

# Norm Miller

by ERNESTINE BOUSQUET



Norm Miller started out as a salesman for a fledgling company in 1962. After working his way to the top in 1978, he took Interstate Batteries to No. 1, relying on business fundamentals he learned at North Texas.

Before Norm Miller ('62) headed Interstate Batteries, he worked the road, convincing customers to buy and distribute its batteries.

The first thing he did when talking to potential customers was size up the room. A mounted stuffed bass on the wall was fodder for conversation about fishing to get the customers talking. Miller would weave the conversation into a discussion about Interstate Batteries. Then he would move in for the trial close, or test close, asking opinion-based questions to get the customers in the "yes" mood and get a read on their potential to buy.

Miller learned these elemental sales lessons while studying general business at North Texas. He took his first business classes not knowing how to make a sales pitch. By the time he graduated, Miller says, he could make a sale from pitch to close, market a product and read a budget. These fundamental skills helped him build Interstate into the No. 1 replacement brand battery in North America.

"Back then, I didn't have a clue," Miller says of his sales experience before college. "My whole foundation for sales and marketing came from the foundation that I got at North Texas."

Miller, 71, went to work for Interstate in 1962 soon after graduating, joining his dad who was an Interstate distributor in Tennessee. Miller soon returned to the Dallas-Fort Worth region to work directly for Interstate and its founder, John Searcy.

At the time, Interstate had five employees and 30 distributors, and offered only automotive batteries — selling about 200,000 a year.

Miller immediately put his skills to the test. Mentored by Searcy, he helped Interstate grow by putting in long hours, logging thousands of miles on the road and learning every

aspect of the business.

Perseverance came naturally to Miller after his university days. Searcy helped him take it to the next level.

"He taught me to put in the hours and to put your best in every hour," he says.

Miller ended up CEO and chairman of Interstate in 1978. By the time he stepped down as CEO in 1990, Interstate had surpassed Sears and Diehard in battery sales.

Now Interstate sells nearly 16 million batteries a year, reaps \$1 billion in annual sales, has 300 wholesale distributors throughout North and South America, employs about 1,400 people nationwide and distributes batteries for everything from automotive needs to household appliances. The company also is well-known on the NASCAR circuit as a sponsor of Team Interstate.

"To accomplish all of that is a big deal," says Miller, who now serves as chairman of Interstate. "We grew everything from the ground up."

Miller says fortune, a strong Christian faith and sound business training led to his successful career.

And most notably for Miller, Interstate has stayed true to its Christian mission and its family roots. Most of its distributorships are family-run operations.

"It's been a fun thing to have a part in people taking a chance, investing their money and being successful," Miller says. "I ended up exactly where I belonged." ●



Angilee Willkerson

**Norm Miller ('62)**  
Dallas



**Degree in:**  
General business

**What I'm reading:**  
*Game Plan for Life* by Joe Gibbs

**Advice I'd give to a new UNT student:**  
Work at your courses. You may never get another chance to devote as much time to just learning.

**What people would be surprised to know about me:**  
I have a great-grandson.

**Music I'm listening to:**  
*Born Again* by the Newsboys

**Last movie I saw:**  
*The Blind Side*

**My favorite UNT memory:**  
Actually graduating

**Superhero I'd want to be:**  
Bud Abbott

**My definition of success:**  
Being in God's will

**Best part about running a battery company:**  
Seeing business as a "team" competition and winning

**Q  
and  
A**