



WEIR BUILDING COMPANY

Empowering Employees to Build a Better Business

Weir's Fenton-based company builds in Livingston, Northern Oakland and Southern Genesee counties and is made up of a four-person team including himself; Ann, office manager; Adam, project manager; and Dave, assistant project manager. Weir credits his company's success to his four-person team and their ability to get their jobs done.

by Jennifer McDermitt

Many builders dream of owning their business. They daydream about being their own boss, making their decisions and doing the things the way they think they should be done. Those builders who have means to start their own businesses quickly realize, however, that running your own business comes with its own set of difficulties and that "being your own boss" can sometimes turn into "being your own worst enemy."

Continued on page 28





Chris Weir of Weir Building Company learned that lesson the hard way. After working for a construction company for five years, he decided to follow his dream and open his own construction business. However, he soon found that, although satisfying, running a business is harder than it seems.

"I always wanted my own business, but I had yet to master the art of delegation," said Weir. "After working 80 hours a week and wearing all the hats for more than three years, I realized I needed help. You gain a lot of satisfaction from running your own business, however the reality is that it is a lot harder than working for someone else. Since that turning point two years ago, I have built a motivated team of employees to help me run my business, and I am proud today to have a company that is made up of empowered team members who continually exceed my expectations."

Finding a Niche

With a stepfather in residential construction, Weir grew up with a love and apprecia-

tion for the trades. In fact, there was little question as to what career path he would take, and he even worked in the trades to help pay his way through college. Weir graduated from Michigan State University with a degree in construction management, and it was then that he starting working for a large construction company.

"Working for another company after college was great experience, but I always knew in the back of my mind that one day I would start my own company," said Weir.

Weir started the business with the intention of being strictly a new home builder, however he soon found that custom home building and large-scale remodeling were what he did best, and the similarities between the two made them an ideal direction for his business.

"A lot of people can't do both remodeling and new home construction, but I found that both of them required a high level of service and craftsmanship, and that has become our niche," he said. "Today, about 60 percent of our business is custom homes and 40 percent is large-scale remodeling."

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son team including himself; Ann, office manager; Adam, project manager; and Dave, assistant project manager. Weir credits his company's success to his four-person team and their ability to get their jobs done.

"We've defined 13 positions within our company and assigned one of the four employees to that position," said Weir. "These are dedicated people who know exactly what is expected of them and that they will receive the necessary tools to get their job done."

There's No Such Thing as Free

Weir takes an innovative approach to running his business by eliminating the all-too-common "free estimate" that so many others in the industry boast about. Weir feels that the free estimate does a disservice not only to himself, but also to the customer.

"When you give free estimates, you have to rush through them because most of those jobs don't pan out," said Weir. "They take a lot of time away from your business, and you are giving your customer an estimate that can hardly be relied upon."

Weir says that by charging for estimates, he can ensure his customers get a well-designed



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plan that balances their wants, needs and budgets. "We are able to invest the necessary time to define every detail," said Weir. "We hate surprises and so do our customers. Our process gives them confidence they will not incur cost overruns on the project. Furthermore, if customers are willing to pay you for this service, you know they are serious about the job. It's a win-win for both sides. I wish all builders would charge for estimates."

Education also plays a key role in Weir's business plan. He is a Certified Aging in Place Specialist and a Certified Graduate Remodeler. Weir dedicates 2 percent of his annual budget for training and educating his team.

"It's so important for your business to make ongoing education a priority," said Weir.

"There's always room for improvement in every business."

Keeping Priorities Straight

One of the places Weir finds educational opportunities is through his builder association membership. Weir belongs to the Builders Association of Metropolitan Flint and the Home Builders Association of Livingston County. In addition, Weir was recently appointed to the board of directors for the HBA of Livingston County's Remodeler's Council.

"For me, my involvement in the association allows me to build relationships with others in the industry," Weir said. "There is plenty of work and opportunity out there for all of us,

and by using each other as a resource, we can all benefit."

Weir also finds time in his busy schedule to give back to the community. As a member of the Fenton Rotary Club, Weir helped run the Club's annual Angel Tree Project, which matches children in need with sponsors. This holiday season, the group successfully found sponsors for all 174 children involved in the project.

For Weir, it's all about keeping his priorities straight. "I can't explain the satisfaction I get from owning my own company, but it's a lot of hard work too. It does make you realize, however, that people are in control of their own destiny and you make anything happen if you work hard enough." ●



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