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Invision Statement

Lee Martin shook hands and left. We'd been chatting for an hour, then I was on my own. Technically, not alone at all - there were over a hundred people in the room. But briefly alone, and there was that space, a slightly disconcerting space you get when one minute you're talking one on one, pretty intensely, and have been for an hour...and then you're not.

Space is about relationships. And we'd been talking about relationships for an hour. Of course, on one level we'd been talking about business and customers and service and all that good stuff. But actually, importantly, Lee and I had been talking about relationships. Show you what we mean: right at the beginning - we'd only been talking for 10 minutes - we asked Lee where he came from.

'Spartanburg, South Carolina. My father was a high school principal, my mother a nurse. I lost my father young, but my mother made sure my sister and I were afforded a normal life while pursuing a professional career. As I grew up, mum led our family. I think that made a big impression on me. There are a lot of women in our industry. I've always appreciated the challenges facing young women

as they follow their career; perhaps I've got a slightly different perspective.'

Lee? Lee Martin is VP Sales and Marketing for J+J/Invision, a significant American carpet company. Totting up some numbers, we reckon Lee's a 36-year carpet industry veteran, and we also reckon that if we'd asked him to give us the warp and the weft on anything carpet related, he'd tell you. But we didn't ask him much about that kind of thing because you and I both know it's a given that he knows it. And besides, every so often Lee said something else which boiled down to being about relationships.

Like when Lee's talking about doing business in London. Respectful, but not in the slightest bit in awe of J+J/Invision's major competitors, he said this:



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▶▶▶▶▶ I remember when I was in Kansas City – the competitors had loads of reps. We had one. Just one – and you know what? It worked. Why? Customers were never confused. They had a relationship with that one person. It looked like it was about service and dedication, and of course it was – but really it was about trust. That relationship's backed up by all the important elements, from response times to supply logistics, but the real value to our customers is a consultative, trusting relationship.

'We've actually done business in the UK for over 20 years, working through agents and other manufacturers. The problem was that way we were never able to build a direct relationship. Three years ago we decided to commit to the UK and Canada. As we decided to build our international business we decided to bring in our own people. I've known Lauren Totzke, who's leading our UK operation, since she was 11 years old! Lauren had a lot of success for us in Orlando – she was my choice because I know how she'll build relationships with architects. Important, much more important than a big showroom, is looking after our clients.'

After military college, at The Citadel in Charleston, Lee intended to go into the military.

'Just as I graduated, the Vietnam War ended, and I found myself like many other officers in the Army Reserve. I started work at Milliken – as a shift supervisor – and worked my way up in

production. I spent my first five years in production management – applying a lot of behavioural reinforcement techniques. The company was quite progressive, keen to support individual development. Human resources noticed what I was doing and got me involved in training salespeople and contractors – before long I was made Director of Sales Training. The company took some advice from Boston Consulting to get 100 contract salespeople in the field – very rapidly! So I was brought back from a stint in the Textiles Division to head up that process. After hiring and training those guys I took them to the field – the natural result was that I headed up the teams I placed in Kansas and Chicago – selling in the core Mid-West market.

'Hired by Welco to do the same thing, I joined Mannington as Sales Director and was part of the team that created Mannington Commercial, which of course is a significant player in North America. After four years at Mannington I joined J+J in 1994 as Director of Sales. It was just at the point the company purchased Invision. Back in 1994 J+J were not in the carpet tile sector at all – from day one I advocated that we should be. Today, it's an important part of our business, and rapidly growing.

'We're not mega, but we're big enough! We have good products backed by really impressive green credentials which go way back. For example we were one of the pioneers of non PVC recyclable carpet▶▶▶▶▶



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▶▶▶▶ile backing, our campus in Dalton is a wetland environment, and last year we won the GSA Evergreen Award. We're also a design led company, involved in a good deal of colour and market research. Current ranges such as Magnify, Papercraft and the Light Collection are designed to appeal to specifiers of top end projects.

'But I think the key to the J+J/Invision difference is the way we work with people. Really responsive and the key to that is the strong relationship based approach.'

Not long after, Lee shook hands and left. We'd been chatting for an hour, then I was on my own. And in that space I thought about Lee, and what he's said. He was proud of the green story, the design led products, the growth – of course he was. But he was even more interested in talking about people, trust, behaviour, relationships. He's right, isn't he? ●

