



Lessons learned the hard way

The hardest story I ever had to write came early in my journalism career. Actually, it came before my professional career officially started. I was still studying at the University of Cincinnati that Sunday when I walked into the school's newsroom. As the news editor it was part of my job to check with the campus information office to review the previous day's events.

That's when I came across the campus police report.

Sometime in the wee hours of the morning after a long night of partying, a student visiting from another school woke in the middle of the night, and perhaps confused and unsure of where he was, tumbled from the dorm room window. He crashed through an iron gate to the cement loading dock 11 floors below. The police report indicated his friends identified him by his clothing; he'd suffered too much "facial trauma" to be identified any other way.

It was a difficult story to write for many reasons, not the least of which were the sad nature of the events and the anger and disdain directed at me after the article appeared in print.

That was the day I became a journalist. I learned more about being a writer from that and my subsequent time at the paper than I did in any of my classes. Sure, I learned theory and style in the classroom, but my real teachers were my fellow editors and daily experiences in the

newsroom and around campus.

I suspect much of what you know about business comes from the challenges you face running your company. Maybe you took some classes on your way to a degree, but it wasn't until you started running your own company that the real lessons kicked in.

Little did we know the downturn and recession we've suffered the past few years would send us all back to school — and what a harsh headmistress. Consider it a master's class in business practice.

The recession might have officially ended, but with the housing market (mostly) still suffering, it looks like a long slow haul before we return to more solid footing.

If this is your first recession you're learning the lessons and strategies that will make your company stronger, leaner and more profitable, strategies that will serve you well when prices stabilize and customers start spending again.

We share some of those lessons as part of *LM's* annual Top 150 coverage. It seems some of the biggest companies in the industry are getting some of their mojo back. Not everyone grew, but a significant number did. We talk to them about the lessons they learned during the recession, how this downturn compared with others and how their businesses are forever changed because of it.

Our Top 150 coverage also includes a look at the up and comers — the young guns just off the Top 150 list (and maybe a couple who just found their way on) to find out how they fared against the biggest in the industry.

There's also a story about the fastest growing companies. When the economy is in turmoil there's always a shakeout — winners and losers. Even in a recession several companies grew at double-digit rates.

Finally there are the lists. In addition to a listing of the largest Green Industry enterprises, we'll show you who does the most business in your region of the country. It all begins on page S1.

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