

“At my age I don’t have to do it unless it’s fun...this is fun..”
- Charlie Loudermilk on opening his 1,500th location.

Charlie Loudermilk, founder and CEO of Aaron Rents.

10 questions for

Charlie Loudermilk

In 1955, Charlie Loudermilk borrowed \$500 and bought 300 folding chairs. He began renting them for 10 cents per day and Aaron Rents was born. Many people told him “this rental thing just won’t work.” 52 years later, Loudermilk was in Mansfield, Texas recently for the grand opening of Aaron’s 1,500th store. RTO Magazine was on hand for the historic event and interviewed Mr. Loudermilk.

Aaron’s pulled out all the stops for the 1500th grand opening. What are your impressions?

WOW. We try to get better with each opening, but this one goes beyond anything I’ve ever seen...WOW!

When you purchased those folding chairs in 1955, did you ever foresee this milestone in your company’s growth?

It’s way beyond any dream I could ever have. Only in America.

What products did you add after those initial 300 folding chairs?

We rented party equipment, medical equipment and a little bit of everything else over the years and eventually ended up primarily with furniture and electronics. We now have 11 manufacturing plants that produce most of the furniture we rent.

Aaron’s has rented many different categories of merchandise over the years. Do you need to diversify more?

No. We just need to do more of what we’re doing. There are weeks when we gain three or four thousand customers. It’s very satisfying.

What’s the secret to growth?

We keep learning what people need and want and keep supplying it. We couldn’t have 1,500 stores unless we were doing a great job of satisfying customers.

A lot has changed since 1955. Tell me, what has remained the same?

Practically everything is the same. It’s about satisfying the customer with quality products at a fair price - just like in 1955. That’s what we’ve been doing for 52 years. We developed a culture at Aaron’s

that treats employees and customers fairly. We look at satisfying people more than the bottom line. Maybe that’s not what an investor may want to hear, but we’re doing very well with that philosophy.

You are the second longest tenured CEO in the U.S. Your executive team is also one of the most experienced. What’s your secret to retaining good people?

There’s no questioning that we have the most tenured executive team of any rental or leasing company. Aaron’s has only lost one of our top 20 people in the last ten years. It’s in our culture. We want to know about our employees and provide them not only with a good workplace, but also give them the opportunity to serve. People feel good about serving customers. We’ve done that for many years and we’ll keep doing it for many more.

Where do you see the company going?

When I opened the first store I didn’t know what would happen. The rental concept was brand new. A lot of people, especially bankers, said it wouldn’t work. I think this is just the half way mark for us. We can have 3,000 stores.

Describe the Aaron’s culture.

We’re a team. We’re like brothers and sisters. We have fun together and, when you’re winning like we are, we’re opening 200 stores this year, you have fun. People want to be a part of that excitement.

How do you remain motivated after a half century in the business?

It’s pretty simple for me because I’ve grown up in the rental business. At my age I don’t have to do it unless it’s fun...this is fun.

RENT TO OWN
RTO
MAGAZINE
ONLINE

Photo by
10-2-07