

Education is one of Linda Ginzel's passions. Here, she is pictured at the University of Chicago's campus in Hyde Park, where she is a clinical professor of managerial psychology and academic director of corporate education.



Leading By Example



LINDA GINZEL

A PERSONAL LOSS, A PUBLIC CRUSADE

By transforming her private grief into a movement for social change, she has saved countless children's lives.

BY ANDREA DOYLE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL ELLEDGE



"We started to fight for the kids

because someone has to. If the manufacturer won't and the government says it can't, then we will."



AN ACCIDENTAL ADVOCATE." THAT IS what 48-year-old Linda Ginzel calls herself. A Princeton-educated professor who incorporated her passion for psychology into a business curriculum, she was immersed in two worlds 10 years ago: academia and motherhood. Her two boys, four-year-old Ely and 16-month-old Daniel (Danny), were the light of her life.

May 12, 1998 started out as a day like many others for Ginzel, a University of Chicago professor. She left Danny at his child care home in their Lincoln Park neighborhood. That afternoon, like many times before, Danny went down for a nap in a Playskool Travel-Lite portable crib. When he awoke from his nap, he stood up, just like many times before. Only this time, as he grabbed onto the rails of the crib, it collapsed forming a V that trapped him by the neck. Just like an animal trap, his own body weight caused the collapsed rails to close tighter and tighter around his neck, cutting off oxygen to his brain and ending his short life.

His tragic death became even more senseless as news spread that the crib that killed him had been recalled five years earlier. It should never have been in use. The accident never should have happened.

Grief turned to disbelief when Ginzel and her husband, Boaz Keysar, also a University of Chicago professor, learned Danny wasn't the first child to die in this model crib — he was actually the fifth. Of 1.5 million similar portable cribs recalled, at least 1.2 million could not be accounted for.

As Ginzel, her husband, and their older son sat shiva for Danny, they were surrounded by family, friends, and col-

leagues, including professors from Stanford to Harvard. They mobilized their network to research how such a thing could have happened. They discovered a fundamental flaw in the children's product safety system: Manufacturers are not required to conduct safety tests for most products and, of the hundreds of products recalled each year by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), up to 90 percent aren't found.

After her unspeakable loss, it would have been easy for Ginzel to fall apart. But she couldn't: There was simply too much to be done. "Boaz and I just knew we couldn't accept the status quo. The thought that information could have saved our son was overwhelming. We just started beating the drum to raise awareness about children's product safety. We started to fight for the kids because somebody has to. If the manufacturers won't and the government says it can't, then we will."

Finding sleep difficult, they turned to the tools of their trade: research and education. Long nights were spent on the Internet researching recalls and learning why they failed. They found that CPSC conducts about 250-300 recalls per year. Of these, approximately 100 involve children's products. While CPSC says they get unsafe products off store shelves, they cannot get them out of homes and child care centers.

Within 11 days of this tragedy, Ginzel and her husband sent an e-mail to 5,000 people, describing Danny's death and warning about the Travel-Lite portable crib and other recalled defective portable cribs. A few weeks later, using \$20,000 in personal savings, they established a non-profit organization called Kids In Danger (KID) to inform the public about dangerous products and to change product safety policy.

"We started with what we knew best — education. We did

everything we possibly could to help the public know what they needed to in order to keep their children safe. Three months after Danny died, a boy in New Jersey died in the same brand crib. There were less than 12,000 of these cribs sold and there were six dead kids. Your child has a better chance of surviving a tour of duty in Iraq," Ginzel said, still heartbroken after a decade. The "kill ratio" was more than one for every 2,000 units sold.

A few months after Ginzel lost her son, a friend and fellow University of Chicago professor put up a Web site, www.KidsInDanger.org, listing recall information and explaining how the nation's product safety system was broken. They created a public service announcement that was sent to radio

Protect Children from Dangerous Products in 3 Steps

1. Check with consumer agencies to learn about product recalls.


The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) (www.cpsc.gov) and other organizations maintain current lists of recalled merchandise.

2. Search your home for dangerous products, and ask your child care center, family, and friends to search for recalled items.

3. Stay up-to-date on product recalls, report products you think are dangerous, and help your friends and family keep their kids safe by spreading the word.

Sign up for safety news and recall updates at:

www.KidsInDanger.org.



SHAKING UP THE STATUS QUO:
Ginzel believes that one person can
make a difference and she instills
that belief — and a strong sense of
ethical responsibility — in all of
her students, many who lead
organizations of their own.

"Without Danny, I have an emptiness that is with me every minute of my day."



stations nationwide, urging consumers to call the CPSC hotline (1-800-638-CPSC) for recall information.

Through KID, Ginzel and her husband have educated millions of parents and caregivers about the dangers of unsafe and recalled children's products.

But Ginzel says that information alone is not enough. A Band-Aid approach will just not do. KID is all about changing the system to better protect children by improving the safety of products before they hit the store shelves. This includes making manufacturers responsible for pre-market testing of their products, instead of "testing" them on children in homes and child care facilities.

Political Change

Ironically, days before Danny's death, state inspectors had paid a routine inspection visit to Sweet Tots, his child care home, but had not checked for recalled products, because they weren't required to. Ginzel championed an Illinois bill, the Children's Product Safety Act, which makes it illegal to sell or lease an unsafe or recalled children's product. It also requires that licensed child care facilities be inspected for unsafe products. On May 13, 1999, one year after Danny's death, this bill passed unanimously in the state senate. The governor signed it in August 1999. "The Children's Product Safety Act" is now law in seven states.

Ginzel testified before the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection urging them to take action. She asked them why there are so many defective children products on the market. Why isn't safety testing mandatory? She also pointed out that companies like Hasbro spend millions of dollars a year on marketing, reaching into homes whenever they want to sell a new product. Why isn't this same tactic used to notify parents of recalls?

The couple also filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Kolcraft, the crib's manufacturer, and Hasbro, the corporate owner of the Playskool brand.

In the course of discovery, they learned that the defendants had secretly settled several earlier cases. After years of depositions and court hearings, and on the day their trial was scheduled to begin, the two companies agreed to settle the lawsuit for the wrongful death of 16-month-old Danny. The couple agreed to the \$3 million settlement only after rejecting the same demand Kolcraft had made successfully in other cases — that they keep the settlement secret.

Some of that money continues to be used to support the work of KID, although close to 90 percent of the organization's annual budget comes from public contributions.

Shawn S. Kasserman of Corboy & Demetrio, who represented the couple, was quoted as saying, "Kolcraft halfheartedly recalled the portable crib in 1993; however, the efforts of the company turned up less than 25 percent of the 11,600 portable cribs it sold. Despite knowledge that thousands of portable cribs remained in people's homes, the defendants, through confidential settlements, restrained victim's families from publicizing the problems with the portable cribs. This is the first public settlement where the defendants were prevented from keeping the settlement terms secret and confidential."

Pivotal Point

Ginzel's experience dealing with the companies responsible for Danny's death changed her as a teacher. "I'm a professor in a business school. I teach these people. The man who owns the company that manufactured this crib graduated from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management where I taught. I felt like I now had even more of a responsibility to help teach managers and future managers about the ethical consequences of their decisions; that every decision they make has an ethical component. About 30 percent of what I teach is now related to ethics."

After the birth of Danny, Ginzel and Keysar had thought their family was complete. "But you never know what life has in store for you," she said. "As the rabbi said at Danny's funeral, one knows not what the day will bring. We said to each other, 'We have so much love, why would we stop? If we can have another child, we should.'"

And that's exactly what they did. Two more sons, Tomer who is eight, and Avi, who is four, have been added to their family. Ely, who was four when Danny died, is now 14.

Ginzel continues to make sure the issue of children's product safety is on the national agenda. She served as a director of Consumers Union, the non-profit publisher of *Consumer Reports*, and is a consumer representative on the Consumer Products Committee F15 of ASTM International (American Society for Testing and Materials).

"Unlike poverty and world hunger, this is a very solvable problem," she said.

She has seen her fair share of awards and recognitions. In 2000, President Clinton presented her and Keysar with the President's Service Award, the most prestigious national recognition for volunteer service directed at solving critical social problems.

Despite the recognition and accomplishment, Ginzel says, "Without Danny, I have an emptiness that is with me every minute of my day." ►

"SMALL, SERIOUS, SOLID":
This is how Ginzel describes the corporate education program she founded at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business — the program the *Financial Times* rated among the top 10 in North American and European business schools.



Meet the Professor: Linda Ginzel

DIVERSE" WOULD BE THE WORD THAT best describes Linda Ginzel's background. Perhaps it helps explain her ability to blend the disciplines of psychology and business and her untraditional approach to teaching.

Ginzel was born in Korea to a Korean mother and American army soldier father of German heritage. Most of her early childhood was spent in Germany, where her father was stationed. Her parents' only child, her father has a daughter who is 16 years older and her mother has two daughters, one who is 14 years older and the other 10 years older.

Her father joined the army during the Japanese occupation after World War II, and served in the Korean conflict, and Vietnam War, where he sustained severe injuries. He spent three grueling years undergoing seven major surgeries — all unsuccessful — to repair the damage. He was left 100 percent disabled, and died this February as a result of his injuries.

"I've always been for the underdog," Ginzel says. "It's a trait I definitely learned from my dad. He spent 30 years in the army as an enlisted man but never took a commission. He never became an officer."

Setting the Bar High

One of her most poignant memories is being elected president of the student council of her junior high school in Colorado Springs. "The first thing I did was create a volunteer

council. There were so many people who wanted to serve but couldn't get elected to student council. The volunteer council was for anyone who wanted to step up to the plate and help make the school a great place. It may sound strange, but it's one of the things I'm really proud of."

She has always set the bar high. A high school advanced placement biology teacher inspired her to major in biology in college, but she changed her mind after she got a B in class. "It was really hard for me. It was only the second B I had ever gotten. I thought if this is what I wanted to spend my life doing, a B wouldn't cut it."

Ginzel worked full time as a waitress and as an apartment complex manager, attending college part time. She still managed to finish in three and a half years — and was named the outstanding graduate for 1984 from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Colorado at Denver, a commuter college.

She found her true calling when she took her first psychology class taught by Gary Stern, Ph.D. "I was amazed to learn why people behave the way they do," she said. Her thirst for knowledge in the field of psychology was insatiable.

As a senior in college, she became especially interested in the work of Bill Swann, Ph.D. She was so taken by a paper he had authored that she considered going to The University of Texas where he taught for her graduate degree. She also wanted to work with the legendary experimental social psy-

Lessons from Linda

If you were lucky enough to sit in Linda Ginzel's business class, here's a taste of what you would learn.

Change the Work Environment, Not the People

Many managers and leaders make the mistake of trying to change the behavior of their employees instead of the environment in which they work. "Therapists can't even change people. Why do you think as a manager you're going to change someone?" she says with a chuckle. "It's the environment that you should change."

All of us think people behave the way they do because of something inside of them, Ginzel says. "You're an extrovert, an ENTJ on Myers-Briggs, a first-born, a sensation seeker, or whatever. People are all different. Despite those differences, if the situation is powerful enough, we can get people to move in the same direction."

Beware of 'Group Think'

When there is a cohesive group, "group think" can prevail where members try to minimize conflict and reach consensus.

In this environment, there is a tendency to suppress critical thinking. Group members may actually prevent other group members from bringing up negative comments about the course of action. Classical examples of group think cited by Ginzel are the Bay of Pigs invasion, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, and the Iraqi invasion.

"Group think is one of the reasons we have bad public policy decisions. It also exists in managerial decision groups. You can alleviate group think by trying to prove

yourself wrong," Ginzel explains.

One suggestion she makes is to identify one person as the devil's advocate at a meeting. It is that person's responsibility to come up with alternative criticisms. "He or she tries to prove us wrong. If we try to prove ourselves wrong and we can't we should have more confidence in our course of action. If we do, we just prevented a lot of hardship and difficulty."

Followers Are Not Sheep

Ginzel fully understands how important leadership is but she doesn't understand why "followership" is so often overlooked. "Leaders follow in front," she asserts. "Followers are the engine of this country. Good followers are not 'yes men.' They aren't sheep. A good follower questions and helps the leader get perspective outside of him or herself."

The Domino Effect

One of the biggest problems with making decisions is when people put blinders on.

Take the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. Morton Thiokol, the supplier of the "O" rings, did not want to launch the night before. Under pressure, the company was told by NASA, "to take off your engineering hat and put on your management hat."

"What does it mean to take off your engineering hat and put on your management hat? Whenever someone tells you to narrow your scope when you are making a decision, that should be a red flag," explained Ginzel. "Another similar statement is, 'It was a business decision.'"

chologist, Ned Jones, at Princeton. When she found out that Swann would be visiting Princeton that year, she made her decision. It was at Princeton where she decided to combine her love of psychology with teaching.

It was also at Princeton that she met her husband of 18 years, Boaz Keysar, a fellow student and Jerusalem-born Israeli. Ginzel, who has converted to Judaism, calls him her "Rock of Gibraltar."

"I was the first person in my family to go to college. When I told my Dad I got into Princeton to do my Ph.D., he just couldn't understand why a girl needed a Ph.D.," she said with a laugh.

Today, Ginzel is a clinical professor of managerial psychology at the University of Chicago. She founded the corporate education program at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business and also creates and teaches customized educational programs such as the "Negotiation Skills and Group Decision Making" class she taught for PCMA's Executive Edge this October. (Read how attendee Susan Katz was able to put Ginzel's principles immediately into practice. Go to www.pcma.org and click on the December issue of *Convene*.)

She is passionate about her work. "If I didn't believe that

I could actually help the students in my classroom to change their behavior, I'd get out of bed and do something else every morning ... because I feel like time is too precious."

"When I first started teaching more than 20 years ago, I thought I was a good teacher because I gave a lot of material and I lectured a lot and they left my room with all these ideas and all this information. But I've learned that information is like butter in the hot sun," she said. "I now focus on a few fundamental concepts. I drill down deeper and help my students to make the link to action in their lives outside the classroom."

She believes in learning through experience. "People don't learn from experience by default. We tend to walk through our experiences. We don't digest them or reflect on them. Without putting some structure in place, we don't link what happened today to what happened last week to what happened the year before. What I try to do with my students is speed up this process so they can learn more from their experiences when they are younger. So they can be further along the curve." ■

♦♦ **Andrea Doyle** is *Convene's* senior writer. The Leading by Example series is sponsored by the **Canadian Tourism Commission**. Visit its Web site at www.CanadaMeetings.com.