



Burton D. Morgan

(posthumously)
President
Basic Search Inc.
BSME '38

For his outstanding contributions as a creative engineer, technical manager, entrepreneur, venture capitalist, and philanthropist

Burton Morgan died on March 6, 2003, shortly after the following interview was completed.

We present these reflections as a celebration of the life of a remarkable man and a remarkable Purdue engineering alumnus.

The Right Stuff

“I went into engineering because my father chose it for me,” says Burton Morgan. “My father was a psychologist. He gave me all kinds of tests and said I had mechanical ability and that I should be a mechanical engineer. I started at Northwestern but I transferred to Purdue after two years. Purdue was a better engineering school.”

At Purdue, Morgan was active in ASME and SAE and served in several other student organizations, including the flying and glider clubs. “During my youth, my friends and I were very fascinated with flight. We constantly tried to come up with some way to produce a glider that could be dragged behind a boat. During college, I joined the Purdue Glider Club. We built our own gliders of wood, linen cloth, and airplane dope. The main thing I remember is that the FAA condemned them all.”

Morgan began his career after Purdue as a research physicist with the B. F. Goodrich Company. He moved from there to the

Pennsylvania Rubber Company as a process engineer and then, in 1945, became chief engineer of the Adhesive Plaster Division of Johnson & Johnson. He was responsible for the design of the first Band-Aid machine. This began a long career in the adhesives industry, first as an engineer at the Behr-Manning Corporation and then as an engineer/entrepreneur.

“I just went along like anybody else and got a job, got married, and raised my kids,” says Morgan. “My bosses kept telling me what a good engineer I was, and I kept telling them what a good president I would make. We never heard each other. I had built a machine that made a million dollars a month for the company, while I made \$600 a month. So I thought I would start on my own.”

“I remember that as a student at Purdue, my mechanical engineering class visited the J. J. Donnelly Company in Chicago to get a taste of what a working engineer’s life is like. We met a number of wizened old men with green eyeshades working on drawing boards in a rather dusty atmosphere. The effect on me was, I’m sure, quite different from the effect my professor hoped for—I was appalled and decided on the spot that my first aim in life was to escape slavery.”

Unconventional Wisdom

Morgan co-founded Fasson Products, now a division of Avery-Dennison, in 1955. In 1959, he founded Morgan Adhesives Company to produce pressure-sensitive tapes, films, and label materials and other products for the automotive, electronic, medical, photographic, and other industries worldwide. He was president of Morgan Adhesives until 1973, when the company was acquired as a subsidiary by the Bemis Company. He continued as a director for the company for more than 20 years.

Since 1973, Morgan has founded or co-founded more than 45 companies, including Multi-Color Corporation (labels and packaging), Filmco (a pioneer in plasticized packaging films, now a division of R. J. Reynolds), Datamark (computer paper), and Toton Inc. (printed plastic films). He holds six patents, in the United States, England and Canada. His reputation as an entrepreneur led to an invitation from the Government of Russia to join five other U.S. businessmen in meetings with Russian businessmen. In 1977, he founded Basic Search Company to identify and mentor new entrepreneurs in the manufacturing area, and he has written five books on entrepreneurship. He also founded and

is past chairman of the Concept Development Institute, a nonprofit research organization. He is passionate about the unique and fulfilling opportunities open to independent business people.

“The three key features of the entrepreneurial way of life are freedom, fun, and an expanded lifestyle,” says Morgan. “Granted, new ventures are not for the light-hearted. But failure never stopped anyone who was truly determined to succeed. I have found that entrepreneurs’ failures are often more interesting than their successes, and these failures helped to develop the character and intelligence that eventually led them to success. An entrepreneur who fails is not put to death. He or she can always try again. And successful entrepreneurs always do.”



- 1996– President, Basic Search Inc.
- 1993 Outstanding Mechanical Engineer Award, Purdue School of Mechanical Engineering
- 1992 Honorary Doctorate of Management, Purdue
- 1987 Burton C. Morgan annual entrepreneurship competition established
- 1985–96 Chairman, Multi-Color Corp.
- 1973–84 Founded several companies and organizations, including Basic Search Inc., a venture capital firm.
- 1959–73 Founder, President and Director, Morgan Adhesives Co.
- 1955–59 Co-founder and President, Fasson Products
- 1949–55 Engineer, Behr-Manning Corp.
- 1945–49 Chief Engineer of Adhesive Plaster Division, Johnson & Johnson
- 1944–45 Process Engineer, Pennsylvania Rubber Co.
- 1938–42 Research Physicist, B. F. Goodrich Co.

BSME '38, Purdue