

Quarterback changes play call, but still uses leadership skills

As a child in Iowa, Michael W. Tryon, 49, president and chief operating officer of Chicago-based metal recycling firm Metal Management Inc., thought he'd be a NFL quarterback. That wasn't as much of a long shot as it sounds, considering his father and his seven uncles were high school football coaches.

Tryon became a quarterback at Iowa State University, where he was the team's captain in the 1977 season. But when he didn't make the cut, twice, in tryouts with the Minnesota Vikings, he refocused this acumen on a business career.

Q Is this where you thought you'd end up? As a child, what did you want to do when you grew up?

A As a child I always thought I'd be playing quarterback in the NFL. I always knew I'd be a leader of a team.

When I discovered—regrettably—that I didn't have the skills to compete in the NFL, I poured my work ethic, discipline, drive, leadership acumen and relentless competitive spirit into business.

Currently I'm leading a large team. It's gratifying, but also very humbling, to be leading a company with \$1.1 billion in sales.

Q At what point in your working life did what you're doing now become your goal?

A From my first job with Fastco Industries, a fractional horsepower motor and consumer products company, my goal has always been to lead people—especially within businesses in trouble or facing demise. I thrive on insurmountable challenges.

I like leadership positions requiring a challenge or aggressive growth-profit plans versus just maintaining status quo. I relish building successful teams and unifying organizations with solid foundations.

Q Did you look for a mentor? How did you develop that relationship?

A I've never looked for a mentor, but tried to orchestrate my own breaks. In addition, I've read over 200 autobiographies of successful people who get results, like Jack Welch, Knute Rockne, Vince Lombardi, John Wood-

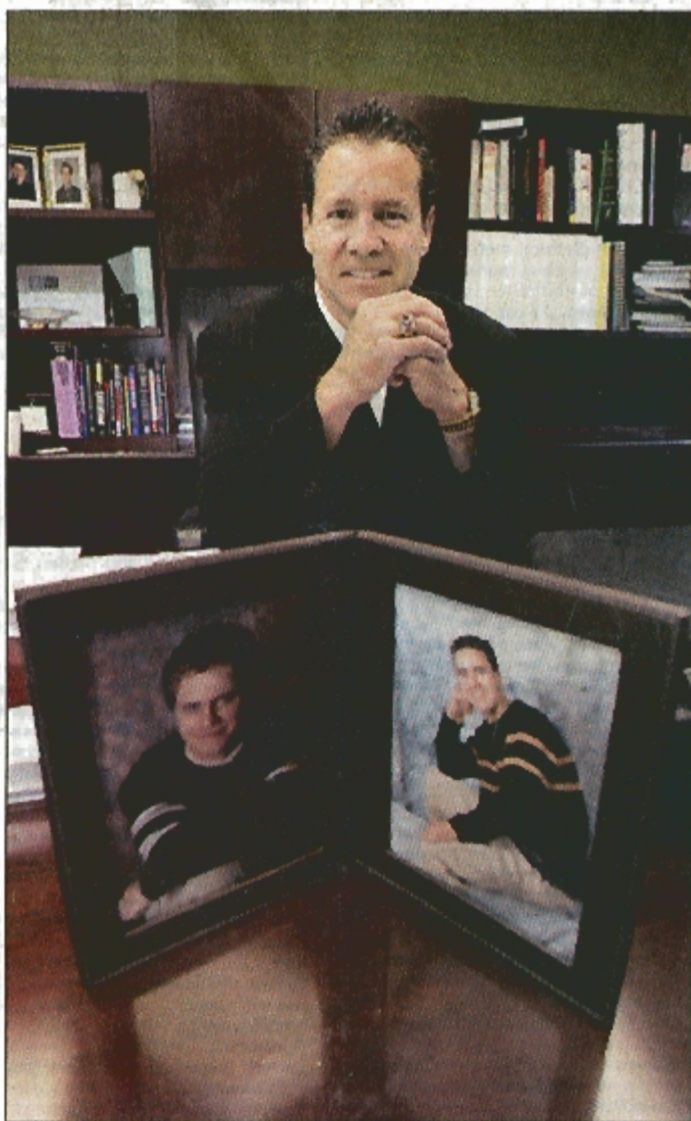


Photo for the Tribune by Buzz Orr

Michael W. Tryon, president and chief operating officer of metal recycling firm Metal Management Inc., focuses on family relationships as well as his career. Photographs of sons Brandon (left) and Michael Jr. are displayed in Tryon's office.

Step by step

1999-present: President and chief operating officer, Metal Management Inc.

1994-99: President, Harris Waste Management Group Inc.

1992-94: Seminar leader, Powerful Results Inc.

1989-92: Regional vice president, General Electric Co.

1986-88: District manager, General Electric Co.

1985-86: District sales and marketing manager, General Electric Co.

1984-85: National sales and marketing manager, Fasco Industries Inc.

1983-84: Western zone manager, Fasco Industries Inc.

1981-83: Regional sales man-

ager, Fasco Industries Inc.

1980-81: District sales manager, Fasco Industries Inc.

1979: Territory sales manager, Fasco Industries Inc.

1977-79: Owner, Sports Graphics

1976-79: Salesman and co-owner, The Athletic Shoe

1974-75: Summer house-painter and co-owner, Cyclone Painters

1971: Summer sales, Denison Country Club golf pro shop

1970-73: Summer helper, Johnny Majors Football Camps

1968-69: Corn detasseler

1964-68: Weed cutter for 500 acres of bean fields

1964-68: Lawn mower

national events, unforeseen circumstances. Did something like that change your career trajectory in any way?

A I've been fortunate to make my own changes except in 1979, when Minnesota Vikings coach Bud Grant put his arm around me and said I should be doing something else.

Q Have you ever had a career setback?

A I've had numerous setbacks and deal with them by maintaining focus, rallying the troops and heading back on to the field with an intense desire to prevail.

Also, I've learned to enjoy pain.

Q Where did you grow up?

A I was raised in Carroll, Iowa. I have a 45-year-old sister who's a registered nurse, and a 37-year-old brother who's a wireless technology director for a Dallas-based communications network.

My mother stayed home and kept sanity there. My father coached high school teams in Iowa for more than 25 years. He also coached me during his every waking hour.

Q How did your personal life fare while you were moving up the ladder?

A I was determined to balance work-family because I hate to lose. That's what a failed marriage would have been for me. So I focused the same intensity on my marriage and family that I had on my job. The secret was becoming world-class as a husband and father, just as at work the goal was becoming world-class.

I learned how to make my wife, Cindy, feel very special. She reciprocated. We've got a very strong marriage, even though we've moved seven times in 23 years of marriage. We've got two sons, Michael Jr., 21, and Brandon, 19.

Aiming to be a world-class husband and father has helped me be a better business leader. Their support has been key to achieving success at work.

Q What advice do you have for ambitious folks who aspire to your type of job?

A Understand your strengths and weakness

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Q Any classes from college particularly helpful to your career?

A The best class for me in college was a business law class. The professor tried to

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embarrass individuals by asking difficult questions throughout his lecture. Once he found candidates who were ill-prepared, he was relentless.

It forced me to prepare bet-

ter than my peers and avoid being ridiculed. That carried over into more focus in all of my other classes.

Q Sometimes the best laid plans get changed due to

been for me. So I focused the same intensity on my marriage and family that I had on my job. The secret was becoming world-class as a husband and father; just as at work the goal was becoming world-class.

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A Understand your strengths and weaknesses.

Develop a leadership style which is authentic and an extension of your personality and experiences.

—Interview conducted by Ann Therese Palmer, special to the Tribune