

Total Tie Keep

NO MORE BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN

I specialize in the manufacture of textile inventions and was quite interested when industry peer Andrea Hence Evans brought the Total Tie Keep to my attention. Inventor Dwight A. Littlejohn's website states: "The Total Tie Keep™ corrects, straightens and controls the entire necktie by loosely attaching the necktie to the shirt using the shirt's buttons." Littlejohn claims the Tie Keep stabilizes the necktie while allowing a natural flow that "provides just enough restraint to keep the user from looking unkempt and disheveled."

So, what's so special about the Total Tie Keep? Why not simply use a tie tack or tuck your tie into your shirt when dining? And how did this invention make it to ABC's *Shark Tank* competition? We spoke with Littlejohn to find out.

Note: Interview was edited for clarity.

Edith G. Tolchin: Please tell us about your background and how you came about inventing the Total Tie Keep.

Dwight Littlejohn: I have been a Special Agent with the United States Capitol Police for almost 20 years. In my profession, I am required to wear a suit and tie just about every day. I have always had difficulty trying to keep my tie neat and straight because I'm constantly on the move. Classics like tie bars and tie

tacks never appealed to me, so I thought about a device that could discreetly control the tie and allow the tie to be the uninterrupted focal point. I came up with the idea of attaching an "anchor" to the shirt's buttons to hold the tie down.

The need to control the tail end of the tie was an issue, as well. I noticed that taller men had to tussle with that problem pretty consistently. The aha moment hit me one morning when I was putting on my belt. That's when I decided to sew loops on my device to control every component of the necktie. I knew the loops would be the one thing that separated my device from all the others.



Dwight Littlejohn's Total Tie Keep ensures that ties stay neat and professional looking.



The Total Tie Keep works better than tucking a tie in a shirt because you don't have to worry about the wrinkle factor—nor about forgetting what you did and walking around looking ridiculous.

EGT: How does the Tie Keep work?

DL: The user attaches the Tie Keep to a shirt using the recommended shirt button. The Tie Keep has two loops that control the tail, which is tucked into the upper loop and pulled through until it lays flat. The Tie Keep, with the tucked tie tail, is then pulled through the loop on the back of the tie. Once that's done, the Tie Keep's remaining button holes align with two other shirt buttons. All that's left to do is give the lower edge of the Tie Keep a slight pull down to make sure it's neat and streamlined.

EGT: Why not use a tie tack or tie clip? Why is the Tie Keep better than tucking a tie in a shirt when dining?

DL: I feel like those devices are a little outdated. They also take away from the design of the tie, stiffening it and inhibiting the natural flow that a necktie is designed to have. Tie tacks can even damage a tie.

The Total Tie Keep works better than tucking a tie in a shirt because you don't have to worry about the wrinkle factor—nor about forgetting what you did and walking around looking ridiculous. The Total Tie Keep minimizes movement, thereby reducing the chances of soiling your tie.

The Total Tie Keep comes in four colors to blend with an assortment of ties.



EGT: How did you create your first prototype, and how many versions did you experiment with before you knew you had a sure thing?

DL: I actually used an old shirt to make the first prototype. I cut a strip of two buttons holes, folded and sewed the edges, then trimmed the excess. It was later, when I did my patent search, that I realized that version already existed. When I wore my first prototype, at times I found that the tie loop blocked a button from cleanly attaching, or a button attached in the case caused the tie to snag or buckle when moving. That's when I made the second prototype, a three-button device. This gave me more room to cover the tie loop. Later, I came up with the idea to sew loops on the device. I tried that out for a while and it worked perfectly. That's when I knew I had something.

EGT: Have you begun to manufacture the product? If so, are you manufacturing domestically or overseas?

DL: We began manufacturing in 2012. Our first two orders were done overseas to keep our initial costs down. At some point, we will begin looking for domestic producers to keep our money here in America and to reduce lead times. Overall, the manufacturing experience was great because I learned a lot. Some of those lessons were financially painful, like mistakes in packaging that were missed, and fees associated with delivery and customs that I didn't understand.

EGT: How is the product packaged?

DL: I designed two types of packaging to give customers a variety. Our basic four-pack includes a white, blue, gray and black Tie Keep presented in a small rectangular box with an instruction sheet. The box has a very eye-catching design. I chose the colors of the Tie Keep based on a survey I took of 100 men to determine the most popular shirt and necktie colors. The second package I created is a flat box that's designed to hold up to two Tie Keeps, with an instruction sheet in each. This is a very durable package and it's great for mailing.

EGT: What is your target market for this product?

DL: The market is pretty vast. It's easy to say anyone who wants to look good in a necktie. More specific markets include businessmen, doctors, attorneys and people in



Dwight Littlejohn demonstrates the Total Tie Keep on *Shark Tank*.

the hospitality industry, such as catering and wait staff, and law enforcement officers and professional limo drivers. The list goes on and on. I was pleasantly surprised to see that about 60 percent of my customers are women.

EGT: Is the Total Tie Keep patented? If so, what type of patent was issued?

DL: Yes, the Total Tie Keep is patented. It's a utility patent that is very broad and covers the wide range of Tie Keeps that I can manufacture.

EGT: What led you to try out for *Shark Tank*, and how did you actually make it to the show? What were the results, and what did you learn from the experience?

DL: My co-worker and investor, Michelle Gonzales, sent me an email about participating on the show. My experience as a participant was pretty fulfilling, and I gained a lot of knowledge about the business. I won't get into the specifics, but I will say the *Shark Tank* staff was amazing. They were very professional and accommodating, and they did a lot to calm my nerves. To my disappointment, I did not get a deal, but I understand why they had their reservations. Nonetheless, I have started to act on some of the wonderful advice that Damon John gave me. My career, coupled with the fact that I was able to go before the Sharks, has taken my confidence to speak to anyone to another level. The fact that they liked my product has also made me believe in the Total Tie Keep even more—especially since two of the Sharks said they would use it.

EGT: What are your plans now that the *Shark Tank* experience is behind you?

DL: I intend to grow my business and improve in the areas that I had previously neglected, like marketing. I have started to put a system in place that I hope will ultimately put the Total Tie Keep in stores across America. I am learning as I go, but every lesson

is valuable in the sense that it is a part of my growth that will strengthen my abilities and knowledge.

EGT: What obstacles, if any, have you encountered during any of the phases of product development?

DL: The biggest obstacle at every phase is time. My career as a federal agent keeps me very busy. I love what I do, and I am pretty close to retirement, so I won't consider resigning to run a business full time. That seemed to be an issue with the Sharks. After I began selling the Total Tie Keep, showing how wonderful and versatile it is became a challenge. There are so many different things it can do, and some people, unless they know exactly what they are looking for in a product, don't have the patience to hear about it.

EGT: Have you invented any other products, or do you have any add-ons for your existing product?

DL: I do have a few different versions of the Tie Keep in the prototyping phase. I have one that works better for slim-fit ties and another that can fit odd-button, patterned shirts. There's also an extra-long version for extremely tall guys. Within the scope of these variations are different materials and designs that can make a Tie Keep a little more stylish. Although Tie Keeps are made to be hidden, some people may like to peel the tie back to show off a stylish Tie Keep that complements their attire.

EGT: Do you have any advice you'd like to offer readers of *Inventors Digest*?

DL: Persistence and patience are key. There are going to be times when you think your invention is not worthy. Then, there will be times when you feel like it can't miss. You have to find your truth somewhere in the middle, work from there and try not to get too discouraged. The truth is, not everyone will find your invention or product useful. Set your goals, accomplish them one step at a time and before you know it, you're there. If you hit a road block, think back to previous road blocks, remember how you overcame them and use that recognition to overcome the road block you're presently facing. 📦

For information, visit www.totaltiekeep.com.

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