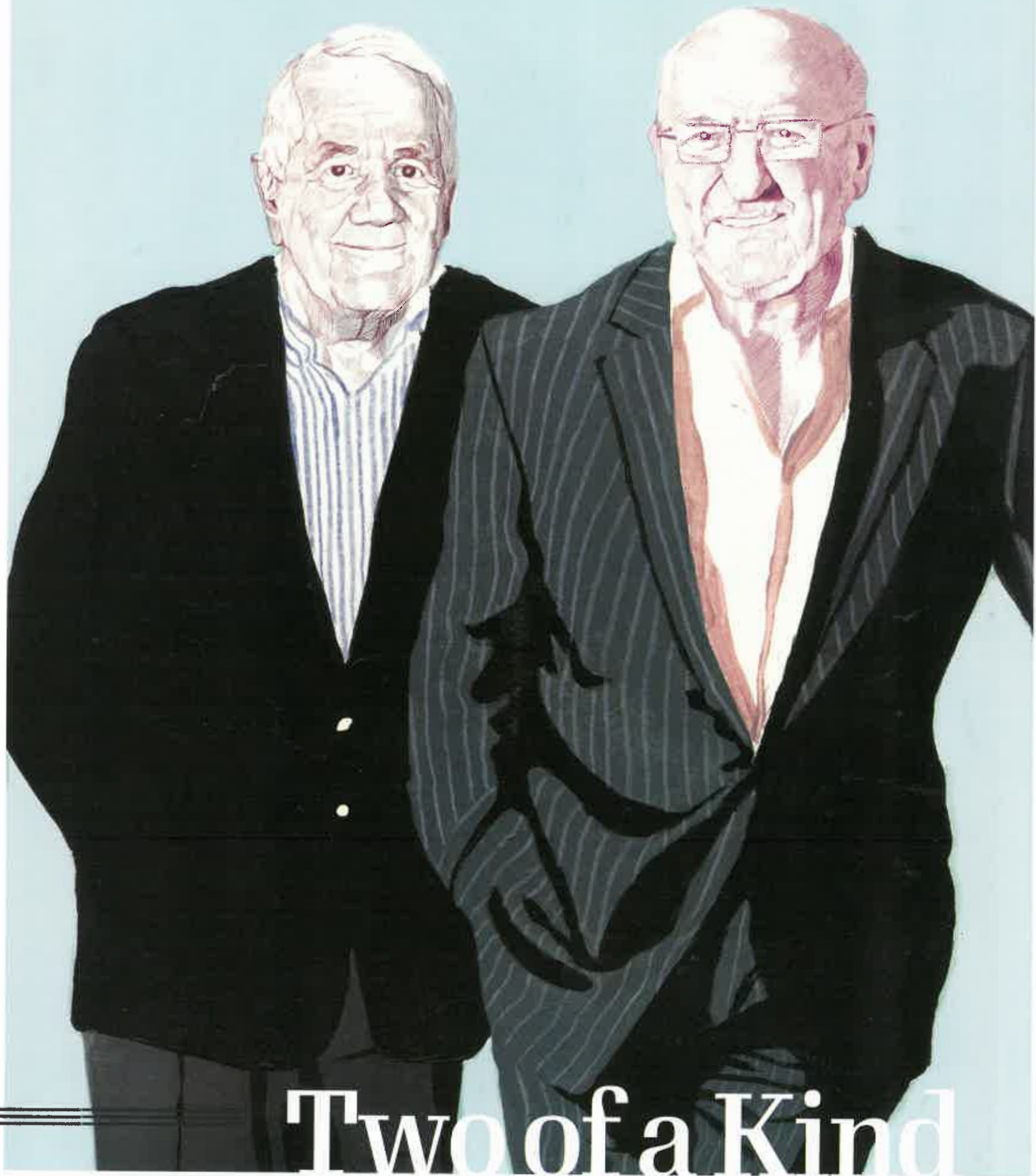


FN

Bob Campbell has spent more than 60 years making a name for himself in both shoes and philanthropy. Now, the BBC founder has earned one of the highest honors for his life's work.



THE BOB REPORT



Two of a Kind

What happens when a pair of powerful footwear personalities talk about life and business? FN was on hand when BBC International's Bob Campbell was grilled by his close friend Sonny Shar.

By JENNIE BELL

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID DELAS

A light rain is falling on this April afternoon, bringing traffic to a standstill in midtown Manhattan. Briefly, a small window opens up between bumpers. "Go now," Bob Campbell instructs his driver, Sal, who expertly steers through the jam and soon has the SUV speeding along the FDR Drive. ➔ Campbell, BBC International's chairman and CEO, is known in the industry for his charm, generosity and, most important, his ability to identify and overcome any obstacle, even gridlock. ➔ The car is heading to Campbell's Upper East Side apartment for an impromptu photo shoot. Also with us is another powerful footwear personality: Sonny Shar, a longtime friend of Campbell's. ➔ At the moment, the two are reminiscing about memorable trips they've taken, both together and apart. Between them, they have traversed much of the globe, from downtown Shanghai to the glaciers of Alaska. ➔ In some sense, both have come a long way to reach this point. For Shar, who is from Namibia by way of South Africa, the distance is quite literal. For Campbell, it is more symbolic. ➔ Raised in the hardscrabble streets of Pittsburgh by a single mother, the shoe titan started working at 9 years old, for his family's bakery. Several years later, after a move to Detroit, Campbell's after-school job in the stockroom at Kinney Shoes set him on his career path, leading to influential roles with Kinney and parent company F.W. Woolworth. ➔ And then, eventually, came BBC, a company he founded in 1975 that is now a multimillion-dollar global footwear powerhouse, producing some of the most coveted fashion and character shoes in the children's category.

Having never attended college, Campbell exhibits great pride in his accomplishments, describing himself as "a doctor of experience."

Last week, however, that moniker changed somewhat, as Campbell received an honorary doctorate degree from Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Fla.

"Bobby Campbell's record of achievements in business, and his significant contributions in the community and to so many charitable causes, provide a great example to our students of what they can aspire to accomplish in their business careers," wrote Daniel Gropper, dean of the College of Business, in a nominating letter for the honor.

Shar has equal praise for Campbell. "In all the years that I've known him, the one thing that has always stood out about him is his heart — the way he treats people [in this business] and in the outside world," he said.

What follows is an edited version of a conversation between these two shoe icons, about humble origins, giving back to the community and why the footwear business today is tougher than ever.

SONNY SHAR: Looking back 37 years, to when I walked into your office for the first time as a consultant, did you ever believe

that I'd be interviewing you or that you'd be getting a doctorate from a university?

BOB CAMPBELL: No, of course not. Also, 37 years ago, no way did I have [any expectations] — except that, I thought, you have to have a dream. And I always had a dream to be successful, but I never looked at where I'd be [in the future].

SS: That goes for both of us, because when I walked into your office, I was a rookie in America.

BC: And I didn't even know what a consultant was in those days.

SS: Let me ask you a few questions. From earlier in your career, who was the most influential person who gave you a direction?

BC: It was a gentleman who passed away some time ago named Cam Anderson. He was president of Kinney Shoes and my idol. I worked with him and I was his assistant. He was the guy I always looked up to, and he was the guy who was my mentor.

SS: Obviously, we all have milestones in our careers. What do you think have been the key milestones for you?

BC: That's a tough question. From the very beginning, I just never looked back. I never thought that

whatever I did could fail, because I started out very, very poor — so I thought, "What am I going to do? I can't go back to that." So my thing is that I just kept working. I knew with luck it'd be OK. I came from a family that only had a mother — never had a father — and she taught me good things. A very religious woman, she taught me to be a good person, to respect people.

SS: There's no question, Bob, that having come from a background like that, your education has been on the street, learning the business.

BC: Absolutely. I learned it all from the streets. I learned it from working on a bakery truck at 9 years old, and on a fruit truck. I worked every kind of job you could think of [because it] put money in your pocket. My mother [worked hard just to put] food on the table, and that's why my sisters and I were very lucky, because we never starved and we would find places to live. We lived in my grandmother's house until I was 6 years old, and all five of us lived in one room.

SS: That says a lot. Going back to when you started BBC, can you pick two or three exciting happenings?

BC: One of the most exciting things I remember is, I was in business a

couple of years, and a guy named Bobby Greenberg called me and said he wanted to go into business. So I started working on LA Gear with him. And probably the second most important thing that happened was when business was down and I thought I was going to go broke. I was right there, about to lose everything, including my house. And then luck came along.

This guy in Canada had a patent [for putting a light in a shoe], and he showed it to me, and I thought, "Oh my god, this is something. But what the hell am I going to do with it?" I knew if I went to Kmart, I could get one big order, because at that time, Kmart was bigger than Walmart. But the guy said, "No, that's not good." So I got some cardboard, put the light on the cardboard and drew a picture of a shoe on the board. I took it to Bobby Greenberg, and he said, "What the hell is this?" And I said, "You're too stupid to understand it." So I went and had the shoes made, and by the time I came back, a new guy was in charge of LA Gear. I didn't know him from Adam, but he says, "Wow, this is just great." And frankly, he did incredible marketing. We sold 10 million pairs that next year. That turned me right around — paid my bills, paid my losses, and I was in good shape.

SS: If you had a choice, would you change anything?

BC: No. I was fortunate. I grew up on tough streets in Pittsburgh, no question. It wasn't easy. But no, I wouldn't change a thing.

SS: In the early days of your career, what were the things that gave you strength?

BC: I think the most important thing is attitude. I never would look down or feel sorry — I mean, I had a tough road, but I never felt sorry for myself. I feel that attitude was my best asset.

SS: Is it fair to say that the business today is much harder than 20 or 30 years ago?

BC: Yes. Making children's shoes 20 years ago was a pleasure. Today it is very, very difficult, with all the compliances you have to deal with and the government regulations. It's not fun being in shoes — it's especially not fun being in children's shoes. We have to go through every single type of testing there is, and not just in the U.S. Our company is very big internationally, and the rules in Europe and everywhere else are very, very tough.

SS: Let's go back to the days of Ted Poland and Jonas Senter, [two pioneers of manufacturing in Asia]. What's happened in the region from then to today?

BC: I'd call both Teddy and Jonas two of the geniuses of the shoe business. Jonas ran a business bigger than Nike. He was the biggest there is. The important thing is, it was a different business back in those days. I've been going to China for 40 years — more than 40 years, because I went there as a buyer. Jonas had built the foundation of what international business was. He had a big company, Mitsubishi, behind him, but he was a true genius. Teddy was a genius, too. Those two guys, they're my idols. I worked with both of them.

SS: Do you think that we could ever go back to Made in America and add higher tariffs to products coming in from other countries?

BC: There is no way we can make

children's shoes in America. We cannot do robotics, because they're too expensive. We cannot do injection, because machines can't handle that and they don't look right. We cannot do things by computer, like 3-D printing. We can't do the things here that can be done in Asia for children's shoes.

SS: Well, that's a pretty clear answer. It certainly tells us what's going on. So now for the next question: How does it feel seeing your son, Seth, so involved in the business?

BC: In the past three years, he has become an incredible person. I won't tell him that usually, but he's become an incredible executive. He has learned an awful lot. He's in Europe right now and often travels around the world. He doesn't mind the traveling, and he gets a lot done. I head up all the sales of the company, and that's what he wants to do. And he's the perfect person — he will be the person to run the sales one day.

SS: Well, the bad news is that after this interview, he's going to hear the nice things you said.

BC: He cannot read this! [laughs] I'm tough on him on purpose, because there are a lot of silver-spoon guys in this business, and there are a lot who've failed in this business. I don't want him to be a

silver-spoon person. People ask me a lot when I'm going to retire, and I say, "Never, because that's death." I don't have any plans of retiring, but he will eventually be working with me in sales in a much bigger way at the company. I know his vision is to replace me, but I'm not ready for that yet.

SS: Your staff has such love for you, and one of the reasons, I think, is that you've always been magnanimous. Would you agree with that statement?

BC: Well, I don't exactly agree with it. But I believe the two big words in business and my personal life are "communication" and "respect." My door is open every day, and the newest person in the company can walk in and say, "Hey, how ya doin', Mr. Campbell?" It's an open door because I really believe [that at BBC], we are a family. Most of our middle management have been with us more than 15 years, and I think [that's because of] good communication and respect of each other. They're all my friends. I can go drinking with them. I don't treat people any different than I want to be treated, and I really feel that it's

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Bob Campbell



"IT DOESN'T MATTER WHERE... YOU TREAT EVERYBODY AS AN EQUAL."

Sonny Shar



Sonny Shar and Bob Campbell sharing a warm drink and an intimate conversation at the BBC showroom in New York late last month

easy to be nice to people. I always look straight at a person, I never look down at a person. I think it's really good that we have built the company we have built.

SS: **Yes, it doesn't matter where — at a party, at shoe shows, whatever — you treat everybody as an equal.**

BC: Except the competition.

SS: **The competition, we're not talking about.**

BC: I'm just kidding. When we first moved the company to Boca Raton, 20 years ago, the first thing I said was, "I want to join some kind of charity." And fortunately, I got involved with The Arc, for children who needed special help. And I fell in love with that, and ever since, I think I'm on five different boards of charities — I'm on the board of the hospital, the historical society, and I'm very much involved in Lynn University and, of course, FAU. I believe in one thing: If you are successful, you've got to give back to the community, you've got to give back to the people who need it. As you know, I'm very much involved with the Two Ten Footwear Foundation, and I give as much as anyone in that association. I just feel good about doing that.

SS: **That's one of your best traits: You are humble. And if you're humble, then the rest of life is good.**

BC: I try to teach my son that. I try to tell him, "If you're going to be successful, you better learn to give back." It's very, very important that you do. Listen, there are a lot of people [who are in need]. At the Florence Fuller [childcare center], behind our office in Boca, you'll see these kids — the mothers come by bicycle or by bus to pick up their kids. And we support them. We give a scholarship every year to them. It's important to help single mothers and people who are having hard times. People have so many problems. It's terrible.

SS: **We're coming close to the end of this interview. But looking back, when you were a stock boy at Kinney Shoes, did you ever envision the success you have had?**

BC: Did I? No! When I was a stock boy at Kinney Shoes and I made \$35 that first week, I thought I was rich. But my dream was to make \$100. That was always my dream, so I worked at it. They made me a stock boy, but I hated it; I wanted to sell, so they let me, and I did some crazy things in the shoe store

to get the sale. Within a year, before I'd even graduated high school, I'd made enough money to buy an old Dodge for \$600. It made me very proud. When I graduated, I had a tuition scholarship to Michigan State, but I couldn't afford to go away, so I decided to stay with Kinney full time. I started selling shoes when I was 15, and here I am a damn shoe dog.

SS: **Well, I'm going to end this by saying one thing: Having known you so long, you deserve every honor, because of the impact you've had on our industry, because of your philanthropy, but most of all — and to me this says it all — because you're a mensch. It's been a bloody privilege to interview you, even in my strange accent.**

BC: Am I suddenly Jewish? Thank you so much, Sonny. You've always been one of my best friends in this industry. There are a lot of guys I really respect in this industry, and you're one of the few people I really love. You're like a brother. ■

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Bob Campbell

THE ANIMATED LIFE OF BOB CAMPBELL



1937

Born in Pittsburgh, where he lives with his mother and three sisters

1946

Starts working in his grandfather's bakery at the age of 9



1952

Moves to Detroit with his mother and new stepdad, attending Cass Tech High School, where he participates in football and concert band

1953

Gets a job at 16 in the stockroom at a Kinney Shoes store. Eventually, he is promoted to store manager and then regional buyer

1963

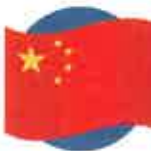
Becomes a buyer for Kinney's parent company, F.W. Woolworth

1975

Establishes BBC International

1976

Brings on Donald Wilborn as a partner



1978

Begins manufacturing in China

1980

BBC signs its first licensing deal, for The Smurfs

1982

More than 10 million pairs of

BBC's lighted shoes are sold under the LA Gear label in the first year



1994

Long-standing partnership with Disney begins, with a Winnie the Pooh license

1996

A Boston office opens to house BBC's branded division



1998

The company relocates from New York to Boca Raton, Fla.

2000

BBC inks a licensing deal for Polo Ralph Lauren Kids

2002

Campbell inducted into the Footwear News Hall of Fame

2004

Licensing partnership with Marvel begins

2012

BBC acquires the Heelys license, and Campbell receives the Award for Social Impact from FN

2013

Son Seth Campbell joins the BBC family



2017

Campbell receives honorary doctorate from Florida Atlantic University

Bob Campbell, photographed last month in his New York apartment

Facets of an Icon

Over his long career, Bob Campbell has influenced countless individuals. Here, several of his close friends and colleagues reflect on five aspects of his varied personality.

Bobby is nothing short of tremendously generous. He has a golden heart — the biggest heart you can think of. He's down-to-earth and very generous with his time. I've known him for maybe 25 years. He's an extraordinary man and deserves all the best that life can give him. He's very special.

Christine Lynn, friend and noted Boca Raton, Fla., philanthropist

I've known Bob since 1979, when he worked at Kinney and then left to start his own business. Through all that time, we've remained friends to this day. He's an amazing personality, a good man with a good heart. I started a charity.

It was a scholarship fund — the Jordan Krakauer Memorial Scholarship Fund — in memory of my fiancée's son, who passed away two years ago. We started a scholarship fund for college kids, particularly people in sports management, and Bob was right there with one of the first checks.

Rick Mina, president, WSS/Eurostar Inc.



Everyone knows my father is such a success story, but people often forget, given the type of person he is, where he actually came from. I often get reminded about that, if he feels I need it. He came from a different time and place and family situation — an extremely impoverished neighborhood in Pittsburgh, raised by a single mom, with three sisters. His mother was tough on him, but she made him who he is today. He doesn't gloat about his success, but look at the challenges he overcame to get where he is. And that's why he cares so much about kids. Yes, we are in the kids' footwear business, but he really does care about the welfare of kids and their well-being.

Seth Campbell, son and VP of international sales, BBC International

From day one, [since I] started the fashion-footwear charity event in China, now in its 14th year, Bob was there for me. He's been there every year as a major sponsor. Without him, it wouldn't be what it is today. He's helped hundreds of thousands of children in China.

Jim Issler, CEO & president, H.H. Brown Shoe Co.

1

GENEROUS PHILANTHROPIST

No matter what he did the night before, Bob is always there the first thing in the morning and ready to go — a real hard-working guy. People ask us, “What’s the secret to the success of the company?” I think, more than anything, it’s outworking our competition. That’s what we do. And it’s contagious. If Bob works as hard as he does, everybody else wants to work that hard as well.

Donald Wilborn,
vice chairman & CFO, BBC



Campbell in 1995

I call him the 360 guy. The way he works, plays, participates, runs his business, his involvement in the Two Ten Footwear Foundation — both in substance as well as monetarily — is incredible. He doesn’t skimp on anything. He just doesn’t quit. He is an incredible role model in how he approaches his life and his business.

Carol Baiocchi, board member, Two Ten; former SVP, Kohl’s



Campbell with Donald Wilborn (at left) and Carol Baiocchi (below)



He would wake up at 4 a.m., want you at breakfast by 7 a.m., and already have a list of to-dos for you. He’d say, “So this is what’s been on my mind.” Meanwhile, I was just sleeping. He’s like the Tasmanian Devil like that. He’s energetic like nobody’s business. He’s full of passion. There’s never a day that he doesn’t want to talk footwear.

I could call him now and he’d want to talk about it. I have to say that finding something that you’re truly passionate about is a great gift, and he did that.

Tracey McLeod, founder, Tiem Footwear; former president, BBC

He is definitely the man, just an awesome person. He’s a very effective and wonderful leader, extremely organized, very disciplined. And Mr. Campbell never forgets. I used to consider him an elephant because he doesn’t forget anything. If there’s anything he asks you to do, believe me, three or four weeks later, he’ll come ask you, “Did you get it done?” He has amazing focus. For instance, the brand he was working on when I started was The Smurfs. And for some reason, he had memorized each and every character. There I was, 25, and I couldn’t remember them all, but he did.

Miranda Aiken, BBC’s receptionist for 35 years

2

TIRELESS WORKER



I met Bobby for lunch one day at Keens Steakhouse in New York, to talk about this new opportunity he was incredibly excited about. The opportunity happened to be that he was buying the Heelys brand. This was long after Heelys had made their first pass and sort of withered away. But Bobby had this tremendous vision for what they could do with Heelys. I, of course, was a little bit skeptical, because my kids had grown up in the original Heelys era, when at every hockey rink we went to in Wisconsin, kids were flying around on Heelys and falling and getting hurt. Fast-forward a year later, and we had another lunch at Keens Steakhouse, and Bobby was telling me about the success of Heelys — and he had this look in his eye like, “Hey, I told you this was going to be a big deal.” One of his key characteristics is that passion and belief and ability to take an idea and turn it into success.

Dick Johnson, chairman, president & CEO, Foot Locker Inc.



3

BUSINESS VISIONARY

[Business-wise], he reads a situation as well as or better than anyone I know. He has a passion for all the things he loves and does. I’ve never seen him do a job halfway. He saw the future of imports long before others did. Due to his personality, he was always able to forge strong relationships with the owners of factories overseas.

Jim Issler

He has an amazing perspective on the business. He was always out there on the front line, grasping opportunities, and sometimes they worked — the lighted shoes are one example — and sometimes they didn’t. But at the same time, these were new opportunities, and Bob was always the first person out there to find them and figure out a way to maximize them. He has been a pioneer in the business. He helped pioneer China [as an import hub for shoes]. He has certainly been a dedicated person to the shoe business and to moving it and making it better.

Bryan Collins, president, Topline Corp.

Back in the 1970s, BBC had an agent in Hong Kong. His brother was doing figurines for a brand called The Smurfs. They became on fire and were everywhere. So Bob contacted the owners of the brand, flew to Atlanta, met with them in the airport and signed a licensing deal that day, no lawyers. Today, if we do a licensing deal, it goes on for weeks and weeks, with lawyers and lawyers. We signed a deal and it became a great success. That was the first thing we did as far as licensing footwear for children.

Donald Wilborn

He was one of the first people in the importing business to go to China, and back in those days, China was not what it is today. Somewhere around 1982 or 1983, when I was in the boys’ department at Kinney Shoes, Bob sourced from China a boys’ kidskin loafer. He attempted to make them for Easter, which was a very big dress-shoe season for boys and girls. He got these loafers made, they were very inexpensive, and the kids’ buyer bought a huge amount of them. They came in, and all the soles fell off — they all had cement problems. They were gorgeous, you just couldn’t wear them because the cement separated, and they all came back. That was a funny story, but one that defined him — because he didn’t give up, he kept right at it. And today in China, they make some of the best shoes in the world.

Rick Mina



Whether it's his involvement in Two Ten, Mercy Ships or any other charitable causes, Bob has always gone the extra mile and always shown how he genuinely cared. On some of the trade-related issues, like import tax, quota or any others, he always seemed to be in the forefront of fighting for the footwear industry, and I have always had a lot of respect for Bob because of that.

Matt Feiner, president & CEO, SG Companies

I started working at BBC in 1989, and within six months, he called everyone into the conference room and was holding a meeting to introduce us to the Two Ten organization. I think at the time, he was the chair of Two Ten, and he wanted to share the message. So he showed us a video and talked about this wonderful organization. He pretty much convinced everyone in the company to sign up to be a lifetime member. I remember thinking then — I was only 23 and had been working in the footwear industry for six months — “Why do I want to spend money to join this group for life?” But his passion convinced me. Twenty-eight years later, I sit on the board of Two Ten with him, and he still does nothing but promote the organization.

Tracey McLeod



Campbell with Tracey McLeod (above) and BBC staff (at right)



4

INDUSTRY ADVOCATE



I've known Bobby for more than 20 years. I admire that he was always learning and continuously finding ways to grow his business. He inspires all of us with his philanthropic efforts as well as his tireless support of our industry. He's one in a million.

Diane Sullivan, CEO, president & chairman, Caleres Inc.

There isn't anyone in modern memory who has done more for the Two Ten organization and the industry than Bobby Campbell. Two years ago, Bobby was the man who stood up in the board meeting and said we have to lower the average age of our board and that it has to be focused on the next generation. It was at his urging that the board undertook a strategy of actively engaging our industry's next generation, in the form of a junior board, which is currently in development.

That's because of Bobby's vision and his real desire to follow through with what's important, which is to ensure that Two Ten has a legacy that goes forward, optimistically, for another 77 years.

And to do that, we need to focus on the next gen in the industry.

Neal Newman, president, Two Ten Footwear Foundation



Bob is an icon in the kids' business, yet he never hesitates to always meet with my team and tell stories about the kids' shoe business. One of my philosophies is to never let the sun set without teaching somebody something.

Bob emulates that well. He is eager to impart knowledge, stories — things people can relate to in the retail world. He has seen all the recessions and the things that have an adverse effect on business. Because of that, he becomes a calming factor to those in the business. He is a great coach, a great mentor and a great man.

Jim Estepa, president, Journeys; CEO, Genesco Inc.'s retail group

I met Bob in the late 1970s or early '80s. I was working at Payless at the time, and he and his team would come out to Topeka, Kansas. He always seemed to just know how to speak to people, especially his customers. I think he was very intuitive about people in general and how to not only speak to them but work with them, to find what they needed and the easiest way to [meet those needs]. He is the consummate sales guy. I've never seen Bob walk into a room and find strangers. He has the gift of gab, in that he can walk into any room and he has got a relationship or common background with [those in the room]. The guy knows no strangers.

Bryan Collins



From left: Bob and Seth Campbell with Joel Oblonsky

I've known Bob since I was 19 years old [and first working in the industry]. I remember that, regardless of my position, he was interested in me as a person and spoke to me like I was the most important person in the room. He's still that way.

Joel Oblonsky, CEO, Nine West and Bandolino

He's somebody that so many people know. Whenever we were at trade shows and we'd have to get to a meeting, I'd tell him, "We have to allow an extra 15 minutes for you to be stopped a million times along the way." He'd say, "Oh, this just means I'm old." But every few steps, someone would want to say hello and talk.

Tracey McLeod



Bob and I met while working together in a Kinney Shoes store in 1959. He was the manager and I was going to school, working part time. And then Bob started BBC in 1975, and six months later I joined him, and that's 41 years ago. So it's probably one of the longest partnerships in the shoe business. After all these years, we've really never had an argument. And Bob is a very ambitious and outgoing and vivacious guy. He is a true salesperson through and through, so it's been exciting to be with him all these years. There's never a dull moment, for sure.

Donald Wilborn



5 GENUINE PEOPLE PERSON