

Wacksman: Gather talented people and let them run

BY JOYCE MICHELE RATHLE

Ben Wacksman's grandmother believed in him and in education.

Wacksman listened to grandma and rode four hours per day to finish high school in New York City.

He started college, ran out of money and became a janitor for three years in order to graduate, a lesson which taught him that "no occupation is below anyone, and that each job, no matter what it was, has its own dignity."

He wanted graduate school at Columbia University and worked simultaneously for former New York Gov. Mario Cuomo in order to afford his dream.

Wacksman considers himself a Renaissance Man with strategies and goals.

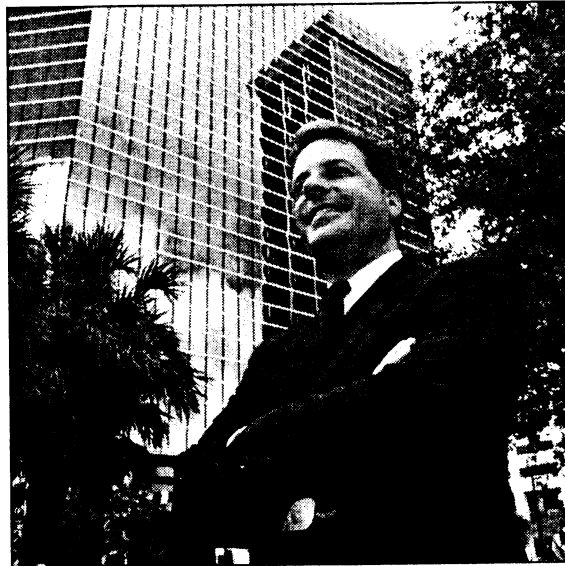
The voracious biography reader admires Aristotle, thrives on business challenges, has strong political convictions and has been a martial arts follower for the past 10 years.

He currently studies Silat, a form of combat art, and practices tai chi and karate as well.

"Martial arts teach discipline, ethics, physical health, strategy, fun, humility and modesty, because as good as you think you are someone else is always better," Wacksman said.

"For me, the hardest things to overcome were running out of money to finish college and losing the (2000) election (for Hillsborough county commissioner)," he said.

"It is not only important to do what makes you happy, and go with your gut instincts, but to always treat others as you would want to be treated."



Ben Wacksman is president and shareholder of Capital Realty Investors, a local real estate acquisition firm.

In 1986, Wacksman met Emy Pope, a fifth-generation Floridian from Gainesville.

He still remembers when Emy said "yes" to a first date at the World Trade Center.

Emy always wanted to return to Florida, and because they both loved the beaches and Tampa, coming here became easy.

Since 1990, real estate has been Wacksman's focus.

Currently he is president and shareholder of Capital Realty Investors, a local real estate acquisition firm

active in real estate investments throughout Florida.

In 1998, Wacksman entered the Tampa political scene after being chosen by the late Gov. Lawton Chiles to complete Ed Turanchik's term on the Hillsborough County Commission.

"I was his last appointment," said Wacksman.

"I felt honor-bound to support his causes: education and children. Different backgrounds bring a variety of ideas to Tampa. One has to be active and to push worthwhile ideas."

And persistently proactive he has been.

His strategy is to gather talented people together and let them run.

He sees himself as a facilitator and finds that through business and innovative applications more can be accomplished.

In 2001, he formed the Tampa Bay Institute, an independent nonpartisan local think-tank in order to provide sources of information, something that he sorely needed when he sat on the commission.

His goal is to marry business with public service.

Wacksman is proud to have been one of the few elected officials to receive the Eddie Award for Excellence Dedication and Devotion in Education.

He serves on the YMCA and Head Start boards, is active in organizations such as the Business and Professional Round Table and successfully chaired the fundraising committee for the 2001 Veterans Day parade.

"Success is an inner feeling of satisfaction one gets while accomplishing something worthwhile, and sometimes business offers more freedom to get things done than public service," said Wacksman.