



Leadership Insight
– William Doyle, CEO,
Newbridge Silverware

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William Doyle is CEO of one of Ireland's most famous giftware brands - Newbridge Silverware. Taking over the reins of the business from his father in the 1990's William transformed the company through innovation, organic growth and plenty of PR! As Newbridge Silverware continues to expand their product ranges in 2013 William Doyle talks to Member Communications Executive Grace Kavanagh about career, business and personal life.

Your Career

Where did you begin your career?

From an early age I spent my summers working in the wholesale meat processing business my Dad owned. I studied Business Studies and Economics in Trinity and I spent some of my summers working on building sites in Copenhagen and Florida. When I finished college I began working as a sales rep for my father's new business, Newbridge Cutlery.

How did your career develop from there?

At an early age I got a feel for how the giftware industry worked. At that time Waterford Crystal was very dominant in the market and I watched and admired their success. When I finished college I had planned to travel to the US and work but my father asked me to help out with Newbridge Cutlery for one more summer. I never got to go to America.

Can you tell me more about your role as CEO of Newbridge Silverware?

I don't see myself as a CEO; the people that I work with have been working with me for the last 33 – 35 years. There are no layers of management, it's a family business. My real forte is marketing, creativity and product development. I am fascinated with change and am always looking for opportunities to change, be relevant and stand out from the crowd.

Taking over the reins of the Company what was your strategy for success?

In the early 90's the company was struggling financially, we needed to economise and be efficient. The idea came up to try add value to the tableware range by using waste material from manufacturing the cutlery to make

napkin rings and jewellery pieces. It wasn't an instant success and we invested a lot of time and resources in the development of a range of jewellery but it was difficult to get the market and retailers interested. But I'm a great believer in chance. Barbara McMahon who presented Head to Toe on RTE was in the store one day. Showing her around the factory, Barbara was fascinated by the jewellery and wanted to tell the story behind the evolution of the pieces. As we hadn't succeeded in this field I was reluctant for her to cover it but a feature on our jewellery was created and made most up most of the TV show. There followed a flood of publicity and the sale of the jewellery pieces took off.

You were previously nominated for Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year, how important is the support of entrepreneurs in Ireland in today's climate?

Vital. It's frightening for those self employed who attempted, succeeded and unfortunately failed through no fault of their own are faced with no safety net of any kind. The vested interests of the government including the bloated nature of our Public Sector will prevent any real enterprise in this country.

Business Life

The last number of years have been difficult on most businesses. What is the recipe for Newbridge Silverware's survival in these difficult times? Continued innovation - 370 new products feature in our 2013 catalogue - I am an absolute believer in change and creative means of keeping the brand relevant and notable and visually entertaining the consumer.

What major lessons have you learned in business so far?

The courage to change, whilst at the same time being cautious. I was thrown in at the deep end in the late 70's and early 80's at a very difficult time in Ireland I would have learned to be relatively cautious. As a business we have never borrowed to grow in the last 20 years, we've done what we've done organically. I remember an attempt in 1983 to have the company put into receivership, I've never forgotten that and from that point onwards we learned to survive.

What advice would you give businesses for the year end?

Seek export markets if possible which has been our focus for the last 2 years. We have gone into partnership with Beleek China in Fermanagh to hopefully develop business in North America. Again I would advise caution, be small, and try to grow without bank borrowings if possible. Be innovative and stand out from the crowd.

Personal Life

Balancing it all...family, career and business life... how do you manage it all and maintain a work-life balance?

I maintain a simple, uncomplicated lifestyle. I would be very family oriented. I attempt to switch off but that doesn't always happen.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I like to play golf, my kids are involved in different sports and I take a keen interest in what they do.