

Gordon Flesch Co. Inc.

62 YEARS OLD

Patrick Flesch, 37, is the grandson of the company's namesake. He and his brother Mark represent the Gordon Flesch Co.'s third generation, and their young children, the fourth. The second generation, brothers Tom (Patrick's father), John, and Bill, remain heavily involved. The family has three offices — in Madison, Illinois, and Ohio — and employs 589 workers, including about 300 in the Madison area.

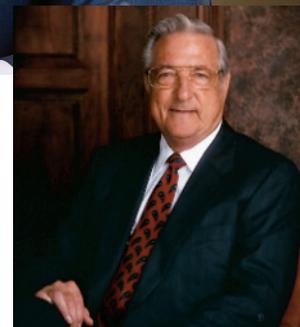
Patrick and his brother Mark are also best friends and share the same titles, vice president of sales, in two different divisions: Patrick handles the western region and Mark the east. There are no female Flesches involved in the business. Patrick and Mark were raised in Columbus, Ohio after Gordon sent his dad there to open a branch. Mark still works there.

Patrick recalls how hard his father worked and the long hours he put in. "Friday nights we'd have dinner with dad in the office, sitting in demo rooms surrounded by big copy machines and usually eating pizza." He also remembers feeling unique in that he recognized that the family was privileged and lucky that it had a company, "but I didn't know how successful that company was," he admits.

Grandfather Gordon, meanwhile, instilled a rule that family members wanting to join the business would have to earn a college degree and spend at least three years working elsewhere before applying. After college, Patrick found a job as an inside account manager at CDW in Chicago and loved it.



The second generation of the family Flesch includes (standing, left to right) brothers Bill, Tom, and John. Seated, generation three is represented by brothers Mark and Patrick. Inset, a portrait of founder Gordon Flesch.



Gordon Flesch Co.

"I was young and single and working in downtown Chicago when I got a call from Tom saying a territory had opened up in the Oakbrook/Elmhurst area and they wanted me to consider it."

Now he's at the Gordon Flesch Co. indefinitely, "and not just because I'm a Flesch," he insists. "I love the technology we sell, I love our customers, and I love the people here." The average employee tenure is 10.4 years, he reports, and "that's a testament to Tom, John, and Bill's leadership. Hopefully Mark and I can continue that forward."

What about his kids, ages 6, 4, and 1? "It would be a dream of mine to see them join the business," Patrick acknowledges. "As exciting as it may be to have your children in the business and transferring the company to the fourth generation, that comes with a lot of work and pressure. I want them to do what they want to do. Let them figure it out."

He admits there are challenges inherent in family business: "I really think it's helped our company that people are located in different states and we don't see each other every day. When you're in the office every day with your family

members, I think conflicts can become more prevalent."

There's also the challenge of non-active family members, he notes, who are always invited to the annual board meetings. How much do they want to know about the company? Do they care? When it comes to finances and making sure that everyone is taken care of, do silent members get the same breakouts?

As far as a company succession plan goes, details are not yet known to the brothers in generation three. "If there is one, Mark and I aren't privy to it," Patrick notes. "I assume they have a contingency plan should something happen to Tom. Bill, the youngest of the three, might be the natural option," he suggests.

But just to be safe, Patrick notes that company executives often travel on separate flights to company meetings because "having all the top earners on one plane is not a good situation."

So what would grandfather Gordon say now? "I think he'd be proud," Patrick says. "He used to tell Tom, John, and Bill that he dreamed of making a top line revenue of \$10 million. Now we're at \$155 million.

"He's got to be smiling."

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— Patrick Flesch, Gordon Flesch Co.