

Lives in Technology

Howard Foley: tech talking is his vocation

For several years Howard Foley, in his role as Director of the Massachusetts High Technology Council, has been the official spokesman and unofficial godfather to high technology in the Commonwealth.

In a recent interview, *Mass High Tech* explored Foley's role as high tech spokesman. At the same time, we wanted to learn a bit about the unphotographed, unquoted side of Howard Foley.

Senior Editor Alan R. Earls asked the questions. The interview took place in Foley's 19th floor office at 60 State Street in Boston.

MHT: What did you do before becoming council president?

FOLEY: I was with IBM from '61 to '72, first selling for the DP division in the Boston area, then training marketing representatives in Poughkeepsie, and finally returning to Boston as head of marketing.

In 1972, I left IBM to help start a private non-profit corporation called Jobs for Massachusetts. I did that from '72 to '78 — until we began to understand the impact that the electronics and computer industry was going to have in the years to come.

MHT: So the Council was an outgrowth of Jobs for Massachusetts?

FOLEY: Yes. We nurtured it for about a year. Then it took on a life of its own and needed to be by itself.

MHT: Did forming the Council take much of a sell-job? The general public seemed to assume that the Council was started by and for industry.

FOLEY: That's not it at all. We were basically trying to encourage companies that were here to expand within the state and to encourage companies that weren't here to relocate.

We came to understand what concerned the DECs, Analogs and DGs. Then we started talking to companies about issues they needed to be concerned with.

At that time there were several key individuals involved: Ray Stata, Ed de Castro, Dee D'Arbeloff, and Dean Morton, who is now executive VP at Hewlett-Packard in Palo Alto.

We finally reached the point where we had to do something more formal, so we incorporated. There were 39 original members.

MHT: What are the basic criteria for membership in the council?

FOLEY: We look for companies with several common characteristics. Among them is a very high level of commitment from the CEO; high value-added products; rapid growth; an international marketing orientation and a high proportion of scientists, engineers and R&D investment.

By having these essential characteristics, you can then have a very well focused program.

MHT: Is there a size criterion?

FOLEY: Not really. Some of our smaller companies have fewer than 20 employees.

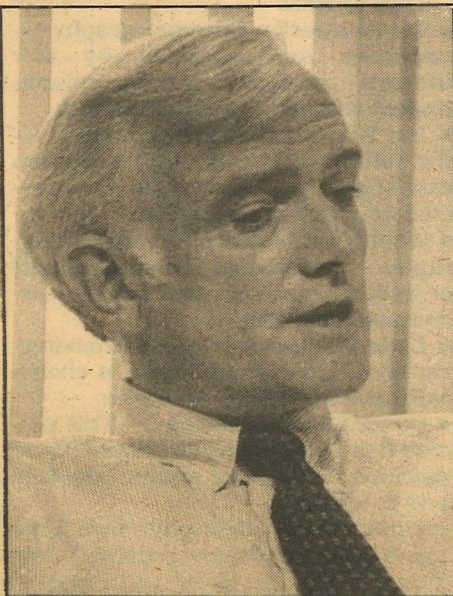
One of our smallest companies, Thinking Machines, is run by a

woman named Sheryl Handler. They are out in Waltham and they are working on a machine that will have one million parallel processors — an artificial intelligence system.

Above all, though, we're looking for CEOs who are willing to do some work. We made a strategic decision when we set this thing up. We basically said, no staff. If the work was going to get done it was going to get done by the members.

MHT: What kind of characteristics do you have that have helped you work with what I would think could be a potentially contentious group?

FOLEY: I think I was fortunate in having industry experience. There is no better industry than the computer industry and no better company than IBM. I learned some extremely valuable lessons that most people in this kind of position never get to experience.



Most people in quasi-governmental lobbying type organizations tend to come out of a government or law background. I think that's a great disadvantage. They don't really understand product issues or the decision making process found in business.

MHT: What do you do when you're not espousing high technology issues?

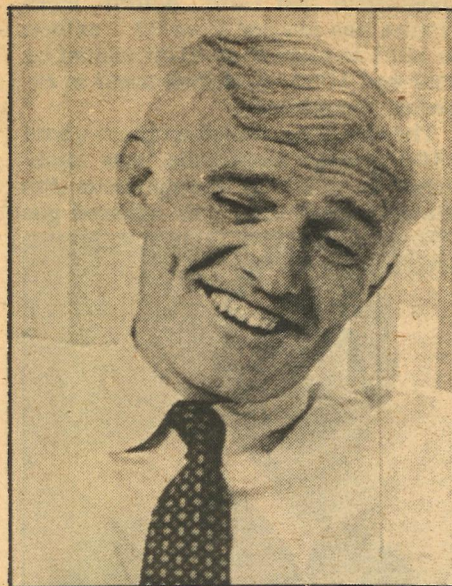
FOLEY: Well, I do try to play a lot of golf in the summer. In the winter it's platform-tennis. I also do some skiing with my wife and three children. In March, we usually take a trip to Aspen.

I also enjoy reading, though I read mostly magazines. This job is really a seven day a week gig.

MHT: Do you have some particular personal goals either within or beyond the Council?

FOLEY: I guess the answer is yes and no. I love to create new things. That's what we did at IBM and that's what we did at Jobs for Massachusetts.

I kind of have a four-job-plan. I had ten years at IBM, ten years doing a non-profit thing and now I'd like to do



Photos by Karen McCarthy

ten years in a for-profit situation maybe starting or running a company and then maybe ten years in some kind of appointed office.

MHT: How about motivations — have you had any so-called role models, or is there anyone you admire in public or private life?

FOLEY: In business, my role model was an IBM fellow named David Kerns. I used to have him come up to speak to my sales classes. He would give such an inspirational speech that my guys were ready to take on the world at the end. He left IBM, and he is now President or Chairman of the Board at Xerox.

As far as other models? Right now, Ray Stata is one of the finest human beings and sharpest visionaries in industry anywhere in the world.

MHT: How does it feel to be caricatured by Paul Szep of the *Boston Globe*?

FOLEY: Oh! Szep is a good friend and I think one of the best cartoonists



in America. I'm a frustrated cartoonist myself. I had a cartoon column myself when I was in junior high school!

MHT: During your tenure as council president, what stands out as the most tense or dramatic moment?

FOLEY: Well, sequentially the decision by the membership to spearhead

proposition 2½ was something. It was unusual for a business organization, especially one as new as the Council. But it seemed logical.

The politicians said there was no constituency for lowering the surtax and they wanted us to get into the property tax.

We raised a quarter of a million dollars and developed an excellent campaign.

MHT: What's a typical day like for you?

FOLEY: It usually falls into one of four categories. Working with a legislative issue involves writing, researching, and talking about that issue, usually to elected officials. Sometimes the audience is other business people and others who will influence the final outcome of an issue.

Then, there is dealing with the Council members themselves on a whole range of issues. Some are specific to the companies. We have a few committees who do quite a bit of the work... the K-12 committee, the fiscal policy committee and so on.

MHT: As far as Council policy, does the tail wag the dog or the dog wag the tail?

FOLEY: Well, both, actually. I do initiate a lot of things. Its a matter of getting inside a lot of people's heads and anticipating their needs. Some come from here and some come from members. The unitary tax policy and the current work on vibration standards came from members.

MHT: How about ancillary Council activities, speaking to the public and so on?

FOLEY: I could literally spend all my time giving talks to chambers of commerce, firefighters, and visiting delegations, etc. Everybody wants to set up their own high tech councils.

MHT: What are the most off-beat requests you've gotten.

FOLEY: Well for God's sake...we get ten calls a day for your publication here! The most unusual request — probably 'how many people in greater Boston work on word-processors.'

MHT: How about the most memorable activity outside of your work?

FOLEY: Well, the most memorable family activity was spending a month out west rafting and seeing all the national parks.

Of course, it's quite something to meet top people like President Reagan or Senator Kennedy..

MHT: You've had to work with a wide variety of people — from state representative Tom Gallagher to Edson de Castro. What personal qualities have helped you in dealing with them?

FOLEY: Well, I genuinely like people. I have a feeling for business and technology. And I can't think of a situation where we were doing something that I felt was wrong. □