

No. 2

TAS Tales

**Fun stories
shared from the
Tas industry**

Composed by
TAS Marketing with
stories and photos
by TAS members

Hole in his Sock

Even the halls were packed with the staff from the hotel as the famous inspirational leader, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, who wrote the book “The Power of Positive Thinking” got up to speak. You could hear a pin drop as Mrs. Peale sat right in front of her husband. This was our first Convention as the ATMS (Association of TeleMessaging Suppliers) and we wanted it to be perfect.

Chris and I were excited to pick up Doctor and Mrs. Peale at the airport allowing us time to get to know them a little better. They were welcomed in their suite with flowers and fruit and they started to get comfortable and removed their shoes. It was then that it happened - Norman Vincent Peale had a hole in his sock! The Almighty OZ hidden behind the curtain was fallible. In an instant, I liked that man and became a big fan.



I grew up in a household of Catholics. I had a very strict mother when it came to observing the dogma, along with saying the rosary every night, even in the middle of a basketball game. Her top Ten Spiritual List would be God, Jesus Christ and Norman Vincent Peale. I asked if Dr. Peale wouldn't mind speaking with my mother. As he agreed, I got her on the line and said, “Ma, I've got someone here that wants to say hi”. Handing him the phone, Dr. Peale said in his low, slow composed voice, “Good Afternoon Mrs. Michaels – this is Norman Vincent Peale”. Lucky his hearing wasn't that good as I heard her scream over the phone from across the room... certainly making the day for me and my Mom.

His speech was very effective and at times when he would come to a dramatic pause, I would look over at his wife and she would just give him a smile and he would continue on.

I guess the holey sock affected me so much because of having to take my shoes off during 3rd grade knowing I had a huge hole in the heel. I was ashamed – he wasn't!

**“Being right
half the time
beats being
half-right all
the time.”**

TAS TALES stories are presented in random order. They are not intended to represent preference or chronological significance.

Dem Spoons

TAS Marketing was celebrating its 25th anniversary in a beautiful hotel with a two story suite and outdoor deck in downtown Vancouver, B.C. The views were incredible. We opened all the stops with live harp music, oysters on the half shell, shrimp, an open bar as well as a book signing for my husband Steve. Lots of TAS owners attended as well as their guests.

The second night after finishing our anniversary, a bunch of us decided to go out to a restaurant overlooking the city. We were all feeling good after imbibing when Bill Hunter hung a spoon on his nose. Not to be outdone, Nosepick (a nameless vendor) along with Roy and Patty Emmett got with the plan and had spoons hanging as well as myself... all but Steve. He just couldn't get it to stick on his nose. If that wasn't enough, he ordered the Cornish Game Hen. When his dish finally arrived – they were the size of two golf balls... which he ate in two bites.

Chris Michaels



**“Nothing is
impossible.
The word
itself says
‘I’m possible!’”**

Audrey Hepburn



"The Lightning Man"

It seems that when Steve Michaels and I get together at a convention, the story of Lightening comes up. The lightening story started in Jerusalem 12 years ago via a good friend Fr. Peter Vasco. He is head of the Franciscan Foundation of the Holy Land. He controls all the major Holy Sites. He is also listed as the 6th most important Catholic in the world.



He predicted that some day when I walk through the entrance of a church I will be stuck by lightning. To this day no one will walk into a church with me. And the lightening stories follow me everywhere...

Chris Michaels and Jim Becker

Thunder and Lightning in the UK

A couple of years ago I arranged a trip to the UK (England) to visit four XDS Customers and one TAS customer, Mike Burkinshaw. Mike's service is in an old mill building. He says it was built in 1774. It has been repurposed and now includes several businesses including Mike's Service. It is in a location that still includes the old mill pond. The mill pond provides a very nice view over the local countryside.

Mike was a gracious host and on the insistence of his operators, he took me to lunch at a local pub and ordered for me what was described as a typical English lunch. Bangers, mash and mussy peas with a pint of the local ale. I was glad to have the pint... banger are a sausage that tastes a bit like greasy sawdust, mash are well mashed potatoes and mussy peas are very overcooked peas.

Upon return to the service, we reviewed some issues and since the weather was starting to look a bit rainy, we decided to head South to Heathrow airport to catch our flight back to the States.

A few days after our return, Mike contacted me and said the rain which started just as we left his service had turned into a major storm with lots of thunder and lightning and torrents of rain. The old mill pond which was a nice view from his office had filled and overflowed flooding the whole area. He and a couple of his operators were trapped in their office. The water from the mill pond was high enough to flood his office. There was water running through his office. They had taken all the equipment and put it on top of tables and desks and raised all the wiring up and had most of it hanging from the ceiling. Miraculously they still had power and telephony. They had stayed there for three days taking calls and feasting on vending machine specials.

Mike's request was that I never should return. They really could not afford another storm like that and the floods that followed. He still blames the whole thing on my visit.

Jim Becker

**"Keep your
face always
toward the
sunshine, and
shadows will
fall behind
you."**

Walt Whitman



ATSI Power

I started my career in the Telephone Answering Service on January 2, 1973. Like many of my peers in the industry I was second generation. After college and off on my own little did I know a late night phone call from my mother would change the direction of my life. Mom's partners offered to sell the TAS business to her. I encouraged her but she asked me to come home to Macon, Georgia as partner. I was living in Schaumburg, IL at the time and very happy in my career but the opportunities intrigue me. A bank loan opened the door to purchase Anserfone.

The next couple years were challenging. In the fall of 1973 I attended STAA (Southern Telephone Answering Association) Annual Conference in Atlanta and then the first ATSI Supervisors Seminar in 1974 in St. Petersburg, Florida. I was the only male in the class that included Betty Porter and taught by ATSI President Margret Walsh, Anne Hasting, Ethel McCloud and Judy Smith. I met the most generous and sharing people one could imagine. I took a wealth of information home with me. I begin to transform our company from just paying the bills to a profitable business in multiple locations over the next 42 years.

I never missed another STAA or ATSI conference or convention and proudly served in every elected office in both organizations including twice ATSI convention chairman. My ATSI education never stopped.

I was elected President of ATSI in 1999. It was a turbulent time in the history of ATSI. Membership had fallen due to consolidation and mergers, members were more involved with their vendors and a perceived lack of value of ATSI was taking a toll on membership. Consideration of a proposed merger with another telecommunication association was most contentious. The ATSI Board and I set out to heal the divide, strengthen the value, increase membership and stabilize the finances. We made great strides and passed the baton to the next administration in better shape than we found it.

In June of 2000 I was honored to be inducted in to ASTI Hall of Fame at the annual convention in Orlando. I was totally shocked. Then President Tedd Smith started the ceremony and as he continued his remarks I sensed he was talking about me but when he announced my name I was stunned. To further my surprise all three of my children and grandkids joined me at the podium. Susan had pulled off arranging for them to be there unbeknownst to me. I was so proud and thankful to have my name aside past icons and giants of our industry.

My association with ATSI helped make me successful. I have cherished friends both Susan and I adore around the country. The transition from cord boards to a futuristic operations call center based on the internet made the journey both rewarding and humbling. At age 69 I sold and retired in 2015 a happy man with memories I will carry with me always. Thanks ATSI.

Raymond Baggarly

**"A man
never starts to
get old until
he starts to
forget his
dreams."**



CANDID SHOTS



I think they went that-away



One of our long term TAS members (Rich Press) from NY City, sold and moved to Vermont to become a ski Instructor



Jolene Corey years after selling her service in Portland, Oregon now has time for creating ceramics and pottery



Elvis came back to swoon Donna West off her feet at one of Startels educational and fun conference.



Barr McClean & Cecile Williams have been promoting and working the answering service business for many years all the way from Texas to New York. True Industry Icons!



Andy Gross & Grant Sibley at one of the many trade shows.

All Things Considered

Today, one can't imagine the almost hostile relationship the TAS Industry had with our only vendor and supplier of switchboards. In my opinion, AT&T and the Bell Operating Companies considered us a nuisance. We were regulated by TAS tariffs. The old cord switchboards were reliable for your local calling area but to expand into another telephone prefix just down the street or across town meant the installation of an electro-mechanical Concentrator-Identifier device that was a maintenance nightmare.

The United States Government decided to break up AT&T in the late 1970s. The Bell Operating Companies such as Bell South would become stand-alone companies and AT&T would be independent as well.

Divestiture of AT&T was the "buzz" word for years that included congressional and FCC involvement. ATSI, regional and state organization hired expensive lawyers, testified before congress and state regulatory commissions in an effort to protect the industry and maintain reasonable rates and tariffs. In the meantime, all of the Bell Operating Companies were seeking rate increases, some of which were devastating to the TAS industry. We fought them tooth and nail.

Innovated people were not in short supply in our industry. New equipment sparked the interest of legends like Cedric Adams, Bill Curtin and George Meyer to name a few.

My first encounter with the prospect of new equipment was at the ATSI National Convention at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix around 1979.



I entered the Exhibit Hall anxious to see this new TAS Answering System. Standing by a table draped in a white table cloth was an unassuming man named George Meyer. He was the only exhibitor. Several blue boxes about the size of a bread box sat on the table. The blue box with the name "Telescan" across the top had a small screen and several buttons.

George and I exchanged greetings and I inquired about what he had and how did it work. He explained DID numbers and call forwarding and did a quick demonstration. I inquired the price of the system. Paul Jones spoke up and said "about \$5,000.00 a pound". Perplexed, I told George I would get back with him.

Later, I learned he had sold 30 systems. I placed my order and as they say "the rest is history". George and I remained friends for life.

Telescan, Amtelco, TASCAM, Startel, PI and many others went on to invent and re-invent amazing equipment with wonderful features to better serve our customers and give us the ability to expand our customer base beyond our wildest imaginations.

To rid the industry of dependence on AT&T and the Bell Operating Companies was an added bonus.

Raymond Baggarly

"About the worst thing a man can do is to let a dream die."

Kudos to those who work at answering service centers

Recently I took a job at an answering service call center. I thought it would be easy work. I mean, really how difficult can it be to answer the phone and take and relay messages?

Well, I learned it is not easy seeing how spoiled some of us have become.

A woman calls in for her home warranty company. She is very upset because it is Friday and the contractor assigned is telling her he needs to do additional work and needs authorization to complete the job.

I went to work happy and in good spirits. But my smile turns upside down as the caller begins yelling at me. I continuously apologize and attempt to explain her coverage amount. I explain customer service will open on Monday and she can get authorization to go over the amount on Monday.

She yells, curses and screams, ‘What am I supposed to do?’ I have to take a shower. I can’t take a shower. Get me a manager right now.” But she is calling after hours and no manager is available.

As she unleashes her anger and directs it towards she yells, “What do you want me to do? I can’t take a shower. I have somewhere to go. Find someone to take care of this.” She screams, “What do you suggest I do mam?”

I bite my tongue. The thought that entered my mind was to say, “Mam, boil some hot water pour it in a tub with your cold water and take a warm bubble bath. Heck, light some candles and make the best of a bad situation. You don’t have to take a shower. For goodness sake boil water and take a bath”

But to keep my job; I listen to her continuous complaints and listen to her yell and direct her anger towards me.

The power goes out in one neighborhood. A call comes in for a power company. The kind woman, understandably, wants to know why the power is out. She explains she has a medical condition which requires the use of a machine that she needs power for.

I dispatch the call and explain to the caller that a technician is in the area and they are working to resolve the issue. She is thankful for the service and the call is ended.

A second call comes in, from the same area, the man is irate and yelling, ‘My power is off, and I can’t use my microwave.’ He begins yelling, cursing and unleashes and directs all his anger towards me. He yells, “I can’t use my microwave.” I explain a technician has been dispatched.

He yells, “Did you hear me? I can’t use my microwave. What am I supposed to do?” I bite my tongue wanting to say, “Sir, the caller before you can’t use her breathing machine and you are worried about a microwave?”

But again, I want to keep my job so I suck up the complaint and anger directed towards me.

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**“We cannot
solve
problems
with the kind
of thinking
we employed
when we
came up
with them.”**

Albert Einstein



Kudos (continued)

I took another call. I held my breath when I saw it was for a home warranty company. The caller stated her upstairs bathroom was not working properly and the plumber can't come until Monday.

I exhaled when she then stated, 'Well, I just wanted to let you know. It's not the end of the world. I can use the downstairs bathroom. Please have someone call me on Monday.'

I smiled. Prior to her call I wondered, "Is it the end of the world? Heck, the folks I was talking to were down right spoiled and mean.

Another call comes in for a heating and air conditioning company. I tell the caller I will dispatch the call and the technician has two hours to respond.

The caller yells, "I have no heat. And you want me to wait two hours?" I bite my tongue wanting to say 'Sir, grab a blanket bundle up and drink some hot chocolate. It's only two hours.'

To work at a call center can be an emotional roller coaster ride. We take hundreds of calls a day.

We take calls from cancer patients having a bad reaction to their chemo. You can hear the fear and love in their voice.

We take calls from family members arranging to have their elderly or hospice family member deceased body picked up. You can hear the pain and love in their voice.

We take calls from women bleeding, in the middle of miscarriages, afraid of losing their child. You can hear the worry and love in their voice.

We take calls from people getting evicted from their apartments or their homes in foreclosure. They are worried about where they will take their children to live. You can hear the sadness and love in their voice.

We take calls from people who can't pay their electric bill and have no lights. They won't have the income to have the lights back on for a month or more. You can hear the concern and love in their voice.

It never ceases to amaze me that the meanest people appear to be those whose complaints are so insignificant in comparison to what so many others are experiencing.

I turned down a job for a telemarketer position. I believe No means No. I would get fired for not doing rebuttals and not trying to convince people to buy something they weren't in the market to buy.

I thought working at an answering service call center would be an easier job since I won't have the pressure of selling people anything. But, I don't know if this is the right job for me. I just keep biting my tongue.

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**"When you
change your
thoughts,
remember to
also change
your world."**

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale



CANDID SHOTS



Permission to come aboard...



Open wide...



Allan Fromm, the Olsons & Steve Michaels – the Sheriff!



*Marcy Hewlett, Chris Michaels & Stan Weisser
chewing the fat at a show in Atlanta*

Kudos (continued)

I try not to let the complaints, anger and hostility I receive from callers affect me. I try to leave with the smile I came to work with. But some days it is difficult to leave with a smile.

The good thing is that for every 50 calls from someone irate; there will be that one call of love that overshadows the anger.

Heck, it's not easy working at an answering service call center when you are low income and see so many spoiled people.

We get paid just enough to make it until our next payday. And often we are a payday away from our electric bill being shut off, or face eviction, or have medical or dental bills that we can't pay the deductible on.

It is not easy answering calls and hearing so many people with genuine concerns and pain. It's not easy answering calls and some (too many) people appear spoiled and become irate and unreasonable and direct their anger and hostility towards you.

Working at an answering service call center is more difficult than I imagined it would be. But heck, I am thankful to be employed.

This article is to send Kudos to all those who work for an answering service company and to also send Kudos to all those who call in the Spirit of Love making our job easier.

Rhonda Erwin



Some Start Out Young!

Doug Lindsey with his adorable twins at a recent trade show. He takes his girls to trade shows to get them used to dealing with vendors & other people in the industry as well as getting to have some fun by seeing different parts of the USA. They are never too young to start learning about the industry...

“Success is not final; failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts.”

Winston S. Churchill

Under estimating ones success.

So now after celebrating 50 years in the answering service business, the beginning was very different. I wanted to be a court reporter because I could take shorthand and type very fast. My ex-husband, John, was told to move his office from Plano, Texas to Dallas, Texas because no one knew where Dallas was in those days, let alone where Plano was. In his search he looked all around trying his best to find a location closer to our home but yet still have a Dallas address. Alas!!! He found one but there was no secretarial and answering service in the building because it was a brand new building. I said, "Let's start one" and start one, we did!

We started with 12 customers we cold called from the complex Keytone Park, where we starting. AT&T told us we only needed a 30-button call directory and it would last us more than 18 months. Well, the 30-button directory had one button for 'hold' and another for an extension. In 3 months, I had already outgrown the call directory and we had ordered a brand new switchboard, the 557B. New alright! The switchboard would be nearer to 100 years old by the time it arrived.

Meanwhile, as I added one customer at a time, I had run out of buttons and added one telephone at a time. I had them lined up on the desk, right next to each other. Big problem: no way to distinguish which one was ringing so there was only one solution. Every time one of the telephones rang, I would jump up from my chair while I was typing and typing and typing letters for customers. I then had to spread my chest and outspread arms to feel for which telephone was actually ringing. This solution worked pretty well but exhausting. I did that over many phones until the switchboard actually arrived and was installed. I promised myself that if I could have 60 customers on that switchboard, I could make it and then actually hire someone part time.

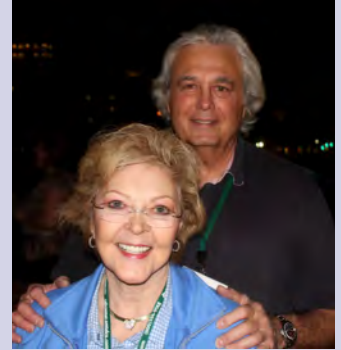
After I had been in business around 18 months, I got this very random call from Pearl Forrester. Mrs. Forrester had a really big answering service and was charging lots more money than I was. My service, at that time, was \$19 a month probably for 100 calls. Imagine that, 1971 pricing. Anyway, Mrs. Forrester called to welcome me into this amazing industry and wanted to meet the person who was her competition. At that same time she also told me I could get a ton of information if I joined and went to ATAE now ATSI. At least, if I went there, I would learn to raise my prices and be a "real" competitor. I did exactly that. Met everyone, attended all meetings and the rest is history.

Over the years, as everyone knows, quality people are always a challenge to find. So where do you go when you're desperate for help?? Of course, you recruit your family. I hired my sister June when she was 12 and had been studying Spanish in school to help answer a very busy account needing Spanish operators. It was only for 3-weeks during the summer so I really started her early in the business. I recruited my brother, down the road, to do collections, which he did for a few years. Then I recruited my sister-in-law, Jim's wife, to manage operations at the time I had had surgery. That worked for quite a few years. Jessica, June's daughter, was sent to work for me after she graduated college, to do advertising. Her oldest son is now only 12, but when he was 10, I hired him to do shredding for my bookkeeping department. So who says this isn't a family business. Everyone chips in and keeps us all afloat. We all just keep on trucking. After all, this is Texas and we are A Better Answer.

Dee Hawkin

**"I never
dreamed
about
success.
I worked
for it."**

Estée Lauder



Never Assume!

I was the VP of Marketing for Centigram Corporation and was given the job of writing the business plan and setting up dealers for the TAS Industry.

One of our first sales came from Dee Hawkins in Dallas, Texas. I had seen Dee at parties and she is someone who likes to let her hair down, get out on that dance floor and dance. Dee is one who would always get invited – the bell of the party.

With this limited information, Bill Hunter, my nationwide salesman and I went into her office along with her staff and demonstrated how the system works along with all of its benefits. Then it started: How much for the system? Is that installed? What about training? Is there 24 hour support and what happens if I go down? All very good and logical questions that left Bill and I a little bewildered since we thought we were going to be dealing with the “Beauty Queen”. Boy were we wrong.

It was interesting how she would build upon a previous statement until she finally said “What if I Buy Two”?



**“Don’t let
yesterday
take up too
much of
today.”**

Will Rogers