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# EDUCATING FOR THE FUTURE

WRITTEN BY WILL HENDERSON

Being part of a family business is unlike any other job. It is instilled in you from a young age and training begins long before you set foot on the site or in the office. The language and terminology, ethos and determination; this is all shared in a casual and unofficial way. For many, it is a path that is laid out, the road map of an industry that is already part of you. Intergenerational businesses benefit because continuity, a much wanted feature in any company, is ingrained from childhood. What happens, however, when a family business closes, leaving the people that have invested their lives in a company with a difficult decision to make? For Megan Kitchner, there was an obvious choice and that was to start The Next Generation.

Atlantic TNG is a precast concrete solutions company that specialize in sanitary and storm drainage structures for underground. These structures include manholes and catch basins. The company is rightly proud of the high level of products it brings to the market and is a leader in the precast industry throughout the state of Florida. Megan, Owner and General Manager of Atlantic TNG identifies the vast reach that the company has throughout the location. "Florida's



Manny the Manhole

infrastructure is built upon the precast products we produce – new communities, FDOT roadways, commercial buildings, and underground sanitary and storm water systems are all manufactured right here at our plant in Sarasota, Florida." The company sets itself high targets in terms of both the service it can offer its clients and the products that it produces. "Our goal is complete client satisfaction, and we deliver. Our team is comprised of creative problem solvers, attentive customer service professionals and a product manufacturing team that is second to none." >









➤ The company is celebrating ten years in business this year which, in itself, is no mean feat. However, that only partially tells the story of Atlantic TNG. Atlantic Concrete was set up back in 1969 and built a strong reputation as a specialist and pioneering member of the precast community. In 2010, following on from the difficulties experienced through the global recession of 2007, a decision was made to close the Florida division of the company. Megan, granddaughter of one of the company founders, had grown up with the company and made the decision to carry on in her own right. "The corporate office decided to close the Florida division of the company in 2010, after my grandfather passed. I was the sales manager at this division in Florida, and I decided to try to do it on my own, to purchase the Florida division and branch off. That's what I did and here we are having our ten year anniversary this year."

Diverting from the heritage and legacy of a family owned business was a brave decision, and one that was certainly not a guaranteed success by any means. The industry, and economy in general, was struggling and start-up companies carried a huge amount of risk. Tapping into the strong client relationships that she had nurtured until that point was a vital aspect of the companies early ability to stay afloat. "When I was younger I met a lot of contractors and some of them still work with us today. I don't have a problem asking for help so as a result a lot of folks helped mentor from a contractor's perspective. It has helped me see the job from all sides of the fence. I am very thankful for those early years that exposed me to this great environment and great people were so willing to help me and teach me things. In 2010, the year I started on my own, wasn't great because of the recession. We struggled to get work. I was fortunate in that I had so many friendships in the industry and people were saying we'll support you, we will buy from you. So with that support, a couple of years later, the economy started to turn around and we were able to turn things around, start to grow our products, improve our equipment and start making plant improvements. So, after a couple years and a lot of patience and faith, things started to work out."

Navigating the construction industry can be a difficult task. As a new business, winning over clients can be a challenge. While Megan felt that, perhaps initially, there may have been skepticism regarding her knowledge and credentials in what is largely a male inhabited industry, she feels that her track record and expertise is enough to silence any doubts about her ability. "I think we all encounter challenges, and none of us have all the answers, but we can step up for the challenge and find out the

answers. It makes you stronger and I'm always up for a challenge. There have been strong women leaders in this industry before me. I saw what they were doing and I was impressed and I just knew I could do it. I had my family backing and I was never told that I couldn't do something so I didn't really doubt my ability to take this on."

While this resilience and belief is an enormous aspect of the success that Atlantic TNG has experienced, ultimately, a business will stand on the merits of its products and client relationships. Simply put, if clients are happy with their experience and the product they receive, they will return. Having identified building relations from a position of trust and honesty, Atlantic TNG has experienced growth from a solid foundation. According to Megan, this focus on trust is a huge aspect of the company goals. "I really just think it comes down to the relationships that you build and that you're honest, that you have integrity. You really have to have respect for the people that you work for, the engineers, the municipalities, the contractors, all the way down to the homeowners. You have to have respect for their timelines and you have to be honest with them." Megan also believes that this level of honesty is such an integral part of her company's values that it can occasionally cost her business opportunities. "I would never promise something that I couldn't commit to. I've always been very honest and I think people know that about me. I've given up jobs because I knew I couldn't do what they want. Sometimes though, it gives you more respect and the next time they are considering giving someone the job, they will remember that at least we are honest with them."





**“In addition to being a leader in the precast industry, Atlantic TNG is also very active in the community and dedicates a large portion of its time and energy to charity work.”**

With the company now in its tenth year and experiencing steady growth, it can be easy to overlook the difficulties experienced throughout that time. Starting out on the back of a recession, not to mention the ever fluctuating market conditions and ongoing COVID related challenges, the company has shown excellent flexibility and resilience to get to where it is. This is, in no small part, down to the knowledge and skill within the staff. “I attribute it to my team here. I think I’m very fortunate, as you know, the first couple of years were hard and we struggled. After that I was able to really dedicate more time to educating employees, to getting a strong group of people that wanted to be part of the success and it really helped us. We do a lot of training through the National Precast Concrete Association. We typically go to their conventions twice a year. There are different education pieces they can also do such as Master Precaster certification training. They can become master precasters and it just makes you feel like you’re part of something. It is our daily goal to absolutely get up and do the best job every day.”



In addition to being a leader in the precast industry, Atlantic TNG is also very active in the community and dedicates a large portion of its time and energy to charity work. What started out as a personal initiative for Megan soon grew into a company wide ethos. The company holds various fundraisers each year “to be part of something bigger than you.” This acknowledgment of being one part of a larger entity is also at the forefront of Megan’s thoughts when asked where the company will go in the future. It is unsurprising that someone raised within the context of a family business is concerned with continuity. Ensuring that the company has a succession plan is of huge importance to Megan. She feels that, by ensuring the company is in safe hands, continued growth will be a by-product. “I learned a lot growing up in the industry and I wanted to make it the best experience that it can be for the people that come behind me. I want to make sure we’re educated and involved in our industry. Nobody is indisposible, not me, not anybody, and you never know what’s around the bend. I feel that if a company is good, it should run without certain people and so I have to keep moving in that direction; making sure people are trained adequately, and that they’re ready for whatever the next step might be, with or without me. The goal is just to keep doing us day by day and getting better and making sure the next generation in line is going to be ready too.”





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