

Peter Blackstock  
A Profile by Tony Seton

You can't hear even a trace of an accent though Peter Blackstock was born and raised in New York City. However there is a significant remnant from his childhood: what he wrote in his high school year book. "Why take life seriously? You'll never get out of it alive." His mother wasn't happy with that at all, but as he explained to her, that was his philosophy. And indeed, he describes much of what he has done in his life as fun. And a great education.

For instance, there was the military. "I went under the college option program, which was if you go into the basic infantry and then advanced infantry, then they'd send you to the [Fort] "Benning School for boys." It was a shorter stint than the Air Force and good training, but it meant that Peter was an officer and subject to call-up of the reserves.

He went to Vietnam. "I was just very fortunate and I came back and then I ended up in the reserves in San Jose." The Army needed him again. As a first lieutenant, he found himself filling a leadership gap, assigned to improving reserves readiness. "I just wrote a bunch of orders and said, 'Well, let's see if it will stick and by God, they stuck.' It was just crazy. The military was a mess."

When he left the military, Peter got a marketing job with Ford Motor Company working in Milpitas. "You had the corporate mentality; it was all tug and pull. It was like going to college. It's not what you really know, it's what the professor wants to hear from you on the test. So you just adapt to the situation. It was the same thing with Ford and basically, they wanted the job to get done. So, you just get it done, whatever it takes to get it done, they're very happy."

He worked hard at Ford. "I felt 10% of the company were the real people that you could count on. The 10-percenters do whatever it takes to accomplish that job, they'll spend a lot of time doing it and that's the way you have to move up through a corporation."

Peter's job required that he call on most of the 165 dealerships in northern California, northern Nevada, and Oregon. In 1975, one of his contacts suggested that he take over a failing dealership in Sacramento. "I realized that retail was a lot of fun and the one thing is you get to sleep in your own bed because you're home every night. You're not on the road. But they had 20% unemployment up there at the time. My wife said, 'What's that mean?' I said, 'It means 80% of the people can buy cars.'"

He turned the store around. "I was working 7 days a week, 12 to 14 hours a day, but we put together a team and we moved along." And it paid off. They went from the bottom of the pile to the top. Peter then had several ownership opportunities, and came back to the Monterey Peninsula to look at buying a Chevrolet dealership.



“When I was in the Army, I came down to Fort Ord, and I thought, ‘God, this is unbelievable.’ I didn’t know places like this existed on this earth. That’s when I said to myself, if I can figure out how to get back here and make a living, the quality of life was superb. In fact, I called it Camelot, because when I first came here, it would rain between midnight and 5:00am.”

He didn’t buy the Chevy store. He worked there for a while, building his nest egg, and then with help from people at Bank of America who knew his work, he bought the Toyota dealership; on his wife’s birthday in 1982. He now has the Scion and Lexus operations, too.

What’s changed in the car business over the last 30 years? “The biggest thing is the capital requirements. More cash was needed in the business, so the requirements are a lot more. The equipment is a lot more. There’s a lot more sophistication.” Plus cars require less maintenance, so the service department isn’t the gold mine it used to be.

And then there is the Internet. “It’s changed everybody’s life dramatically.” Especially for the consumer, who won’t waste time at a dealership that isn’t up to date, in terms of both equipment and personnel. “So now the customer is driving everything, the process is transparent and it’s basically trying to move the customer through the store as quickly as possible.”

What does he do when he’s not working? “Work. I like people. I like to be stimulated and I enjoy work. I consider that I work 24/7. I have a lot of freedom to do what I want to do. I try and empower our people. You have to tell them what you expect, what you want. Your responsibility is to provide them what they need to do the job and just let them grow.”

Fun and education. Peter and his wife live in Pebble Beach.