

Graham appreciates playing role in workers' live

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The Question and Answer feature helps readers learn more about prominent people in the business community. This issue's Q&A profiles Ben Graham, vice president of Bell Inc.

Q: Tell me about your interests.

A: "Skiing, golfing and vintage cars are my real passions."

Q: How did you become interested in your field?

A: "I guess you can say it's in my blood since I grew up in the family business and visited the plant starting at a young age. I remember coming to the plant with my dad on Saturdays; we'd have breakfast together, and I'd watch as he opened his mail. In high school, I had summer jobs in the maintenance department. In college, I interned in sales and other areas of the business. After college, I started taking on greater responsibilities for business development and outside sales."

Q: What do you enjoy most about work?

A: "Three things. First, I have always enjoyed the thrill of doing deals and negotiating – creating new opportunities, developing and signing new business. It's exciting and fun. Second, I love the tangible nature of being in a manufacturing company. At the end of the day, you have created something you can touch and feel. It's done right or it isn't; it's direct, honest, real. And I love being part of a dynamic organization that continues to grow. There's a feeling of pride and accomplishment that comes with knowing you are part of something that touches the lives of so many families: providing incomes that, literally, put food on tables. And that in turn helps build a strong and thriving community."

Q: What's a typical day like?

A: "There's no typical day. The nature of what I do requires a lot of travel, face-to-face meetings with our supply-chain partners and customer meetings all over the country. My wife and I have a house in Sioux Falls and are splitting time between Sioux Falls and Chicago; I have been on the go for so long I get anxious when I'm in one place for too long."



Ben Graham (Submitted photo)

The Graham file

Name: Ben Graham

Title: Vice president, Bell Inc.

Hometown: Born in Aberdeen, grew up in Sioux Falls

Age: 34

Background: Graduated from the University of Montana; received MBA from the Kellogg School of Business, Northwestern University; has worked in the packaging industry since 1992; serves as chairman of the Independent Carton Group's New Generation Leaders Committee; board member of Ice Sports Activities Foundation

Family: Wife, Molly

Q: How do you find time to balance your job and your family?

A: "Being in a family business, sometimes those lines can get blurred. And, it would be easy to do nothing but work, especially since my wife works, too, and we are frequently apart during the week. I am a very active person, though, and there are a lot of things I enjoy outside of work. I make time for those things, but it takes a certain amount of discipline."

Q: Do you have a charity or organization that's especially close to your heart?

A: "Special Olympics, Ronald McDonald House Charities and the Ice Sports Activities Foundation. Bell is very active with RMHC on a national level. We are contributors to the Annual Award of Excellence in Chicago, the McDonald's LPGA Championship and our recent gift to the Sanford Ronald McDonald House here in Sioux Falls."

Q: If you could take a one-year sabbatical, what would you do?

A: "I would love to go and live in Tokyo, Paris, Moscow or Hong Kong for a year – full cultural immersion."

Q: What's the best advice you've gotten from your dad?

A: "Do what you say and say what you do. Your word is your bond. You can't inherit it, and no one can take it away."

Q: What kind of music is in your car or what do you listen to on the radio?

A: "I have CNBC on the radio in the car most of the time or XM Satellite Radio, the jazz channel."

Q: If you could have dinner with two or three people, alive or dead, who would you choose and why?

A: "My father-in-law, Keith Magnuson. I never had the opportunity to meet him, but I would love the opportunity to hear some of his stories and spend a dinner with him. He was a professional athlete in the '70s and '80s, and he was one of the more stand-up guys there ever was."

Q: What do you think are the best and worst things about living in Sioux Falls?

A: "There are a lot of things I love about Sioux Falls. Its size, accessibility, safety and security. There are excellent schools here. People are friendly. And it's advantageous for business, with low taxes, quality people, a strong work force and a solid work ethic. I guess the only thing I don't like is that I miss getting a regular Thai food fix."