

New Kid on the Planet

Positive thinker Peter Janssen likens underwriting new companies to parenting, and he'd better be a successful dad. He has set the highest possible goals for himself, with his underwriting firm of Janssen/Meyers set to achieve them.

By Parikhith Sinha

Spurning the wise man's advice to let one's achievements speak for themselves, 35-year-old Peter Janssen proclaimed to the *New York Times* in 1992 that he wanted to become the greatest philanthropist the world has ever known. Since anonymous donors have often given away hundreds of millions, Janssen is going to have to become one of the richest ever in order to achieve his goal. So far, he has earned \$15 million and given away \$400,000.

Is Janssen a braggart to be laughed at or a fraud to be completely distrusted? Neither. He is yet another in the long line of "positive thinkers" which began in Scotland during the vibrant Protestant Reformation. The Presbyterian John Wesley brought positive thinking into the Christian mainstream. Grand old men like the late Norman Vincent Peale, Sir John Templeton and Phillip Carret proved that the power of positive thinking works—at least for them—as they turned each negative into a positive.

Janssen's own philosophical thinking comes from Scottish immigrant Andrew Carnegie, whose steel company became the basis for J.P. Morgan's U.S. Steel. Carnegie left most of his fortune to charity so his children would be motivated to grow themselves and not be corrupted by inherited wealth.

Another role model of Janssen's is the late insurance entrepreneur W. Clement Stone, who commissioned Og Mandino to write "The Greatest Salesman in the World." Stone also sponsored *Success Magazine*, which profiles every achiever overcoming great obstacles.

To keep up or restore his energy when

he's down, Janssen reads daily from "The Master Key to Riches" by Stone disciple Napoleon Hill. It says we can all succeed by superseding bad crippling thoughts with enabling positive ones. Janssen was first introduced to the philosophy of success by Hill's "Think Rich and Grow," which describes some of the greatest success stories of all time and advises everyone to emulate them.

Now Peter Janssen and his partner Bruce Meyers have started their Janssen/Meyers Associates, L.P. Their brokerage firm's mission is to create "the premier investment banking firm on this planet for quality growth companies." Since its doors opened at 17 State Street, New York, NY, last September, the duo and its 20 employees have completed two private placements.

"Each company that we underwrite

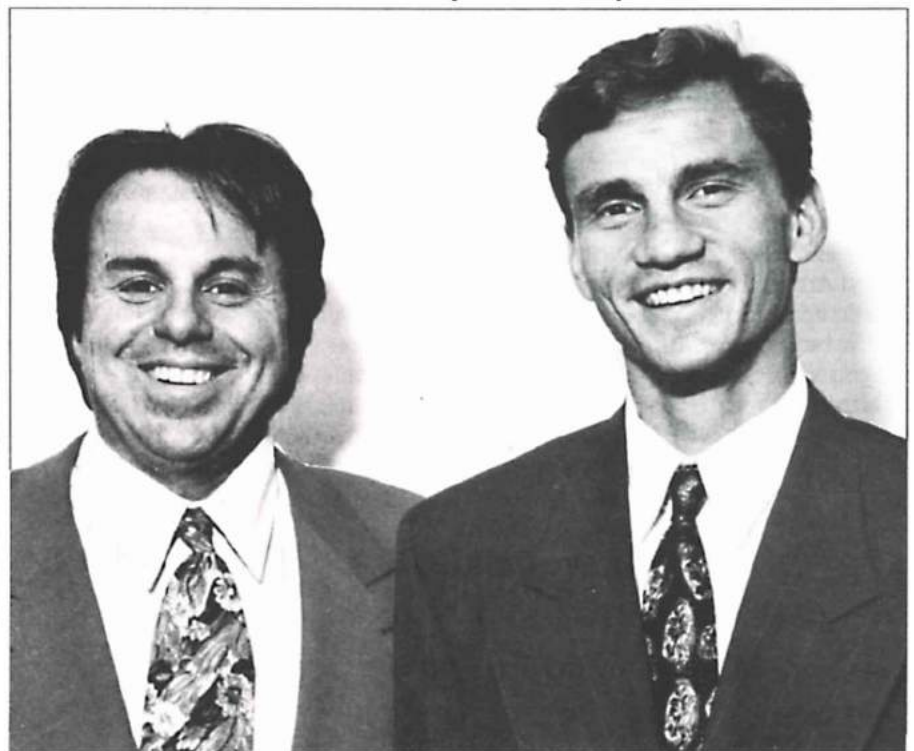
today will be like one of my very own children," says Janssen, who hopes to raise his tykes into billion dollar blue chips. A four-year old may be able to feed himself, go to bathroom and get dressed, but he is not ready to face the world alone. Janssen believes the same is true of emerging companies and will not abandon one in its formative years. In contrast, many underwriters of small companies simply hand out the IPO check and boot the CEO out of the door. Such companies, known as "orphans," often stall due to lack of growth capital.

Peter Janssen also practices planned parenthood. He wants to be extremely careful about whom he chooses to underwrite. The company must be socially conscious, run by a proven management and capable of growing to \$1 billion in sales over five years. Models of such explosive growth are Genentech, Acclaim Entertainment, and Summit Technology. In addition, the company must make many different products that are patented, address a whole new industry and be validated by experts.

"We may look at a hundred deals or a thousand deals before we find the one that has the right combination of ingredients," says Janssen. However, he is confident that he will get his share of these prime deals in competition with the older, more established underwriters.

Not believing in day-care, Janssen takes full responsibility in his role as parent. Janssen/Meyers will practice merchant banking, venture capital work and investment banking. "It's vertical

Attention Earth: Would-be Philanthropists Bruce Meyers and Peter Janssen



integration," says Janssen, "where you're the manufacturer, distributor and wholesaler." He is motivated by his past failures, which he partly attributes to the mistakes of others. "I would rather rely on myself to make sure the company gets the money and gets the job done," he asserts.

One of Janssen's model children is Summit Technology, underwritten by D.H. Blair at the time Janssen worked there. Like excimer laser pioneer VISX, Summit is developing a vision correction procedure where a patient's cornea is reshaped with an excimer laser.

Janssen consulted scientists Seiler, Puliofido and Hunkler to confirm the legitimacy of the technology before taking a significant position in the float of public stock for his clients at D.H. Blair. Janssen also had observed the firm's management, noticing their strong marketing skills. Every quarter, Summit would update key investors on its progress in product development.

Janssen was convinced that Summit shares would be attractive, and he was right. Over a period of six years, a \$100,000 investment became \$38 million. Even during the October 1987 market crash when Summit stock fell as well, Janssen didn't sell his clients' shares out of fear of losses. Instead, he maintained his belief in the company, a commitment which proved rewarding.

Not always a parent, Janssen spent his childhood first in Queens and then in Manhasset, New York, the son of an affluent, entrepreneurial father who had begun his own racing safety equipment company, profitable TrackStar Products. Athletically inclined, Janssen excelled in baseball. When he was nine years old, Janssen attended the Hall of Fame baseball camp, where he was told by Bob Feller and Tom Seaver that he would one day be a major league pitcher. In high school, Janssen opted for motorcycle racing instead. In 1972 and '73, he was ranked second in the United States on mini-cycles. In sum, Janssen's childhood fostered an entrepreneurial sense and a desire to excel.

Janssen's desire was evident when he pursued his first investment banking position in 1982. He had just spent four years at the University of South Alabama, majoring in business management. Now back in New York City, a newspaper advertisement beckoned for broker trainees at now defunct, disgraced Blinder Robinson (whose nickname

"Blind 'em and Rob 'em" was first printed by *EQUITIES* Magazine). The Blinder Robinson representative told him to wait until the next Thursday, but Janssen told the representative to expect him in the next five minutes. "If you give me an opportunity to come in," Janssen told him, "I will become the greatest asset you've ever had."

The next few years reads like a work of fiction. Surprisingly, Bruce Meyers had answered the same advertisement in the newspaper, which started a beautiful friendship. Frustration with investment banking had at one point led Janssen to try real estate ventures, but he was summoned back to his original trade when he saw his initials P.W.J. flash by on a quote machine. The initials stood for Paine-Webber-Jackson, but Janssen foresaw possibilities for his firm.

At one point, Janssen worked for another disgraced stock firm called Rooney-Pace, which went out of business at the end of 1986. The next day, Janssen was at D.H. Blair, and by the end of the month, he claims that he had become the firm's top producer.

Of course, Janssen has failed like everyone else. Playing Mark Anthony, he discovered his Cleopatra, a promising growth firm that made cosmetics. At the same time as Janssen's discovery, Charlie Sheen was in New York for the filming of *Wall Street*. The two met in the subway, where Janssen recommended that Sheen buy Cleopatra stock. Unfortunately, Janssen claims one of his colleagues at D.H. Blair who had also invested in Cleopatra took his eye off the ball and struck out. The stock fell and, six months later, the company went out of business.

Consequently, Janssen made his Hollywood debut. When Charlie Sheen first meets with Michael Douglas, Douglas tells Sheen, "I'll give you a shot, but if you're fifteenth in line with your information like Janssen was on that cosmetics company, I'll never do business with you again."

Not only did Cleopatra make for a good story, but it also served as an epiphanal moment, leading to the formation of Janssen/Meyers. The company had failed because, Janssen believes, a colleague had made the error of allowing personal problems to affect professional conduct. Janssen decided that he would never be let down by another colleague again and wanted the confidence that only running his own firm would allow.

Bruce Meyers had come over to D.H.

Blair with Janssen and they had successfully built several companies together. Meyers had always been entrepreneurial and Janssen wanted his own firm, so they decided to take the plunge.

Partner Bruce Meyers lauds Peter Janssen for his causes and the way he effects them: "He has a vision, works very hard, and is ultimately committed to the cause of giving back. He is also one of the best salesmen in the business."

Peter Janssen is making sure that their Janssen/Meyers will become no ordinary investment banking firm. Janssen subjects his employees to what he calls "Peak Performance Training." He plans to bring motivational speakers such as Anthony Robbins to his firm to share success stories and contribute strategies that have led to success over the ages.

For Janssen, success can be reduced to two simple principles: a "magnificent obsession" and "focus." By pursuing that which he desires above all else, his magnificent obsession, Janssen finds meaning and joy in life. In order to realize that magnificent obsession, Janssen keeps focused. The combination of focus and burning desire leads to unparalleled success. The books say so.

Janssen's magnificent obsession is philanthropy. He has established the Janssen/Meyers Foundation for Excellence, which will receive 5% of all company profits to donate to national charities. So far it has given away \$150,000. Janssen would like to start his own cause one day, one that would spread the philosophies of success to the "environmentally disadvantaged people." Janssen's philanthropic theory follows President John F. Kennedy's idea of teaching people how to fish instead of just giving them a fish.

Of course, in the real world, many people talk the talk of success and still fail. You can get sick, suffer an accident, fail to practice what you preach or, as the late Bishop Al Jolson noted, react badly to a personal or business failure and make it a life halting event. Still, Peter Janssen talks the talk and now must prove he can walk the walk. If he can just do his best each day, admit his failures quickly, stay clean and focus his enormous energy properly, we will hear a lot more about Janssen/Meyers. □

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