

THREE PHASES OF THE TSONGAS EVOLUTION

and a new chapter for Joyce Tsongas and Dennis Brooks

Over 30 years ago, Joyce Tsongas set up a card table in her family room and started her client list in an index card box. Much has happened since then - she formed what was to become one of the preeminent trial consulting firms in the country, became nationally known for her work, and helped found the American Society of Trial Consultants (ASTC). Ten years later, with the help of her husband Dennis Brooks, Joyce not only made a name for herself, but also helped put trial consulting on the map. Of course, if you ask her if she considers herself a pioneer, she'll tell you, *"All you have to do to be a pioneer is do something new, grow older, don't die, and keep doing the same thing."* But those of you who know Joyce and Dennis, and who have worked with them over the years, know that their contributions to the legal community have been significant and impressive.

Now, after three decades, Joyce and Dennis have formed Communication Strategies Northwest. Though no longer working for Tsongas Litigation Consulting, Inc., Joyce's influence remains.

"We could not be the firm we currently are today without that foundation," says Chris Dominic, current president of Tsongas Litigation Consulting, Inc. *"We wish them well and great success."* Joyce and Dennis feel no differently. *"Tsongas will continue its leadership in the industry not only in the Northwest, but also the nation,"* says Joyce.

As Joyce and Dennis transition into the next phase of their career, taking more time for themselves and as the principals of Communication Strategies Northwest, we take a look back on the legacy behind the Tsongas name - how it all began, where it is now, and where we all go from here.



Joyce Tsongas, 1983

The Early Days

Having a background in speech communication and debate, Joyce put her talents to work in the late 1970s teaching business and interpersonal

communication skills to professionals. When a lawyer asked her for help communicating to a jury, she ventured to the courthouse to watch several trials. Joyce was fascinated with the process; she described them as *"a series of communication events that weren't working as well as they could."*

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For example, she recalls, *“I remember watching voir dire and thinking this is just like an interview, but the problem is the lawyers are doing all the talking. I heard opening statements without a clear story. I saw witnesses whose anxiety made them look deceptive.”* Joyce knew at that moment that she could put her special talents to work in the legal community.

Working out of her home office, she made a name for herself in Portland. After five years working with attorneys, she heard murmurs that others across the country were doing the same kind of work. In 1981, a handful of communication consultants, specializing in litigation preparation, met in Scottsdale, Arizona, for the first annual convention of what is now known as the American Society of Trial Consultants. Joyce served as its second president.

Joyce is most fondly remembered by the early founders of ASTC as the go-getter who pulled out her personal checkbook to get the very first directory printed. *“From there we began down a path to standardize and systematize areas of competency in trial consultation, always with an emphasis on ethics.”*

Joyce describes the early days working with lawyers as an educational process. *“At the very beginning, it was a learning process about what effective communication can do in the courtroom. There aren’t many advocacy classes in law school, so some of the things that seemed so obvious to me – like interviewing a jury, taking the anxiety out of testifying, and formulating a compelling case strategy with persuasive themes – didn’t come*

easily to a lot of attorneys. What I wanted to bring to the legal community was a standardized way to deal with improving the various communication events that occur throughout the litigation process.”

The majority of the work Joyce provided was in witness preparation, jury selection, and case strategy. Her reputation soon grew beyond the Portland area, and she found herself traveling to Seattle nearly twice a week. Her practice expanded out of the Northwest to 47 states. Joyce knew she had a good thing going when she received a letter from Alaska Airlines thanking her for being one of their top 10 customers.

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The Growth of the Firm

Joyce not only found a business partner who would change the face of the company, but also a husband in Dennis Brooks. In 1986, Dennis partnered with Joyce, and not only helped build and grow the practice through the 1990s, but also became one of the preeminent jury selection consultants in the country. Dennis explains, *“The part of trial that lawyers seem to like the least is jury selection because it is an unknown and also because lawyers are trained to ask leading questions not open-ended questions. They don’t like to get the bad news. So, we systematized the process and helped take the fear out of the unknown.”* Dennis contributed to the firm’s leadership when he served two terms as the president of ASTC.

It was about this same time in the industry when trial consultants began providing mock trial and focus group services. *“You couldn’t*

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Joyce and Dennis in the Tsongas, Portland office

answer all the questions without doing some kind of sophisticated research,” says Dennis. With the addition of research services and a graphics department came new team members, and the birth of the first full-service trial consulting firm in the Northwest. Joyce recalls, “One of our advisors said, ‘Do you want to grow the company or be the company?’ I wanted to be the company. Dennis wanted to grow the company. Dennis won. So we grew.” With the addition of new talent came new insights, perspectives, and innovations built upon the solid foundation Joyce and Dennis had created.

Tsongas Litigation Consulting, Inc. became a leader within the trial consulting and legal fields. Over time, “Tsongas” started to become used not only as a noun but a verb. *“I remember a lawyer asking me to ‘Tsongasize’ his witnesses, and I recently had a lawyer tell me she picked a jury ‘Tsongas style,’”* Joyce explains.

As the name and the firm became more than the person, Joyce and Dennis had a unique and forward-looking perspective. They began, early on, to develop a strategy to continue the legacy of the firm by transitioning the management and ownership to the next

generation of professionals. This was not an overnight process.

The Transition of Ownership

In 2001, Joyce and Dennis recognized it was time to move the company’s management into new hands. They hired Chris Dominic, who had been doing contract work for Tsongas for four years while working as a management consultant. Neither Joyce nor Dennis was ready to give up the work they loved, but they were ready to relinquish leadership and management duties. In 2003, Chris Dominic was promoted to president of the company. He would later continue Joyce’s and Dennis’ tradition of leadership in the profession by



Joyce and Dennis will operate CSNW, Inc. from their Forest Park home

becoming the president of ASTC. At the close of 2004, their plans came to fruition as they sold Tsongas to its current group of core consultants: Chris Dominic, Ted Prosis, Elizabeth Bourne, Bruce Boyd, and Laura Dominic. *“We have made the most successful transition in our industry. We have had so many others ask us how we did it. We were very fortunate to have the right people in the right place at the right time,”* Joyce states. For the next four years, Joyce and Dennis continued as part-time members of the Tsongas team and got to enjoy some time on their own.

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Joyce and Dennis have now reached their next milestone – the formation of Communication Strategies Northwest. *“It was the next logical step. We grew the company. We sold the company and it’s in great hands. Now it’s time to be in charge of our own pace,”* says Dennis.

Communication Strategies Northwest

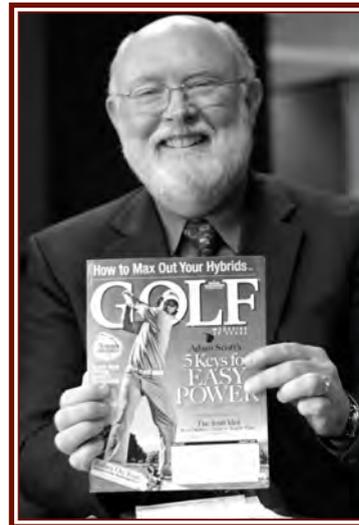
Communication Strategies Northwest will offer a triad of litigation, political, and corporate communication training. They endeavor to simultaneously broaden their scope of communication consulting into

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other arenas, as well as to specialize and narrow their litigation consulting focus to a few of the services they enjoy most, such as strategy work, witness preparation, and jury selection. They also look forward to collaborating with the Tsongas firm from time to time.

Looking Forward

The current Tsongas team will continue to carry on the Tsongas name and its full-service mission. Joyce and Dennis will enjoy a rarely accomplished goal of enjoying daily life while doing the work they love. *“I feel very lucky to be in the enviable position of not having to go full-throttle. We can have balance but still be engaged in some fascinating work. I want to spend more time in the garden, on the hiking trails, and reading the New York*



“I know what I’m going to do...”
says Dennis

Times,” says Joyce. Grinning, Dennis adds, *“I know what I’m going to do...”* as he holds up the current edition of Golf Magazine.

Joyce started Tsongas in her family room, and together with Dennis

they grew a company through the 1980s and 1990s. In the 21st century they began the process of change. They built a company that they can be proud of, and successfully passed the baton. With a job well done, now Dennis promises to let Joyce “be” the company as they achieve a work/life balance through Communication Strategies Northwest.



Berries on Joyce’s 100-year-old blueberry bushes

Tsongas will continue to run its Northwest and National operations from its Seattle and Portland offices with its core consulting team. Tsongas can be reached as it has been for the last three decades. Joyce and Dennis, and their new company, can be reached at: (503) 297-4141; joyce@commsnw.com; dennis@commsnw.com; or at www.commsnw.com.