

Bollin Label Systems: No easy labels but plenty of success

If you've ever visited the Churchills retail store, examined a bakery item to see if it was apple or cherry pie, or picked up a bottle of Garlic Expressions, you've seen a product of Bollin Label Systems. Those die-cut labels were designed, produced and printed at the Toledo headquarters of the company that hit its half-century anniversary and is now in its third generation of the Bollin family.

"I grew up always knowing what my dad did for a living," says Heidi Bollin, president. "My brothers and I would visit the plant often, although I was terrified of the size and the noise of the very large print presses."

Not too terrified, she notes, to do occasional work there, even as a child: putting labels on one-off product jobs, for instance or "doing the fan-fold labels by hand because there wasn't a machine that could do the accordion folds." And even when the presses frightened her, she remembers the print crews as being kind.

"And some of those employees are still with us!" she adds.

Heidi's father, Mark, still comes to the office but has reached emeritus status; her aunt, Chris Younkman, is part of the leadership team, overseeing sales and finance. Her daughter Kristin Younkman plays the same role for warehousing, shipping and the service department. For Heidi's part, she says, "I spend a lot of time working with our human resources area, and in organizational leadership, where I take a very hands-on approach. I oversee production, too, but I rely heavily on the expertise of our operations manager." (Her MBA from The University of Toledo included a specialty in human resources.)

"But when the family does strategic planning, we rely heavily on our management team, which is drawn mostly from outside the family. They're great people, and we couldn't accomplish what we have without them. We combine their expertise with our leadership team's eye on the future, and our overarching vision for the company."

Now in the midst of succession planning, Heidi says that right now she can't envision a time when non-family employees would make up the majority of ownership — "and right now I can't envision retiring, either. I like coming into work!"

She and her cousin Kristin are gradually reaching the level of familiarity with the company employees that Chris possesses. "My aunt knows many of our employees from their starting dates," Heidi says. "They would do anything for her. My cousin and I are looking forward to building that kind of trust with our team."

Mark Bollin began the company relationship with the Family Business Center in 1995, and Heidi gives accolades to her affinity group. "Especially with COVID, I see my group more often than I do my non-work friends. They get me, they understand. You can't easily find other people in your position, of your age, with small children like you have. The Center really spent the time to create our group, deciding who would go in — they did a good job."

Does this successful executive have advice for the rising generation? “Whatever you’re planning, be comfortable if things change,” she says after a moment’s reflection. “Life isn’t a ladder where you step up on each upward rung; There are turns you didn’t expect. When I was 18, I was in human development, then went into education first as a teacher, then an administrator. When I went back to school for my MBA, I realized that all the skills I learned previously could be used in business. I’m still using all those skills constantly. Only now I use them for the benefit of my employees.

“The important thing is that you’re happy with where you end up.” As, she says, she is.