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enLIGHTenment  
MAGAZINE  
JUNE 2018



# FAMILY FOOTSTEPS: THE NEW GENERATION

Five lighting industry “kids” share their thoughts on growing up in the industry, and how they are helping to usher it into a new era.

BY HANNAH  
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**W**hat do you want to be when you grow up? is a question we all hear. Some people seem to have always known the answer, while others hope they'll figure it out in time. For those who grew up in a family business, finding the answer may even be harder, as they must decide whether to follow their parents' path or create their own destiny.

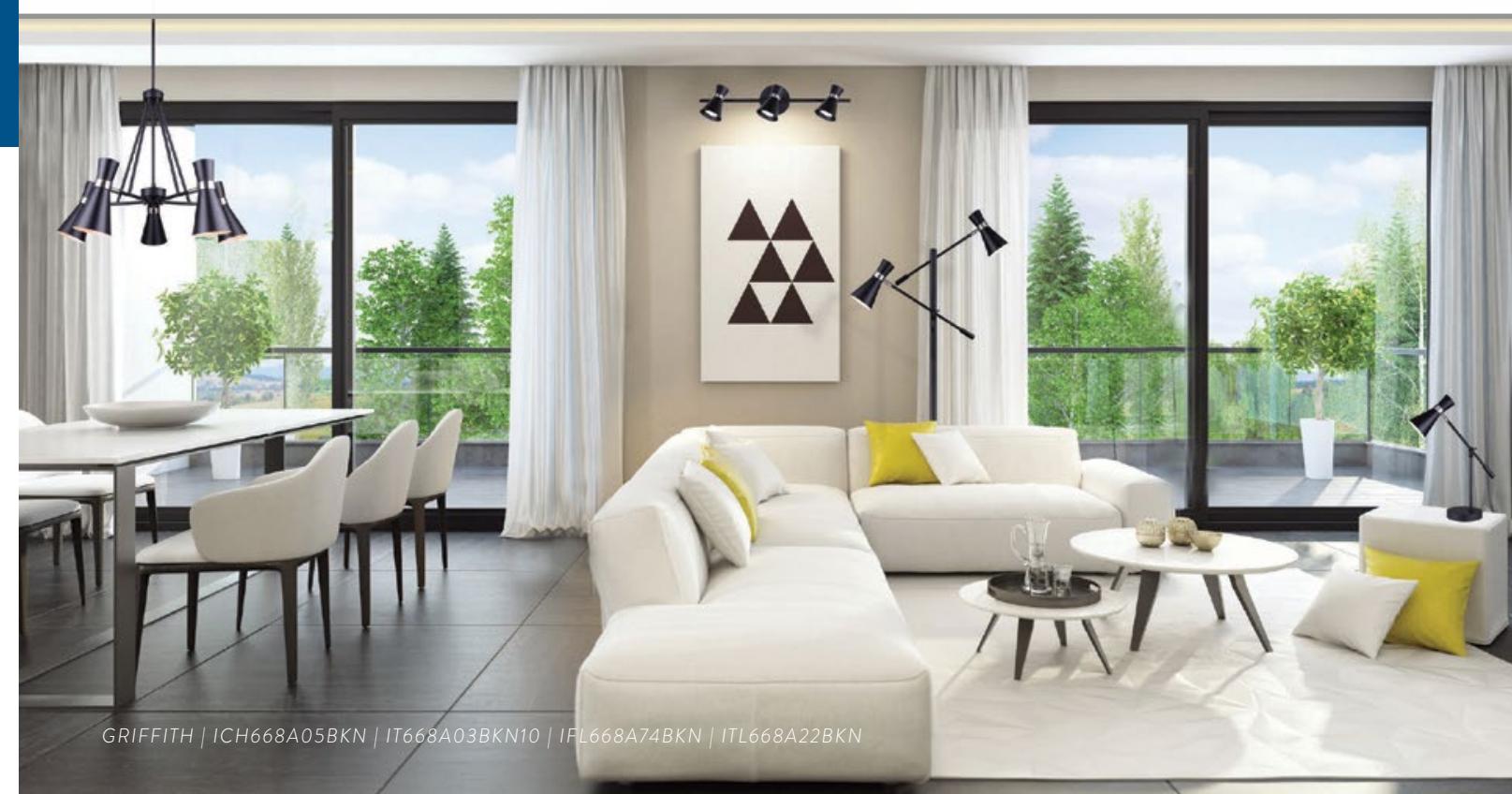
According to the Family Business Institute, few family businesses survive for the long haul. Roughly 30 percent make it to the second generation, just 12 percent reach the third generation, and only 3 percent are viable into the fourth and beyond.

I sat down with five people under the age of 30 who grew up in the industry and chose to stay. While their stories share similar themes – many recall afternoons spent playing in warehouses or on showroom floors after school – each journey to their place in the business is as unique as the individual.

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LIGHTovation  
DALLAS INTERNATIONAL LIGHTING SHOW  
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**ADENA SPERLING**, 30

Daughter of Jacob Sperling, founder of Maxim Lighting, a manufacturer based in California



**WILLIAM SENOFSKY**, 26

Son of Nick Senofsky, founder of LED Inspirations, a manufacturer based in Texas



**DANNY WARMBOLD**, 29

Son of Bob Warmbold, founder of Accent Lighting, a retailer based in Oregon



**RUDY DINI**, 30

Son of Randy Dini, owner of Frank Dini Lamp & Shade, a retailer based in North Carolina



**JARRETT FENNELL**, 27

Son of Fred Fennell, founder of Fennell Marketing & Sales, a rep firm based in Ontario, Canada

**“Growing up, it never felt like learning, but every day was a lesson.”**

— Adena Sperling

**Hannah Rachel Carroll: What was your childhood like?**

**Adena Sperling:** When we were younger, my father and mother would take my siblings and I to the office on the weekends. The people who worked with my parents also became my family. Cindi, our shipping manager, would tear off the perforated edges from the green printing paper, hand us a paper clip, and help us make pom-poms out of them. Our summer breaks were spent tagging along on business trips where we would visit new and current vendors, learn about quality control, and production. I saw and experienced the world in a very unique way. Growing up, it never felt like learning, but every day was a lesson. Probably the biggest growth benefited from those years was a deep respect for my parents, the business, and the people we worked with.

**HRC: Did you grow up wanting to join the industry?**

**Jarrett Fennell:** Absolutely not. I wanted to be a professional hockey player. I had a full ride to a D1 school in Boston, and after graduation, I signed with the Idaho Steelheads. It only took a few days

to know deep down I wasn't happy. A lot of people didn't understand, but I knew it wasn't the life I wanted anymore. I wanted to help my dad take his business to the next level. Walking away from the rink was incredibly hard, though I never dwelled on it. I knew I was making the right decision.

**HRC: Has it been hard expressing your views or implementing changes?**

**Danny Warmbold:** My dad and I haven't always seen eye-to-eye. He says I have to learn how to do things his way first, and then I can make suggestions. That's been frustrating for me, especially when I feel like I have a good idea, but I respect him and learn his methods. About six months ago, I was able to change how we do returns — I implemented a new system for receiving defective replacements. So far, it's been going well.

**HRC: What do you think is needed for a family business to thrive?**

**William Senofsky:** There has to be mutual respect. Kids working in a family business need to honor the experiences of the elders, and those with experience need to embrace fresh and new

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**"I never wanted to just come in and start calling the shots because I was the boss' son. I want to be viewed as a good fit because of what I bring to the table."**

— Danny Warmbold

perspectives. If the owners of companies felt their children were listening to them, they would more freely give their kids freedom. If kids felt they were trusted, they'd be more inclined to take initiative. It's a two-way street.

**HRC: How has the lighting industry changed within your lifetime?**

**Adena Sperling:** We saw manufacturing move from the U.S. to Mexico, and then to China. We were witness to a change in relationship, however slight, in the design and production when a different manufacturer is executing it. Given the increase in outlets of production, we also saw a big influx of different designs as each of the manufacturers we worked with experimented and tried to find their niche. Technology also moved quickly. We were early adopters of LED and learned as much as we could about its technology and design. We continue to study and evolve accordingly. We are also currently seeing a burst of aggregate information on sales trends, pricing, etc. We are tapping into that information to apply to new designs, negotiate prices, promote product, and share with our sales representatives and customers so that the entire team can benefit.

**HRC: What are you doing to stay current as the industry changes?**

**Rudy Dini:** We have been putting our work on Etsy. It's been a great and easy way for people all over the world to purchase our custom lamps and designs. We also continue to support the community we serve. The industry might change, but our zip code isn't going to — at least we hope not. This community has been good to us so we make sure to participate in sponsored events and charities, anything to give back.

**HRC: What has been the greatest challenge you've overcome since joining the family business?**

**Danny Warmbold:** Earning respect from my peers. I never wanted to just come in and start calling the shots because I was the boss' son. I want to be viewed as a good fit because of what I bring to the table. I'm taking some courses with the American Lighting Association (ALA) to understand the industry and be part of the conversation.

**HRC: What is one of the greatest life lessons you've learned?**

**William Senofsky:** How to be inventive. When I was little, I remember this box we had in the garage. It was specifically for taking things apart and putting them back together. When the microwave or hair dryer broke, they didn't get thrown away — they got thrown into the box. I'm not saying we grew up without nice things. I'm saying my father always encouraged me to think critically, and to use my knowledge and the best of my abilities to improve the quality of the things I already had. Those same principles have been applied to how we do business. My father saw the value in lighting a few years ago and invested heavily. When the Recession hit, things got interesting, but we were used to refurbishing what we had. We came out of it with one of the best LED products on the market and our company has never been stronger.

**HRC: What has been your biggest contribution to the business?**

**Rudy Dini:** The hardest thing to get my dad onboard with was adopting Square (it's a user-friendly software program). I think he was a little apprehensive because it was something he just wasn't familiar with. It's a great tool for small businesses; it does everything from tracking trends and payments to point-of-sale and payroll. My dad was used to doing everything by hand. I really pushed for Square because I knew it would make his life easier, and it has.

**HRC: What industry changes do you expect to see in the next 5 years?**

**Jarrett Fennell:** I know a lot of people are worried, as far as ecommerce goes, but I don't think brick and mortars are going away. I would never buy a lighting fixture online. I still need to go to a store. I need to see it and feel it. I need that instant gratification. Pictures can't capture the true beauty and essence of a lighting fixture. Don't get me wrong, I believe there is immense potential in ecommerce and it will inevitably change this industry, but I do not think it will destroy it. I think it will only make things better.

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