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POWER PLAYERS

Footwear Industry Leaders Tell All About BBC's Bob Campbell

By Jennie Bell (<http://footwearnews.com/author/jenniebell2014/>) / May 9, 2017 10:27AM



Jim Issler and Bob Campbell
FN Archives

Over his long career in the footwear industry, BBC International chairman and CEO Bob Campbell has influenced countless individuals.

Here, several of his close friends and colleagues reflect on five aspects of his varied personality.

1. BUSINESS VISIONARY

Jim Issler

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

[Business-wise], Bob 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.



Dick Johnson.
Courtesy of brand.

Dick Johnson

Chairman, president & CEO, Foot Locker Inc.

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.

Rick Mina

President, WSS/Eurostar Inc.

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.

2. INDUSTRY ADVOCATE



Diane Sullivan.
Mark Mann

Diane Sullivan

CEO, president & chairman, Caleres Inc.

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.

Neal Newman

President, Two Ten Footwear Foundation

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 that 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.

Jim Estepa,

President, Journeys; CEO, Genesco Inc.'s retail group

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.

Matt Feiner

President & CEO, SG Companies

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.

3. GENEROUS PHILANTHROPIST



Bob Campbell and his son, Seth, photographed at Campbell Stables.
Steve Eichner.

Seth Campbell

Son & VP of international sales, BBC International

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.

Christine Lynn

Friend & noted Boca Raton, Fla., philanthropist

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.

4. TIRELESS WORKER



Bob Campbell & Donald Wilborn in 2010.

Donald Wilborn

Vice chairman & CFO, BBC International

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.

Carol Baiocchi

Board member, Two Ten; former SVP, Kohl’s

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.

Miranda Aiken

BBC’s receptionist for 35 years

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.