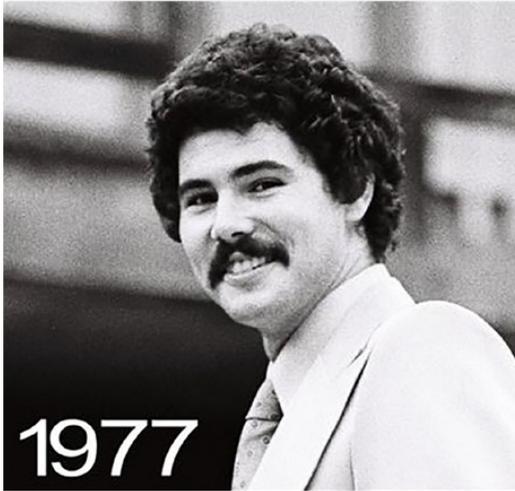




Art Hatley - Retired / enjoying life - "My Life"



Reformatted content from the Edison Report - a leading source of breaking news for the lighting industry

When I got into this industry there were no conglomerates— most of the lighting companies were small family-owned businesses. In the mid-seventies, the Keene Corporation bought a handful of companies—Smithcraft, Seacrest, Stonco, L&P Lighting and Sunbeam, and maybe and became Keene Lighting, our industry's first conglomerate. And now, only Stonco still exists. Einstein said, "The only constant is change," the lighting industry is under the same laws of the universe. Whatever it is today, it will be different in the future.

I was packing for a trip one Sunday evening, and my then eleven-year-old son was with me. He asked me why I had to have a job that made me leave home. After I removed the dagger from my heart [laughs], I sat down on the bed next to him, and said, 'Son, the reason I have this job that takes me away from you and your Mom, and your sisters, is because I can earn enough so that your Mom can be here with you all the time.'

I've been on both sides of acquisitions. I've been with a company that was bought, and I've been with a company that acquired others. I've found that often neither position is a picnic. The only time in my career I had to fire good people was after an acquisition. It's not fun to terminate someone's livelihood, even when they deserve it, but when you have to let good people go— that's a tough one.

After thirty years of marriage, and most of it traveling, I came home from a business trip, and my wife said, 'I'd like you to move out, I want a divorce.' I lost my best friend in the world. That taught me too late to pay attention to what's important.

At a recent IALD conference someone was complaining about how an acquired company was no longer the great company they were. When someone asked to name any acquired company that had improved after acquisition, there was dead silence.

Many of the relationships you make in business are just that—business relationships. I've learned the hard and painful way that many times your friendship is based on what you can do for them. When I was National Sales Manager of Capri, I thought many of my reps were true friends, and some still are. But there were many when I resigned and could no longer help their business, that 'friendship' evaporated. I've learned to really value my true friends.

The lighting industry will always have its entrepreneurs. We'll always have small, innovative companies taking risks and creating breakthroughs—so there will always be something new!

Please don't misunderstand me— everybody deserves the best of service—but some perspective is needed. I had a dear friend in this industry that has now passed on who once replied to a customer who was saying his shipment was urgent and crucial, 'On that point, I will have to disagree with you. A heart transplant is urgent and crucial. These are lighting fixtures.' I've found that urgent often actually means 'slightly important.'

The time you have with your kids goes in the blink of an eye. I wish I'd been more present than I was. Sometimes, even when I was home, I wasn't there. And that cost me dearly. I've learned how important it is to spend quality time with one's family.

You can make a good living in lighting, but not everyone will get rich in our industry, so you might as well have some fun and make some friends along the way, or what's the heck is the point?

It's always great when you can do business with your friends, but the bottom line is, you've got to do business. Sometimes you will have to do business with people you don't like, and sometimes, your friends will disappoint you.

Cell phones and the internet are great tools, and I love having that reference library in my hands, but to me nothing will ever take the place of sitting down with someone face to face and having a real conversation.

Even in the dark times, I've learned to try and find something that will make me laugh, or at least smile. My Mother used to say, "It takes thirty-eight muscles to frown, but only fourteen to smile [laughs]. So why overwork?" I've learned that if you look for it, there is usually humor in almost everything.