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SIMON NYNENS:

On Life, Leadership and Fairy Tales

By Gretchen C. Van Benthuisen

Simon Nynens was hired in 2006 to be vice president of nothing in particular at a local software company and eight years later became its president and chief executive officer. Six months later he was also chairman of the board.

In an interview that was as much about philosophy as business smarts, Nynens touched on why the Grimm brothers' fairy tales are the best source for morality, how the monomyth, or the hero's journey, leads to a meaningful life, and why focusing on business, life, friends that matter and your children will reward you a thousand times.

"I've had my ups and downs," he said. "I'm

smarter, but only because I failed a thousand times. And that's OK."

Nynens will share some of his wisdom and experiences at TEDxAsburyPark on May 19 at the Paramount Theatre in Asbury Park. In his presentation, "Everyone Deserves a Fairy Tale," he will talk about struggles, real-life tests, vulnerability – and fairy tales.

Nynens, a Dutch immigrant, motivational speaker and Little Silver resident, doesn't really lead the life of a fairy tale character but finding a balance between work and play and focusing on priorities does give his life a certain charmed feeling.

What stands out about

Nynens is his passion for his employees, the environment and his family. His wife is a nurse and they have four children, two of whom are adopted.

Technology Group, including Lifeboat Distribution and TechXtend divisions, where Nynens works, is on the third floor of an office building on Industrial Way

"Leadership is not about the leader.

Leadership is about removing hurdles for others." – Simon Nynens

He says people tell him those kids hit the lottery. "No. I tell them, *we* hit the lottery."

The headquarters of the international Wayside

West in Eatontown.

The company, formerly known as Programmer's Paradise (yes, Nynens knows it sounds like an IT convention cocktail), has

offices in Arizona, Ontario, and Amsterdam in the Netherlands, Nynens' homeland. The company sells software and hardware to companies who sell it to other companies, he said.

When the company relocated to Eatontown two years ago, Nynens, in an effort to help his colleagues find that work/life balance he strives for, had the office stripped and designed the space.

Nobody has assigned desks, including Nynens. Walking and bike desks are available. Offices and collaboration rooms are in the center of the floor, desks by the windows.

"People need sunlight," he said. "If you want to work alone or make a private call, take an office."

Personal items are stored in lockable cubbies and a wall is dedicated for wedding, baby and family photos hanging together. One side of the floor is the "loud side," the other the "quiet side."

"At the other building I saw people sitting in their cars during lunch," he said. "When I asked them why, they said they needed to clear their minds."

So he included a meditation room in the new office and a lactation room for new mothers which he asked them to design.

There's a game room and a cafe with a large screen TV and a family-style industrial refrigerator, filtered water and freshly ground organic coffee. The walls are covered with positive sayings and soothing artwork.

There are no plastics, no toxins in the floor covering, LED lights that use 80 percent less energy and don't flicker and 130 plants filtering toxins from the air.

"As a company we can do little things and as a citizen you can do your own little thing," he said. "We save money. It's good for the environment and healthier for ourselves."

Nynens believes there are three things in life you need: money, time and health.

"I don't expect people to work 70 hours a week," he said. "Do what you need to do and spend time with your family."

He encourages employees to work from home as much as possible.

He's even helped employees find other jobs.

"Why? Because an unhappy person, on average, makes five to eight people around them unhappy," he said.

Now a former employee recommends clients to him and he gave her job to some-

one who wants it.

"Leadership is not about the leader. Leadership is about removing hurdles for others," Nynens said. "It's much better for the world to help each other than this constant 'grab for me' attitude."

After Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico last September, an employee asked to use the company's corporate shipping rate to send a generator to her father. He said the company would pay for the generator as well.

"Now how hard do you think that person is going to work for us?" he asked.

"That's when people need a leader – when you're down on your luck," he said. "I don't know what an 'employee-focused company' means unless you put it in practice."

Growing up, Nynens said his family wasn't poor, but his town was the fourth poorest in the Netherlands. He was raised by a mother who is a minister and a father who is a C.P.A. His goal was to get to the United States. He earned a degree in auditing and accountancy and went to work at Ernst and Young Amsterdam advising companies who bought other companies.

He joined Programmer's Paradise and says the path had its ups and downs, as did the company who sent him to the advanced management program at Harvard Business School. He was chairman of the board for the New Jersey Technology Council for nine years and a member of the President's Leadership Council of Stevens Institute of Technology.

Nynens is also one of six owners of FC Monmouth, which plays in the North-East Division of the nationwide, semi-pro National Premier Soccer League (NPSL).

"It's a great game for families and you can watch quality soccer with your kids in Monmouth County," he said. "And it gives the college kids a chance to fulfill their dream."

He also volunteers for the after-school program at Asbury Park High School.

"I wanted to help students make less mistakes, to have a happy and meaningful life," he said.

The best part is when they put down their phones to listen, then he knows he made a connection, he said.

"You know, we're all going to be nothing but specks of dust in the future," Nynens muses. "It's just that some of us can be brighter specks."



DANNY SANCHEZ