Decades into a highly successful career, Dan Muenzer found himself in an unfamiliar situation. For the first time in his professional life, his confidence waned, he questioned his decision-making and felt shell shocked by his task at hand.

Muenzer had traveled to Sea Island, Ga., for the 2015 TLMI Converter Meeting for what is typically three days of sunshine, networking with industry colleagues, attending educational sessions and collaborating with fellow board members to develop initiatives and direction for the association.

But just a couple of months earlier, an unprecedented series of events created a bit of turmoil. Muenzer was in Europe when he received an urgent phone call from Frank Sablone, the then-president of TLMI. Sablone called to say that the chairman was resigning from the position and Muenzer, who had only been in the position of chairman-elect since October, would be immediately thrust into the chairman position.

A week later, back in the states, Muenzer and Sablone held a meeting. At the time, the plan was for Sablone to retire from the position at the end of 2016, but he informed Muenzer during this meeting that he would like to retire a year earlier than expected.

When Muenzer arrived at that Converter Meeting at Sea Island — which was his first as chairman — he was not only tasked with leading the association having had minimal time to prepare, but he was also charged with leading the search for a new president.

“So I’m 51 or 52 and I was pretty confident, I had success and I wasn’t really worried about anything,” Muenzer says. “But man, I could see this just crumbling around me. I really was questioning myself and I really wondered what I needed to do next.”

But what happened next wasn’t a result of an action Muenzer took. Instead, it was what his colleagues in TLMI did to help him right the
ship. Throughout the meeting, his fellow TLMI members sought out their newly appointed leader, gave him pep talks, consoled him and made him realize that they would get through this together.

It was then that it clicked. Muenzer says he realized at that point that it wasn’t his job to figure everything out on his own. Sure, he had to facilitate decisions and be a leader, but it was TLMI as a team that had to come together to establish the new direction for the association.

Two years later, Muenzer has overseen the search for a new president, an overhaul of the entire TLMI staff and has led the association through the development of its latest Strategic Plan. Through it all, he says, it was about teamwork and the entire association pulling together to work through these challenging transitions.

“To see this industry come together and support something we all love — not just our own companies, but more importantly TLMI and what it represents to everybody — was just amazing,” he says.

An Innovator From the Start

When looking at the titles of most of TLMI’s board members and the companies they represent, there’s something that’s noticeably different about Muenzer. Unlike many of his colleagues, Muenzer is not a president, CEO or owner, building his company from the ground up with one of those classic “we started with one press in a garage” converter stories. Instead, Muenzer is VP of marketing for Constantia Flexibles, an international label printing corporation based in Vienna. Muenzer is based in Constantia’s Mason, Ohio, facility, which was originally known as Spear before it was acquired by Constantia Flexibles in 2013.

Before he entered the label industry, Muenzer, just fresh out of college, moved his young family to Toledo, Ohio, to take what he says was a great job with Owens-Illinois, one of the worldwide leaders in glass container manufacturing. At the time, pressure-sensitive labels were a fairly new innovation and had begun to appear on plastic applications like shampoo bottles.

Muenzer recalls that his first brush with the label industry came during his time at Owens-Illinois when the company started collaborating with Spear. Spear had contacted Owens-Illinois because it was dead set on figuring out a way to apply pressure-sensitive labels onto glass. The two companies worked together for a couple of years and Muenzer recalls that there was something inspiring about this little company that was so determined to accomplish something so innovative.

Additionally, Muenzer says that collaborating with Spear made him realize that in the label industry, there are so many opportunities to work with a variety of different market segments, whereas the glass industry was more limiting. In 1994, Muenzer made what he says was a relatively easy decision to leave Owens-Illinois and dive head on into the label world with Spear.

“People at the time thought I was nuts,” he says. “I had a really good job at a big multi-billion dollar company with a big future. People thought I was just crazy, but something told me this was the direction I wanted my life to go.”

When he joined Spear in the mid-1990s, the company was entering a transitional time. It had gained a reputation as an innovator in the pressure-sensitive market, becoming the first company to apply a pressure-sensitive label to any kind of container and the first to create a prime pressure-sensitive label.

In the mid 90s, Muenzer says Spear adopted the beverage industry as its main focus when it developed the capability to apply pressure-sensitive labels to glass. In 1994, Anheuser-Busch made plans to leverage Spear’s new capability on a new product called Ice Draft by Budweiser. With this major new account, Spear was positioned well for the future, investing equipment and space specifically to Ice Draft label production. But before the product got off the ground, Anheuser-Busch pulled the plug on Ice Draft, leaving Spear in the lurch.

For the next three years, Muenzer says the company struggled mightily, watching its revenues dip by two-thirds. Oddly enough, he recalls, despite the insecurity and trepidation around the
We have a better way — save money, decrease downtime, and improve your process.
To learn more, call us today at 888.493.5396 or visit www.flexowashus.com.
“When they bought us, they were already big into beverage, but they didn’t do any pressure-sensitive,” Muenzer says. “There was very little overlap in technology, but there was overlap in customers and marketplace.”

A Natural Leader

Another aspect that differentiates Muenzer from his TLMI colleagues is that, comparatively speaking, he has not been a fixture at association events for very long. He explains that Spear had been a TLMI member for years, but was not active in the association. He says the company’s involvement was mostly limited to entering the annual awards competition and having its owners attend an occasional meeting.

As a marketing professional responsible for his company’s growth, Muenzer explains that he recognized the value of TLMI before he even attended his first meeting. In 2008, Spear’s owners relented to Muenzer’s constant requests to be more active in TLMI and sent him to a meeting for the first time. During this first meeting, Muenzer says he mostly just tried to get the lay of the land, since he didn’t know too many other members.

But in 2009, Muenzer returned to the annual meeting and accepted the Environmental Leadership Award on behalf of Spear. During that meeting, Calvin Frost of Channeled Resources Group and the co-chair of the Environmental Health and Safety Committee, introduced Muenzer to Ken Kidd of WS Packaging, who at the time was chairman of the Recycling Solutions Committee.

Coincidentally, Kidd was based in Cincinnati, just a couple of miles from Muenzer’s office at Spear. When they returned home from the meeting, they began working together on sustainability initiatives for TLMI and the industry. Within a year, Muenzer says Kidd announced his retirement and recommended that Muenzer be named the committee’s new chairman.

“At that point, I changed the way that committee worked and broke it into task forces,” Muenzer says. “Recycling solutions covered too many things. We broke it into liner recycling, matrix recycling, ink recycling and adhesives. I like to think because of that we started to have some focus and success on some things. I’d like to think that was where I made my first mark on TLMI.”

A Team-Oriented Approach

While taking over as chairman of TLMI earlier than expected would have been a major challenge on its own, Muenzer says his proudest accomplishment in his tenure as chairman was facilitating the search for a new president, which also involved a complete overhaul of the TLMI staff and moving the office from Gloucester, Mass., to Alexandria, Va.

According to Craig Moreland, president of Coast Label Co., and TLMI’s chairman elect, Muenzer’s collaborative approach throughout the presidential search was instrumental in making it a smooth transition.

“We had to go through a process of defining of the job and conducting a thorough survey of the membership to make sure the person we hired understood what the membership wanted out of TLMI,” Moreland says. “Dan did a really great job of leading that process and building consensus.”

Frost says that through Muenzer’s leadership, TLMI is better poised to foster involvement among all of its members. He says that Muenzer’s transparent approach in his tenure as chairman has been highly beneficial to the association as a whole.

“He has brought sweeping changes to the organization, which embrace better communication and more engagement by members,” Frost says. “He has shared
his vision and beliefs with the entire constituency. His enthusiasm and energy are contagious and TLMI will change because of his dedication and commitment.”

Additionally, Muenzer says he is particularly proud of the new TLMI Strategic Plan, which he says takes a more holistic approach to what TLMI is all about and sets some clearer goals and objectives than past iterations.

“Without question, I’m most proud of managing the transition, developing the team and setting the organization in a position to go from good to great,” he says. “I’m convinced we’re going to get there. Plus, [I’m proud of] the way we did the strategic plan and the way we’re going to incorporate that into how our committees are run, how we run our board meetings, how we prioritize our resources and actually use that as a guiding document as opposed to something you do every three years and put it on a shelf.”

A Passion for Others

When he’s not leading the largest North American label industry association and managing the demands of his full-time job, Muenzer’s other passion lies in the extensive work he does with charitable nonprofit organizations. He is on the board of Visionaries and Voices, which is an organization that provides services to disabled adults through art. Recently, Muenzer says Constantia Flexibles hosted a fundraising golf tournament that netted a $54,000 donation for the organization.

“Talk about being able to marry your career and industry with your passion,” he says. “It was just fantastic. I get charged up on that kind of stuff.”

Muenzer also credits his family for their support and inspiration over the years. He and his wife Christine have been married for 32 years and his son and two daughters, Daniel, Jamie Rae and Chelsea, have all embarked on successful careers of their own.

Though his time at the helm of TLMI has ended, having passed the chairman title on to Moreland during the annual meeting, Muenzer says he has learned a great deal from the experience. While he says he has always understood the importance of TLMI to the industry, the past two years have shown him that this organization is truly a cohesive unit that holds each other up and seeks to improve the industry for the future.

“I love team, I love group challenge and I love group victory,” he says. “That’s why TLMI is so appealing. It’s all about the team and being part of something bigger than yourself. I’ve always approached my professional life with that philosophy.”