



## TIM HOELTER

Tim Hoelter's distinguished 30-year career with Harley-Davidson took him through ups and downs and twists and turns, around the world and back to his hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin – where his story is commemorated inside the walls of the Harley-Davidson Museum. As Harley's first General Counsel, later as Vice President, Government Affairs, and as the only outsider among a group of 13 executives who purchased the company in a leveraged buyout in 1981, Tim has seen it all. His motivational firsthand account of the horrendous obstacles his group faced, how they hung on, averted bankruptcy and turned Harley-Davidson into an *American Success Story* is a gripping tale that will forever resonate with leadership teams facing seemingly impossible challenges.

After falling in love with motorcycling on the back of a '56 Triumph during his undergrad years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, adventuring through Europe on a shoestring budget, teaching, then graduating from Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Tim landed a job practicing with a premier Milwaukee law firm. His new employer happened to represent Harley-Davidson's parent, AMF Incorporated, which meant eventually, Tim's becoming Harley's "go to" lawyer for a host of issues including marketing campaigns, contracts, dealer and regulatory matters. Then, after nine years of advising the company, demonstrating his love of the industry and the "real" people in it, Tim logically, yet somewhat extraordinarily, was invited to become the lone outsider among a close-knit team of Harley-Davidson executives forming the buyout group. For Tim, the decision to jump on board was to a great extent based on emotion, versus cold, hard career calculations. He invested his entire life savings for a 4% ownership interest in the newly independent company, yet within six weeks he was quite certain he'd made the worst decision of his life. His career switch unfortunately aligned with the U.S. economy suddenly plunging into the worst recession since the Great Depression. Nationwide unemployment exceeded 10%, the prime rate soared into the teens, Harley's sales plummeted by 40% and that was just the tip of the iceberg. Under a staggering mountain of debt, an unsavory brand image, ownership of its trademark in jeopardy, and an onslaught of Japanese competition, all added up to four and a half years of living on the edge, knowing Harley's bankers might pull the plug at any moment.

However, the years to follow brought Harley unparalleled success and are filled with countless stories of strategic management, teamwork, innovation and what many regard as the most dramatic turnaround in U.S. business history. Some of Tim's many notable accomplishments include:

- Securing Harley's rights to its trademark and cleaning up rampant counterfeiting
- Launching the company's trademark licensing program
- Winning temporary tariff protection from the Reagan White House
- Managing the company's IPO
- Overseeing the application to trademark the world famous Harley engine sound
- Prying open the markets of India, Vietnam and Taiwan for Harley motorcycles
- Tripling Harley's sales in Japan by removing significant trade barriers
- Serving three terms as President of the International Motorcycle Manufacturers Association (Geneva, Switzerland)
- Chairing a trade advisory committee at the U.S. Department of Commerce
- Being handpicked to serve on trade roundtables with two U.S. Presidents
- Serving as trustee of the American Motorcyclist Association
- Earning the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Motorcycle Riders Foundation



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Now in retirement from Harley, Tim continues to serve as President of the Board of Harbor Commissioners for the City of Milwaukee. He is an accomplished and entertaining keynote speaker ([www.timhoelter.com](http://www.timhoelter.com)) who provides a passionate and colorful insider's perspective on one of the greatest business stories of all time, while sharing the keys to success that can be adopted by any enterprise or leadership group today.