

Chapter 3

Focus started out with a strong cast of characters. At the time, I could not possibly have predicted the strange fates that would eventually befall each one.

It took a number of phone calls and several trips to the Focus office to get the financial information, but several weeks later I was able to build the financial plan. When I presented my work to Mike, I could see he was very pleased, but he was not nearly finished with the plan's narrative. I asked if I could help him and he gave me the non-technical part of the plan, primarily the biographies of the team members, while he kept the parts related to the initial Focus product and the market it served.

The Focus founding group was fairly large and consisted of seven persons including McNeilly. The highest-ranking founder other than Mike was Dr. Walter Benzing. Benzing had been a founder of Applied, held a number of patents related to the technology of depositing thin films on silicon wafers, and had worked with McNeilly until Mike had left Applied. At the time Focus was founded, Benzing was in his sixties; he held an honorary technical title with Applied, but was no longer involved in product development or day-to-day activities. As I remember, he functioned as an advisor at Applied and continued to receive pay from them, but planned to go on the Focus payroll once it was funded. His title at Focus was to be Senior Vice President. Dr. Benzing was well known in the industry, although I had never met him. Interestingly, Benzing spoke with a heavy German accent.

The next highest-ranking founder was the Operations Vice President, David Angel, who had worked for several semiconduc-

tor companies, but never for McNeilly. As I was compiling the biographies for these persons, Mike spoke very highly of Angel, although I did not see anything in his resume to indicate why Mike felt this way about him. Neither Benzing nor Angel was in the group that was already working at Focus.

The remainder of the group consisted of four persons, some with Ph.D.'s, with previous connections to Applied Materials, although three came directly from a small, local CVD company named Genus, Inc. The most important person in this group for the future of the company was the manager of film development, Dr. Imad Mahawili. Imad had received his Ph.D. in chemical engineering from The University of London, and although he was only in his late thirties at the time Focus was founded, he had apparently risen to a position of importance at Genus in a short time because of his work making the Genus thin films reproducible. He had been born and raised in Iraq and had left that country to finish his education elsewhere because of problems for his family caused by Saddam Hussein. His parents and siblings were still in Iraq, but Imad believed that if he returned to visit, he would be unable to leave the country. His father had apparently spent some time in prison because of Saddam Hussein.

As Mike was describing the people in this group to me, I must have looked at him questioningly when he mentioned Imad's name. Although I was really wondering how to spell Imad Mahawili, McNeilly thought I was questioning Imad's ethnicity, for he said, "He is ok, he is a Christian." This statement surprised me. Certainly at that time I had no biases or prejudices about religion, since I didn't know anyone who was religious who wasn't Christian. However, the point I missed in Mike's response had to do with the extent of Imad's involvement in religion and his religious convictions. I later learned that his religion dominated every aspect of his life, including his family and his marriage. He was at his church almost every night and every weekend. He was an assistant pastor, and he counseled congregation members on everything from marriage, health, and finances to religious dogma. He considered himself an expert on every aspect of the Bible. And he had few

friends who were not associated with his church. It turned out that by our standards, his social skills were limited because he had grown up in a completely different society, where he was sent from his home at an early age to go to boarding school, and so much of his adult life was spent involved in church activities. Although he had a terrific educational background and was married to an attractive American wife, his acceptance into our society up to this point had all been based on his religious involvement. It later turned out that Focus Semiconductor Systems presented a chance for him to broaden his horizons and his sphere of influence.

The other people at Focus while Mike and I were trying to finish the business plan were support people involved in drafting or office activities. There were no founding persons responsible for sales or marketing, and I later found out that Mike considered himself an expert in these areas and intended to handle these functions himself. Mike described his educational background as "several courses and a thesis short of a Ph.D. in chemistry," and later it became apparent that at least as far as the chemistry involved in the thin films Focus intended to produce, Mike was indeed very knowledgeable.

As my remaining assignments were coming to an end for the business plan, Mike told me he wanted me to join Focus as its vice president finance and also to serve as the corporate secretary. I was elated to be offered this job, since I thought Focus had practically a 100 percent chance of succeeding and prospering because of Mike's background and the financial commitment from Kleiner Perkins.