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### Business Innovation Group (BIG) News

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# Freeman Memorial Lecture 2011

April 25, 2011

On **Monday 11th April** the Center for Entrepreneurial Learning and Leadership held its third annual Freeman Memorial lecture in the Nessmith-Lane Assembly Hall. Guests of the Center gathered at a social reception for the speaker J.T. Marburger at 4:30pm followed by the formal public lecture at 5:30pm. There was an excellent turnout from the students with over 200 students and guests attending.

The speaker J.T. Marburger talked about his experiences at Georgia Southern University and how these prepared him for a life of entrepreneurial effort. In particular he mentioned his experience working with Frank Hook and his role in helping Fraternity Row become established. JT then described the different stages in his entrepreneurial life and the challenges that he faced in growing a range of businesses. First he talked about his current business **Insignia Promotions LLC** and discussed some of the challenges and enjoyment of opening up international offices (in London).

After talking about his current business he returned to his roots as an entrepreneur and explained about how he started by getting involved with his Mother's business (Dinah Marburger and Incentive Marketing). There were some interesting insights about 'bootstrapping' and some challenges this posed when working with one's mother. **Incentive Marketing** started at \$200,000 revenue per year and grew to \$3 million by 1995 and at this point had five employees. Growth was funded solely from proceeds and the partner's own cash and JT recommended that it was better to use other people's money to grow if you can. He also commented that he learnt during this period to, "*never pay yourself last*".

From 1995 to 2003 sales continue to grow and the firm grew to 12 employees. JT then embarked on a new direction first setting up **Proforma** and then becoming a VP of Sales and then President of **CorpLogoWare** which at its height grew to \$45 million and 235 employees. JT had many insights about the challenges this level of growth can create. He highlighted the challenges it can sometimes place on managing cash flow and described how ultimately the business got into trouble due the actions of his partner. Here JT explained that even negative experiences in entrepreneurial businesses can lead to positive learning outcomes for the entrepreneur.

JT Marburger closed his talk by returning to his current business Insignia Promotions and he discussed the challenges of rebuilding from scratch and the tenacity that this required. When his talk closed many questions followed and a large number of students stayed to discuss his businesses and to ask further questions.

## **About J.T. Marburger**

J.T. Marburger was President of Incentive Marketing from 1990 to 2005 and took company from \$200,000 in sales to \$5,000,000. During his time as President of CorpLogoWare from 2005 to 2008 he took the company from sales of \$12,000,000 to \$45,000,000. Now as President of Insignia Promotions from 2008 present, J.T. Marburger has brought the company from a start up to a current value of \$6,200,000. J.T. Marburger graduated from Georgia Southern in 1984 with a BBA in Management. J.T. is married to Gerilynn and has two children Madeline and Joey and lives in Roswell, GA. J.T. has owned several businesses in the \$18 billion dollar promotional products industry. He currently serves as

President of Insignia Promotions, a privately held company that ranks in the top 50 within the promotional products industry. Insignia Promotions focuses on Fortune 500 companies with clients such as The Coca-Cola Company, Hershey's, Lenovo, Atlanta Braves, and Anheuser Busch. Additionally the company focuses on activating sports license agreements with these companies and currently provides merchandise to promote NCAA BCS Bowl Series, NCAA Final Four, Super Bowl, Olympics, FIFA World Cup, Super Bowl, NBA All Star and Finals and many other key sporting events around the world.