

ATD-American Company  
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Jerome M. Zaslow CEO & Chief Strategist

ATD-American, manufacturers and distributors of Textiles, Furniture and Law Enforcement products, was founded in 1931 by Irving Zaslow, as Jaffe's Art Linens, a home furnishings retailer. Irving, the family patriarch, came to America in 1910, from the Ukraine, when he was 23 years old with his mother and eight siblings. Irving believed America was the land of opportunity and when he arrived in the U.S. he secured a position as a salesman selling textile piece goods to the apparel industry.

In 1919 Zaslow went into business for himself. Within a year a recession occurred and the business failed. He went back to work for his former employer and in 1923 he started another business which failed in 1929, with the onset of the Great Depression.

With \$500.00 of borrowed money he went back into business in 1931. He opened a store at 5<sup>th</sup> and South Streets in Philadelphia with living quarters above the store where Jerry, his father, mother and two brothers lived. The store became a playground for Jerry and his brothers.

Jerry would watch his father, a masterful salesman; sell household linens including bed sheets, towels, blankets, and curtains. Jerry had no intention of going to college; it was a given that he would go into his father's business. However, his father employed a salesman that was 23 years old, when Jerry was 15 years old. The salesman had wanted to be a physician but could not afford to go to college. One day, while at work, the salesman told Jerry that if his father could afford to send him to college that he should take advantage of this opportunity even if he never applied his education. Jerry discussed this with his mother and he said he wanted to pursue a business degree. His mother suggested

going to the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Jerry, totally ignorant relative to schools of higher education asked, “why the Wharton School”? Because, his mother replied, her father who was a tailor, (Jerry’s grandfather) knew a professor from the Wharton School who was such a nice man and therefore Jerry should go to Wharton. Jerry applied, was accepted and started college in 1941. He graduated in seven semesters. Wharton forever changed his life.

Upon graduation the plan was to open a chain of retail stores with his father and two brothers. He worked at the family store for two years. His brothers Spencer and Arnold also graduated from the Wharton School and they have continuously worked together since that time. Irving worked with his three sons until he was 91 years old. Jerry and his brother Spencer opened a branch store in 1947 and operated that for three years when the brothers decided that the retail business was not for them; the hours were long and Jerry aspired to higher goals.

During the next four years, Jerry discussed with his father various business ideas and opportunities. Finally, his father suggested selling to government agencies. Jerry did research on City, County, State and Federal government procurement practices and proceeded to get on various government bid lists for textiles. Months later, while Jerry was away on vacation, his brother Spencer got the first sale from the State of Connecticut. The business, American Textile Distributors took off and grew and grew. The Zaslows had identified their market: City, County, State and Federal government agencies and they have been in this market since 1952. In 1959 they phased out the retail business. Through the years they competed in all 50 states and internationally, selling government entities including the Department of Defense, the FBI, schools, the prison market, clubs, and organizations.

In 1966 American Textile Distributors, changed to ATD-American Co., expanded into the furniture business distributing chairs, tables, filing cabinets, desks, etc. They started out as a distributor for the Samsonite Corporation, selling furniture to the same customers who purchased their textiles.

ATD-American also worked with sub-contractors who drop shipped to ATD's customers. Eventually, ATD decided it was time to open its own manufacturing plant and in 1990 they acquired a plant in Virginia and ATD, trading as Augusta Mills, continued to grow. In 2001 ATD acquired Thomaston Mills, a 300,000 square foot textile mill with the industry's most modern equipment. ATD streamlined the product line which produced even more growth. With much pride Jerry states that Thomaston Mills is the last brand name manufacturer of sheets and pillow cases in the United States.

ATD-American developed a market strategy that works well for them. Product that is manufactured in China or India may take weeks to arrive in the U.S. and sometimes longer due to the long supply chain, while fuel prices have increased and negatively impact off shore manufacturers. ATD-American on the other hand continues exceeding the demands of their customers by producing consistent quality with overnight shipping.

The third generation of Zaslows is now involved in the business, Jerry's daughter, Janet, has taken over as president of the company. Jerry knew that from the time Janet was 5 years old that she was a natural for business. Jerry's brother Spencer has three children working for the company while Jerry's grandson is currently attending the University of Pennsylvania and working part time as well; so here comes the fourth generation!

The future of ATD-American is bright. As the fourth generation becomes more active in the company they may have different areas of interest and the ATD corporate structure will afford them the flexibility to move forward. An example

of their constant evolution was the 2008 purchase of Adirondack Direct, a catalog company in Long Island City, NY, which markets a product line similar to ATD's.

Jerry's general advice for someone starting a business or a young person getting involved in the business world is to be daring, unafraid and to be conservative with money. Be willing to delegate and follow up, which is critical. It is also imperative to have impeccable credit and pay bills on time. Irving Zaslou used to tell his sons "pay your bills before you eat". Be a man of your word, when you make a deal, abide by it. Work hard and be creative, think out of the box and ask for the advice of people who are more experienced than you.

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