen.

#1. If everything is going well and it seems like your project has a silver lining, be very alert and look for a small dark cloud hiding in your good fortune. By the same token if all looks bleak and everything seems to be coming down around you, search for a ray of light in the situation and follow that to a brighter outcome.

#2. When making a decision, take your time, and check the points and topics again. Even in the rapid pace electronic age, STOP, check again and then decide.

#3. As the leader you are responsible for the good situations and give your subordinates the credit. Likewise you also are responsible for the bad situations, and in these cases protect your subordinates and take the blame.

I found that by following these three simple rules, business ran smoother, decisions were better and employees were happier.

Q What is one characteristic that you believe every leader should possess?

A I believe a strong leader must be humble, keep your feet on the ground and your ego in check.

Q Please comment on the importance of accuracy, product quality and reputation to the longevity of a business.

A In the dairy industry you are dealing with a rather small customer base. You have to be able to stand behind your work and be like a carpenter and "measure twice and cut once" to ensure accuracy, use the best resources to ensure quality, and make friends with your customers and be honest to ensure future business.

Q What are some of the benefits and possible challenges that come with running a family business?

A There are a number of benefits and, without a doubt, challenges with running a family business

The main challenge is establishing a firm line of authority among family members and not allowing non-business family to interfere with business decisions. I established this line of authority by explaining to each family member that joined the company that the company was a democracy run by a dictator, and my vote was the only one that counted! That worked very well in my case and the company had at one time or another about 10 to 12 family members employed and operated in this manner over the course of three decades.

The benefits are numerous. Family members are loyal, their background is a known quantity, and they have the well-being and the reputation of the business at heart and want the business to succeed. The family can groom younger members in areas of expertise needed by the company and keep valuable information in secure hands.

All in all, it is a delight to own and operate a close family business.

Q How do you encourage creative thinking within your organization?

A Accept all suggestions as viable, and don't harbor the attitude that your ideas are the best and your employees don't understand the big picture.

The people in the field know firsthand what is happening in the industry and will bring you the meaningful suggestions. As a leader, listen and learn. Only good things will come of it.

Q What would you cite as an example of a time where your company showed innovation and leadership in the dairy marketplace?

A In 1987, the dairy industry was interested in developing products with reduced mineral levels. The concerns came from the need to curtail salt levels and other mono-valiant minerals in foods to control blood pressure and for other medical reasons.

A membrane had been developed to desalinate sea water, but it would not stop salt. I heard of the membrane and asked if it would stop lactose. The answer was "we don't know," so I decided to set up a test to answer that question

I envisioned that if the membrane would stop lactose but allow salt to pass, we would have a de-mineralizing membrane for many applications in the dairy industry

As luck would have it, the membrane did indeed pass salt and rejected lactose. I named it Ultra-Osmosis (UO); today it is known as nanofiltration.

That UO membrane was applied in desalting Cheddar cheese salty whey and demineralizing normal whey, but the real big application was demineralizing acid casein whey and buffering the concentrate to a sweet whey pH.

This solved a problem in Ireland, France, Australia and India and allowed the manufacturing of acid casein whey to continue.

Q What are some of the key concepts that support the long-term success of your business?

A The industry is small and word travels fast, you must do what you say you are going to do.

We always had post order and pre-installation meetings to discuss the details regarding the responsibility of each company on both sides of the sale. These meeting would define the responsibility of the customer and the supplier and eliminated surprises or misunderstanding about costs or obligations.

Q What has been your favorite thing about working in the cheese and dairy industry?

A I mentioned earlier that the dairy industry is rather small and it is necessary to have high quality and honesty in dealing in this business.

The wonderful thing about the dairy industry is that your customers become your friends.

I spent 40 years in the industry and had the opportunity to sell our product worldwide. As time went on, I made friends in Europe and Australasia and attended weddings and birthdays for a number of my customers' children and relatives.

This close relationship with your customers and in many cases with your competitors is what make the industry special. **CMN**