

Photo by Bob Giglione



TWO MINUTES

Different strokes

Competitive swimmer **Roger Kahn** dives into the office pool

Roger Kahn is just getting going at age 58. The head of Garden City temporary office space firm Champion Office Suites is one of the nation's top competitive swimmers in his age group – a pursuit he believes gives him an edge in the ultra-competitive office-space-leasing industry.

You've been a competitive swimmer for decades. What keeps you going? I enjoy it. It's good for you and I find it cathartic. It clears my mind. It's a time when I'm insulated from pretty much everything in the outside world.

What kind of competitions are you in? U.S. Swimming is the governing body for competitive swimming across the country. There's a division called U.S. Masters Swimming. They run competitions all over the country and have national championships twice a year. I swim in the 55 to 59 age group.

Have you won many competitions? I was an All-American this year. That means in a given event, I was No. 1 in the country. Consistently, I'm in the top 10 in the country. In the past 20 years, I've been in the top 10 in the world 11 or 12 times.

How important is winning? If you want to do a certain time and you don't, no matter

what place I take, in my mind I lost. I constantly swim against the clock. I try not to swim against people.

Are you still trained by coaches? Two summers ago, I got an anniversary gift from my wife: She sent me to the high-performance swimming camp run by U.S. Masters. We were trained by four nationally renowned coaches and a former head physiologist for the U.S. Olympic swim team.

That must have been an interesting and useful experience. The physiologist hooked us up to a power meter. We swam a lap and got videotaped. The power meter produced a graph, showing when the torque was strong and weak. You could see where the problems were.

Sounds like a good analogy for a business analysis. How else does competitive swimming relate to business? You compete in business all the time. You compete to get an account, to keep an account, to give

good customer service. To me, it's all competition. In sports you have to be focused, and you have to be focused in business, too.

Do you ever discuss your swimming with clients? I don't really talk about it with customers. It doesn't really come up. But I think the way it's helped me live my life works to my customers' benefit.

How did you go into temporary office space? It was like the Remington razor guy: He liked the razor so much, he bought the company. I had a similar situation. I was a client of a predecessor company, Intelligent Offices. Management saw how much I was excited by the business, which was a franchise, and they told me it was for sale.

You bought that Garden City franchise in 1993, and when you went independent in 2010 you renamed it "Champion," an obvious a reference to your competitive athletics. Do other people get that? Probably not. They don't have to. "Champion" means the best. They don't have to know why it's called that. It was more about being the best than being a good swimmer – but the two do fit in pretty nicely.

– CLAUDE SOLNIK