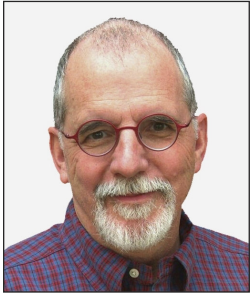# Insight For Getting Started in a Career as a Product Developer.

Why did you choose this career and what makes you particularly well suited to this work?

Earl - I've always had creative energy; taking things apart, building things from found materials and loose parts, and drawing or sketching. It was a monumental coincidence and life changer when I discovered that the University of Kansas offered Industrial Design. I immediately changed majors, and the rest is history.

In high school and college, which courses prepared you for your current position?

Earl - Looking back, high school physics, sciences, drafting and art comprised substantial elements of my educational foundation. In college, besides the course work for my major, I think English composition, speech, and a healthy dose of liberal arts continues to give me credibility when I need to communicate ideas with others. Being somewhat of a generalist (well rounded) is also useful when you're being considered as a potential product development professional.

What qualities do you look for in a prospective employee?

Earl - I first look at experience, then education and course work. Then I consider their personality. We tend to hire people with character, aptitude, and a love for the work. That translates well to our clients and establishes trust. Confidence without ego, the ability to work well with others, and an unending willingness to learn are all strong traits employers like Omnica seek.

What is the best advice you received that has benefitted your career?

Earl - Build your portfolio. Keeping records and examples of your body of work, no matter how indirectly related they may be to a position, can persuade someone that you can do the job. Examples and real stories are much more convincing than GPA's, titles or even advanced degrees. This is advice for starting out and it's still true regardless of where you are in your career.

What kinds of projects does your company typically work on?

Earl - In the thirty years since Omnica was founded, we have designed products ranging from parts the size of a grain of rice to large, free-standing, integrated systems (and everything in between). Because of our medical product background and body of work, 80% of our business is medical. Our customers range from venture-funded startups to Fortune 500 device firms.

Why do you think companies like yours can compete in the world market and survive?

Earl - I firmly believe that the U.S. still holds a prominent place with the world's imaginative minds and innovators. We have lost ground in areas like manufacturing, but we still hold the edge in creativity and superior products. It's part of our culture.

I'm always surprised to observe that most people don't stop to think that everything they handle, buy or use was designed by someone. The products that are well designed are usually the most successful.

What about your company is most important to you, and which aspects of what you do are most satisfying?

Earl - Our people are our best asset. By hiring and retaining talented mechanical, electronics, software engineers, industrial designers and scientists, we tend to feel that with our pool of knowledge and experience, no challenge is too difficult. That belief engenders job satisfaction and company success.

Our people are attracted to working in the creative end of the product design and development business where there is no typical. We literally don't know what's going to come in the door next, but we have all the tools to solve whatever challenge might face us. I like to describe our business as "Santa's workshop".

Personally, holding the first working prototype or part off the production line is magical. "Art to part" is an apt definition of the essence of creativity. It's a little like witnessing a birth where everyone is excited to see what they have accomplished, and what the future holds.

Earl Robinson is Omnica's co-founder and President. He has been in the product development business for nearly 40 years.

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What advice would you give the student who may think math, science or engineering are "too hard"?

Earl - These types of courses are all about satisfying curiosity and solving problems. To today's computer game generation, I'd point out that most games involve solving puzzles, riddles or tactical situations. It's fun. Solving math, science and engineering problems should be even more rewarding. If it's fun, it's not even work. And to those who are on the fence, don't lose your sense of wonder when exploring careers that involve science. Science is stimulating, it's all around us, and it affects every aspect of our lives.