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US 'kingmaker' puts passion into success

Survival in the US corporate stratosphere requires special skills, SIMON MOUNTFORD meets a former Bradford

woolman who has them.

JUNESS you earn more than £25,000 a year, you can't use the services of David Werner.

Described by Forbes Magazine as a headhunter in reverse, Mr Werner has become one of the acknowledged kingmakers of Corporate America.

His list of clients — senior executives in Europe and Asia as well as the US — reads like a roll call of Who's Who in international business.

He claims: "My reputation is such that if I tell the president of a company that an executive is worth meeting, he'll make sure he sees him."

Although he now lives in New York, Mr Werner, 54, still describes himself as a Bradfordian and is fiercely proud of his home town.

He first went to the United States in 1977 after working for the International Wool Secretariat in Ilkley.

He left the IWS because he was restless. "I had completed my assignment, promotion from within didn't exist and I suddenly remembered that old saying, 'if you can't move up, move out'."

He obtained his first job in the United States through sheer chutzpa. Finding himself in the middle of the night at a Scandinavian airport, a job advertisement caught his eye. He telephoned the number in New York and found himself speaking to the chief executive of Azcon Corporation, the American subsidiary of Consolidated Goldfields. An interview in London followed and then a job as special marketing assistant to the CEO.

But brass nerve is one of Mr Werner's hallmarks. After national service in Malaya with the Royal Artillery, he recognised the market potential of the Far East and became one of the first, and youngest, Western businessmen to enter mainland China during the late 1950s.

He successfully traded with both the Communists and the Taiwanese, although this meant using two passports.

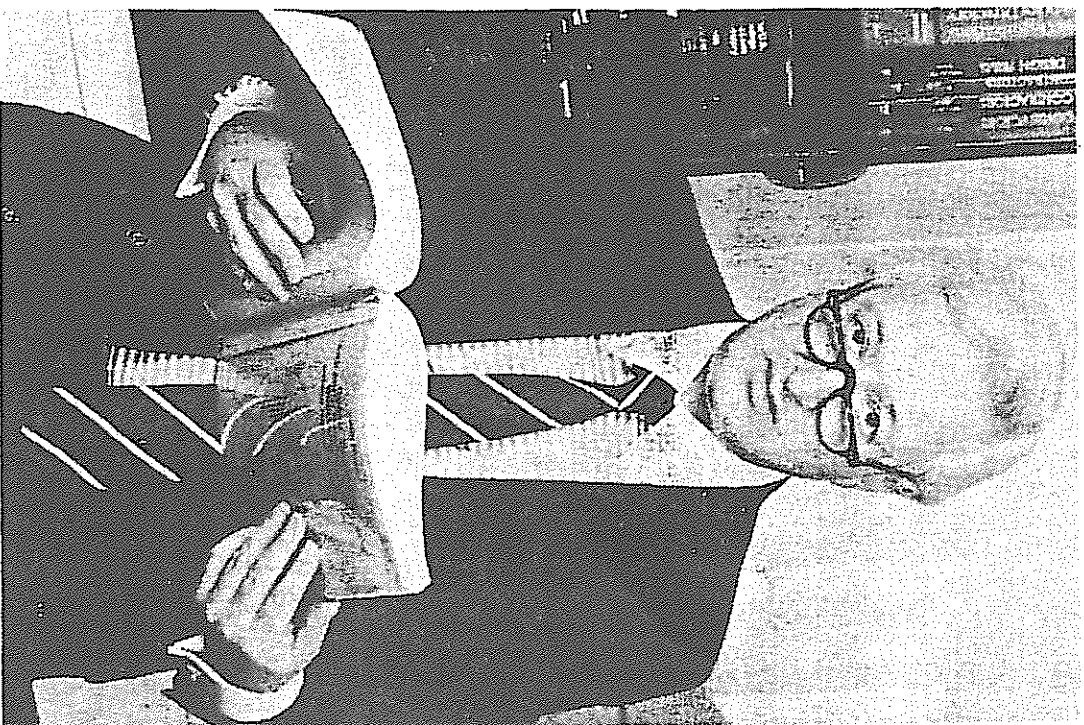
However, his love of adventure nearly killed him while on a business trip to Australia. While surfing at Sydney, he was dumped by a large wave and catapulted into medical history with a broken neck.

"I shouldn't have lived," Mr Werner told me. "But I can't founded everyone, especially the doctors."

His recovery took four tough years as he moved from total paralysis to complete mobility. During that time, his philosophy changed.

"From then on, I regarded every new day as a bonus," he explained. "Having cheated death, I gained a new perspective on life. Many issues which had seemed major became relatively unimportant."

His philosophy can be summed up in one word — passion. "Without passion you will not succeed,



MIR DAVID WERNER: 'Passion, properly directed, is the only essential ingredient to success.'

be it a job or hobby, a belief or sentiment.

"Passion, properly directed, is the only essential ingredient to success. Without it, you're dead in the water."

By the age of 30, with a dual BA degree in economics, business and accounting from Macquarie University, Mr Werner was fully recovered and playing squash and golf again.

He was also managing director in Australia for Aire Wool, then one of Britain's oldest and largest wool firms, which was subsequently taken over by Illingworth Morris in 1966.

It was the time, he said "when the Bradford wool industry was in total disarray and companies were merging in a frantic attempt to counter Far East competition. As a

result, unrealistically large amounts of money were being paid for non-existent goodwill.

"In short, it was a dream come true for the lucky owners of Yorkshire wool firms."

Realising that the industry was undergoing a fundamental change, Mr Werner took a job with the Australian Wool Commission as an industrial economist and subsequently moved to the International Wool Secretariat in London to help refocus wool as a luxury product.

"We needed to give it a new image in order to justify changing a premium over the price of other fibres," he said.

It was this experience of marketing wool and later gold with Azcon that led to Mr Werner's present career as a head-hunter in reverse

— or, more prosaically, an outplacement consultant.

"Marketing gold is like marketing wool," he explained. "You concentrate on the intangible benefits of ownership — in other words, marketing the sizzle, the crackle, the smell ... never the steak itself."

"Frankly, that's still what I do today when I market a senior executive as a next managing director. I emphasise the future benefits."

Mr Werner's success in the US stems in part from his cultivated image as an Englishman. In spite of living in New York for more than 10 years, he has accorded any trace of an American accent and has been described (again by Forbes Magazine) as being frosty and professorial.

His present company, David Werner International, was set up 11 years ago on the premise that many high level executives are better at selling their products than selling themselves to a new employer.

His approach differs from that of traditional outplacement firms, which typically charge companies 10 per cent to 15 per cent of a departing employee's salary.

For this fee, they put the executives through various tests to discover where their talents lie, counsel them on writing CVs and generally seek to rebuild their battered egos.

Mr Werner doesn't go for these practices. He says firmly that he is not a career consultant or therapist. Instead, he tries to save time — a valuable service given the salaries his clients earn when they are working.

In return, he charges about ten per cent of salary up to a limit of \$20,000 and also asks for a "success" fee — two weeks of gross pay at the new job.

Mr Werner has three data-bases containing lists of companies and their top executives in the US, Europe, Australia and the Far East. Using these, he can search for companies by industry sector, size and location.

Now, with the imminent introduction of the single European market and the need for American companies to set up in the EC, Mr Werner is considering opening a London office.

In the meantime, success has brought his rewards. He has homes in New Jersey and Mexico and a collection of Laguard cars — including a 1969 E-type.

But he still rhapsodises about Yorkshire and the Dales. "I was at school at Clapham during the war and I still find the Dales are the most beautiful scenery in the world."

"I guess it's the lush grass, the stone walls... all those lovely Westleydale sheep. Perhaps it's just the wool merchant in me. It gets into the blood, you know."

As we part, he has a final word of advice: "You've got to have passion." Quite so.