

Gene Rumley

Bell Performance, Inc.

Do what you can with what you have, wherever you are.

—*Theodore Roosevelt*

From the very first pages of this book, you've learned how businesspeople all over the world are empowering themselves through Alibaba.com's business-to-business (B2B) platform. Any one of those businesses may have adopted this motto from our 26th president. Making success happen with the tools you have available, no matter where you are, is central to the idea behind Alibaba.com. By using Alibaba.com, so many entrepreneurs have opened new doors and crafted interesting, independent, profitable lives for themselves.

Bell Performance, Inc., owned by the Williams family, represents just one great example of this empowerment. When Gene Rumley (Figure P1.1), Bell Performance's international marketing manager, came to Alibaba.com in 2006 he was looking for a source of international leads for the company as well as reasonably priced translation services. He found both. The translation services were at such a bargain rate, he couldn't help but consider what else may be possible through Alibaba.com.

In 2008, Alibaba.com awarded Gene Rumley and Bell Performance, Inc., the e-Business of the Year Award. In fewer than three



Figure P1.1 **Gene Rumley** of Bell Performance, Inc., with one of "his" kids.

years, Gene's activities had expanded from seeking services at a good value to helping his company expand its international manufacturing and distributor base; quite a new direction for the 100-year-old firm. Since 1909, when Theodore Roosevelt was president, the company has produced fuel additives for engines of all sorts, from cars to boats to lawn mowers to power plants, to help them run more efficiently and last longer. For most of those years, the company operated mainly with customers in the United States. Today, through Alibaba.com, **Gene** has seen the company's product distribution grow to span more than 30 different countries.

You've learned from **Gene** throughout this book, as he has generously shared his knowledge and expertise. Business is second nature to him, and no doubt, you've grown enriched through the wisdom he has offered. **Gene** has even more to give than his business acumen, however. With his wife Arlene, **Gene** has founded a nonprofit organization called Mission for Orphans that the couple operates from their home in Florida. When we spoke, **Gene** was eager to share his deepest passion, working to help homeless street children all over the world.

Gene and Arlene have long supported the work of the Thampy family in Mumbai, India. The Thampy family has been

providing relief to destitute families throughout India for more than 30 years. Within the past four years, the Rumleys have been helping young Biju Thampy fund and establish Vision Rescue, a program to feed an increasingly large number of street orphans and provide them with some basic schooling. Biju Thampy's mission includes the hope to one day free these youngsters from their lives on the street, set for them by the caste system in India that dooms generations of families to hopeless destitution.

Biju, along with some friends including Rajesh Jahaw, set out with a few snacks to try and help the hungry children who hung out on a train platform nearby. At first it was difficult to convince these wary, streetwise youngsters to even reveal their names to the relief workers. The group started by feeding six children. Today, just a few years later, the group feeds one meal a day, six days a week, to over 1,000 street children at 10 separate locations throughout Mumbai. The impact has been dramatic as these youngsters have grown to trust and care for the staff and thrive with the constancy of a healthy meal. Biju, Rajesh, and the other workers have become trusted friends and confidants: living proof to these vulnerable children that people actually do care about them.

Estimates place the population of homeless children in Mumbai at about 300,000. Sadly, these children are likely to have been born on the streets and have spent their whole lives scratching out a hopeless survival. Many of them become addicted to inhalants and further slip away from having any hope for their futures. When Gene traveled to Mumbai, he learned of such desperation that parents often abandon young children, or leave them to die, because they simply can't provide food for them. He knew it would be very difficult to sleep in a comfortable bed once he'd seen tiny children huddled on cement sidewalks to sleep. Through his friendship with the Thampy family, he was ready to step in and help.

Today, Mission for Orphans, www.missionfororphans.com, collects money to support Biju and his relief efforts. In addition to feeding the children, the group has outfitted a bus as a

classroom and is working hard to provide some basic education to the children along with a nutritious meal. Biju knows it's impossible for just a few people to save the world, but that doesn't deter him. "If we could make a difference for one child, I thought that would change his or her world," he explained in a documentary, *My Name Is Orphan*, produced by Gene, Arlene, and Trevor Brown. When he first brought the bus around, Biju told the incredulous children that it belonged to them. They quarreled with him, stressing that the bus was his. "No," he kept insisting, "this is your bus!" "Their eyes just popped," he remembered happily.

Vision Rescue is hoping to be able to provide each of the children with his or her own school bag that includes a few books, a pencil case, and some colored pencils, perhaps a toothbrush and some toothpaste. The children's names would be written on the bags, and the kids would know the bags were there in the bus just waiting to be used. "A child will go to sleep thinking, 'My bag is on the bus! There is something that belongs to me!'" explained Biju. For these children who have never owned anything, that knowledge in itself is empowering. It would serve as actual proof that they do matter enough to have received these things that truly belong to them. With some education and a start at having their nutritional needs met, the future has begun to look brighter for these youngsters.

That will brighten the future of the city of Mumbai as well. According to the documentary, the average age for a street child in Mumbai is seven years old. With 300,000 such children destined to grow up undernourished and uneducated, in 10 years the city will include not only a new generation of homeless children, but 300,000 young adults with no education, no skills, no trade, and most likely addicted to drugs. The future of the whole city depends on successfully helping these children out of hopeless destitution.

But Gene and Arlene aren't ready to sit back, comfortable in what they've already achieved on behalf of these children. Through their web site, they are working with a program called

5 for Kids. If each comfortable and well-loved child set about to donate \$5.00 each year, just think of all the good that money could do! Not only would Biju's dream of individual book bags be possible, but the efforts of those dedicated to solving this problem could dramatically change the quality of life into the next generation and beyond.

Gene is clearly a brilliant businessman. He came to Alibaba .com to solve a specific business problem, and discovered a whole new direction in which to move his company: international trade. He's won prestigious awards and traveled the world, connecting and working with entrepreneurs from all over the globe. "When I went to China," he told us, "there were more than 4,000 entrepreneurs from all over Asia. It was very interesting to associate with them to see that they have many of the same problems we have, gaining and retaining customers and suppliers."

But Gene is also a dedicated humanitarian, seeing our commonalities not only in the boardroom or on the trading floor, but also wherever the most vulnerable of us gather and struggle to survive. We knew he'd have plenty of business advice to share, but we were even more impressed by the compassion, dedication, and commitment he and his wife have given to this, their true passion in life.

I have visited you in orphanages in the darkest streets and slums of Mumbai and Calcutta. My heart is broken. My mission is to rescue you!

—Gene and Arlene Rumley