

## Leading the Way at Upside Engineering

It's interesting how the same words crop up when people describe Rod Evans, President and Chief Executive Officer of Upside Engineering: honest, fair, committed, approachable, professional, intelligent, empowering . . . the list goes on. Clients and staff alike appreciate his ability to draw the best out of people and help them meet or exceed project and service expectations. But what does Rod think is the key to his success? He believes it stems from relationships. He understands that he and his staff are a team, with the shared goal of responding to clients' needs. While he provides strategy and direction, he allows people to do their jobs well, equipping and empowering them to make good decisions and giving them the freedom to discover their strengths. It is in this environment of mutual respect that the company has grown over 25 years to be the successful Engineering, Procurement, and Construction Support (EPCS) services firm that it is now. But it is not just the desire to succeed that drives Rod; as Jason Keerak, Vice President of Engineering Services, said, "[Rod] works very hard at maintaining relationships with people. He does it because he truly wants to do that." Rod's caring attitude and value of people form the foundation of his leadership style, and this is evident in the way he seems to know everyone who works at Upside. He attends new hire orientations just to meet people and welcome them to the company, and is interested in staff and their families. Rob Mariott, Civil/Structural Engineering Manager, said of Rod, "You may tell him something about your family and he remembers. He will ask you about it three months later. He makes it a priority to know his people and leads by

example.” Rod’s connection to staff and clients creates an open, progressive workplace, and people are happy to be a part of that.

So how did Rod become such a strong leader and why did he form the company in the first place? He worked for a short time at an owner company and didn’t find it stimulating enough. His parents had repeatedly suggested that he would be better working for himself, so after ten years of consulting, Rod felt that the time was right to start his own business. He was very motivated to create a company that could respond effectively to the changing needs of clients, and his initiative paved the way for his early success. For many years Rod was completely ‘hands-on’, doing everything from engineering to photocopying. However, as the company grew he saw that he couldn’t do it all. He recognized that in order to steer Upside into future success, he needed more support; from this belief he created the Management Team in 2005, and subsequently the Operations Team. With the added structure and support from both teams, Rod has been able to let people do their jobs, confident that the work is in skilled hands and allowing him to focus more on strategic planning. His leadership style has evolved in line with the company’s growth and changing needs, and this ability to be adaptable has held him in good stead through both the busy times and the economic downturns.

As Rod has continued to evaluate the effectiveness of his leadership, he has found inspiration in Nancy MacKay, Chief Executive Officer of MacKay CEO Forums. Nancy specializes in helping CEOs across Canada to excel in their performance, and Rod joined one of Nancy’s peer learning groups two years ago. He has found the support and shared

information from other CEOs invaluable. For example, when Rod decided to pursue the 50 Best Managed Companies in Canada application in 2012, he was able to contact other executives who had been successful in receiving this designation to find out how to start the process. Another result of his experience in the MacKay group was to implement the leadership training program at Upside. Nancy believes strongly in this type of training, and emphasizes the importance of hiring the right people and having them in the right places. Rod decided to develop a leadership program to help all managers and leads of the various groups within the company. Despite having a successful business and skilled teams in place, Rod has striven to improve his leadership and that of his staff to best serve Upside's clients.

Rod believes that every year is a milestone for Upside, and he appreciates all of its achievements. Looking back, Rod sees his purchase of the company from three other partners in 1992 as key to its success, as it allowed him to control the vision at Upside. He is focused on the company's core values and says, "We want to do the small things right continually." He values existing clients and celebrates new clients, making sure that they are looked after and their requirements are met. Rod initiated client appreciation nights in 2005 as a way of showing how much he cares about the business relationships he and staff have built with clients. Chris Read, Vice President of Business Services, noted that "[Rod] has always put people first . . . He has instilled that you have to be honest with people and that speaks to why we get the business we do. He hasn't done anything to break that trust." As the head of Upside, Rod emphasizes that the clients' needs come first, and happy clients mean a successful Upside.

People often wonder how Rod stays so connected to what's going on while empowering people to make their own decisions and manage their own workflows. Rex Perchard, Engineering Manager, remarked that "[Rod] is the best at knowing where he needs to focus his attention at any given time for the good of the company, but he still remains very approachable and down to earth." He has a unique ability to draw people to him, and is keenly aware of what is happening and how projects are progressing. Nonetheless, he allows people to work through issues themselves and learn how to be successful. One thing that Rod has consistently believed in is that people should be left to do their own work, without having someone looking over their shoulder. In line with his leadership philosophy, Rod values the input of others and is always open to people's ideas, being a great listener and a collaborative leader. He fosters a positive company culture, especially through the numerous social events that Upside offers. Rod and his wife, Donna, support and participate in these events, such the Christmas party, annual golf tournament, and a host of summer barbeques. Rod has a generous budget for the company's social calendar, and staff appreciate that they can be on the same team as the CEO in a pool tournament or curling bonspiel. Leading by example, Rod demonstrates that the people are what makes a company great.

Rod has led his company through tremendous growth and change over the last 25 years, managing to make relationships his top priority. His success is clear not only from the repeat business that Upside receives, but also from the people who are happy to be a part of the team.