

RICHARD BRENNER RETIRES

Longtime industry leader answers 20 questions



Felice and Richard Brenner

Richard Brenner, longtime CEO of Amarr (now Entrematic), retired at the end of March. As an industry leader for 32 years, he succeeded Herb Brenner (his father) as president of Amarr in 1993, led the company from 1993 to 2013, and served as DASMA president from 2002 to 2004.

We chatted with him on his final day in the garage door business.

1. What were the most significant contributions that your father made to Amarr?

Brenner: *My dad's contributions were many, but chief among them was instilling a strategic planning process at the company. This let us "vision the future" and build toward it. His other major contribution was instilling a service ethic that I coined as our Caring Culture of Service. That service ethic persists today. It was, and is, a major reason for our success.*

2. In what ways are you most like your father?

Brenner: *We are both impatient, but I'd like to think I am less impatient than he was. We both have a sense of humor. We are both very sentimental. We like helping people. We both want to smell the roses.*

3. In what ways are you most unlike your father?

Brenner: *My dad had a civil engineering degree, and he was the most un-technology person on the planet. I love and embrace tech.*

4. Some CEOs are engineering-driven, some are marketing-driven or accounting-driven, etc. Would you say that you were marketing-driven?

Brenner: *I do focus on marketing, but my #1 driver is that I simply love business. I love growing businesses, teaching, learning, and leading teams. If I had to pick a #2 discipline, I would say human resources, which we called our "People Department." A company*

is simply a group of humans trying to do extraordinary things. HR has a huge role in people development.

5. You became Amarr's director of marketing in 1988. How would you describe the company's growth since then?

Brenner: *From the time I took over as president (1993), we doubled in size every five years until the Great Recession. Then we bounced back very effectively after that.*

6. What were Amarr's top three best moves that you initiated as CEO?

Brenner: *#1 is recognizing my weaknesses and hiring Jeff Mick. #2 is buying out Ankmarr and Delden (our manufacturing partners in Kansas). By buying out these companies, we could rapidly invest in manufacturing. #3 is greenlighting the Classica door, even though we had no market research. #4 is focusing on private labeling.*

7. I've often heard that you made Amarr a great place to work. How did you do that?

Brenner: *By understanding that every business has a culture. The key is identifying your culture and then exploiting it to the max. We have a Culture of Caring Service — service to each other and our dealers, and it shows in everything we do. Then we hire only people who embrace that culture.*

We also like to have fun. We find that great people want to be a part of a fun, progressive, winning team.

8. Is it fair to say that the Classica door, more than any other door, gave Amarr the biggest boost for growth in the history of the company?

Brenner: *Yes and no. We grew nicely before and after Classica.*

9. What was your role in the development of that door?

Brenner: *Most innovations have many parents, and Classica is no exception. Great credit goes to Lyle Symons, Jim Ford, and Delbert Phlipot. My biggest contribution was writing an eight-figure check for development without doing any market research. We made a 6" x 6" sketch, and I based my decision on that.*

10. You also promoted the concept of viewing the garage door as a designer item and not as a commodity. Is this concept still as important as ever?

Brenner: *It is vastly important. It is imperative for our industry to think of our products as works of art. Delving into the commodity rat-hole is a road I never wanted to be on.*

11. Over the years, you've also been very active in DASMA, and you've come to know most of the CEOs of the industry. What did you learn about the industry in your DASMA years?

Brenner: *I was one of the longest-serving board members in the industry, and I only do things that bring a huge ROI. Getting to know my competitors and vendors was important to me and the company. I encourage everyone to serve.*

12. It's been 3 1/2 years since you sold the company to Assa Abloy. How would you describe Amarr's transition to a new owner?

Brenner: *As I write this, I am no longer an employee of the company, so I can speak freely with candor. For those who know me well, I always speak my mind.*

I cannot envision a better transition than what we have achieved with Assa Abloy. They have been true to their word in every respect. No matter what is written on paper, you have to have a partner you can trust.

13. If you came back and visited Amarr in five years, what would give you great

satisfaction to see?

Brenner: *I'd like to see that most of our team is still in place and leading the company to even greater heights ... and that we still embrace our Culture of Caring Service and are still a product and service innovator. I told our team at our recent national meeting, "We are in great shape, so don't fudge it up!"*

14. You've also been active in nonprofit work. Do you wish you had spent more time with the company and less time with nonprofits?

Brenner: *Not for a minute. There is ample time for both, if you are efficient.*

15. Which nonprofit has been your favorite?

Brenner: *While the Brenner Children's Hospital will always be special to me and my family, my wife, Felice, and I started ABC of NC (www.abcofnc.org), which is a school and clinic for children with autism. It is a very special place and so dear to us.*

16. You've been taking down a few memories in your office. Which one stirs up the warmest fond feelings and will still find a prominent place at your home?

Brenner: *Clearing out 32 years of memories has been so hard; I have so many wonderful friends in the company and the industry. I got a huge kick out of a PowerPoint that was done for me, showing my future career options. One was a picture of me as a barista at Starbucks, and one as an Uber driver!*

Many years ago, I received a plaque with a quote by Warren Bennis that reads, "Managers do things right, Leaders do the

right thing." But they added, "Richard, you do both."

17. As you step out the door for the last time, you leave behind a company built by Brenners, and you will be the last Brenner involved. How do you feel about that?

Brenner: *Our family has started over a dozen businesses, and this is the last one with multiple-family ownership. It is the end of an era for our family, but I suspect that it's not the final chapter.*

I was blessed to be in a position to lead a great organization where our TEAM was always the focus. They deserve the credit. They led us to great heights. They worked three shifts to make the doors, track, and hardware. They drove the trucks. They stayed late so a dealer could get a door. I am forever indebted to our Team Members!

18. If you have a final message to all of your employees, what would you say?

Brenner: *I love you.*

19. If you have a final message to all of your dealers, what would you say?

Brenner: *Thanks for putting your trust in our team. I hope we served you well and will continue to do so in the future.*

20. You're only 53 with plenty of good years left in you. What will you do now?

Brenner: *I have been formulating a concept called "The Third Plan." I plan to spend 1/3 of my time on for-profit ventures, 1/3 on not-for-profit, and 1/3 on family, friends, golf, hiking, fitness, eating, traveling, and learning the harmonica. ■*

Richard Brenner TIMELINE

1975-84

At age 12, Richard assembles garage door hardware boxes, bolt bags, and cable sets. He works numerous summers and breaks at Amarr locations in Alabama and Texas as well as Winston-Salem.

1985

Upon graduating from the University of Georgia with a degree in business, he begins managing Amarr Door Centers in Nashville, Tenn., and Riviera Beach, Fla., and a wood door plant in Birmingham, Ala.

1989

Becomes Amarr's first marketing manager.

1990

Promoted to vice president of eastern operations.

1992

Promoted to executive vice president.

1993

At age 29, becomes company president.

1994

Herb Brenner dies of lung cancer. Richard becomes the sole leader of Amarr at the age of 30.

2002

Becomes Amarr's chief executive officer.

2002

Elected president of DASMA.

2004

National finalist for the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

2013

Assa Abloy acquires Amarr. Richard becomes vice chairman.

2017

Retires from the garage door industry.



Richard and Herb Brenner, ca. 1990.