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Q&A With a Concession Stand Visionary

BY STEVEN SCHUSSLER

ANDY LANSING IS PRESIDENT AND CEO OF LEVY RESTAURANTS, an innovative and award-winning company specializing in restaurants and premium sports and entertainment dining, including concessions at the Xcel Energy Center. He's a guy who understands partnership and leadership. With him at the controls, revenues have grown by 800 percent and Levy has topped 100 locations in North America and Europe, with more than 20,000 team members delivering Levy's signature hospitality to guests. In 2009, the company was named one of the 10 most innovative companies in sports by *Fast Company* magazine. Levy, the only foodservice company on the list, shared this honor with industry greats like Nike, ESPN, the Boston Red Sox and Speedo.

SS: What impact have the Minnesota Wild and Xcel Energy Center had on the business? **AL:** Partnering with the Wild really inspires us creatively. We love digging into a new project, immersing ourselves in the local culture and finding new ways to add to the gameday excitement. There is nothing better than surprising fans with great food and authentic flavors and helping our clients bring something new and special to the fans.

SS: You spearheaded Levy Cares, the charitable arm of the company and under your direction, Levy Cares has become a national charitable presence. Why is philanthropy part of your business plan? **AL:** At Levy we are truly a family and part of that means we want to share our enthusiasm for great food and hospitality beyond the restaurants, stadiums and arenas. We have locations around the country and the world, and we are passionate about giving back and really becoming a part of each community. I am constantly amazed by the incredible work our team members do. They donate more than just food; they give their time, their energy and their enthusiasm not only to the fans and guests, but to those in the community who are in need. Levy Cares is not just part of the business, it's part of who we are.

SS: What was your biggest sacrifice to get to where you are today? **AL:** I travel a ton and I don't like being away from my family. Consequently, when I am home I spend every minute I can with them.



« Steve and Andy (seated at Steve's right) with the Backfire BBQ crew.


SS: What was your biggest business mistake? What advice would you give to those who are facing a similar situation? **AL:** The only deals that haven't worked out for us were, not coincidentally, when we partnered with people who were not the right partners. Pick the right partners! Don't look at

the resume until you've convinced yourself that the person you are interviewing is nice and passionate about what they do. Forget the experience. Hire only for kindness and passion. To me, only after you get past the nice and the passion part is when I'm interested in what your experience has been.

SS: What was your biggest business "hallelujah"? **AL:** What I'm most proud of, and grateful for, is that we've been able to stay true to our family and restaurant roots. We're a pretty big company and I'm so proud that we continue to have a heart and a soul.

SS: Who continues to be your inspiration today? **AL:** First and foremost is my family. They truly do inspire me every day. I adore them and love spending time with them.

SS: When and where was your entrepreneur "aha" moment? **AL:** When we realized that, historically, sports fans were treated like captive audiences. When we introduced the restaurateur mentality to a stadium, ballpark or arena, it blew people away. They were expecting hot dogs and beer and we gave them crab cakes and tenderloin.

SS: Are you living your dream? **AL:** Are you kidding me? I get to work around food and sports. It doesn't get much better than that! 

« Steven Schussler (steven@schusslercreative.com) is the founder, chairman and CEO of Schussler Creative, Inc., which specializes in creating, designing and developing theatrical attractions, restaurants, retail stores and entertainment venues worldwide. He is also the author of the upcoming book, *It's a Jungle in There - Inspiring Lessons, Hard-Won Insights, and Other Acts of Entrepreneurial Daring*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVEN SCHUSSLER