

INNER-VIEWS

CEO Innerview: Chuck Hollingsworth

A tinkerer who is making engineering firm a good place to work

Chuck Hollingsworth, president of Engineering and Environmental Consultants, has always been a tinkerer. He's built and repaired things. His father owned a service station. "I've always been a motor head. I got through college fixing motorcycles," he says.

After completing a degree in civil engineering at the University of Connecticut, Hollingsworth earned one of the first ever master's degrees in environmental engineering from Polytechnic Institute of New York in 1979.

Working for Connecticut-based Citizens Utilities, Hollingsworth had been to Tucson several times before finally moving here in 1981. He wanted to put his environment skills to good use but found no companies in Arizona doing that kind of work. He liked this part of the country and took a job working for a Tucson engineering company.

Subsequently he joined a national firm that had 5,500 employees. It wasn't the right move for Hollingsworth.

"I didn't care for the bureaucracy. Waiting nine months for a computer seemed excessive and I realized this was not my kind of place," Hollingsworth said.

He left thinking he would work out of his house until he found the right position. Before that happened his wife kicked him out of the garage.

That was 1987 and Environmental and Engineering Consultants was born.

From the beginning "I didn't want my name on the business. I wanted it to be about employees and clients; not about Chuck," Hollingsworth said. "I wanted a



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company based in Tucson so we could manage our future, contribute to the community and support employees who live and work here."

After 10 years and adding many engineers the company became

Engineering and Environmental Consultants to reflect its growing transportation and civil engineering practices. However, the environmental aspect of their work continues. "The green movement is a very big part of our future. We have several LEED-certified professionals and we make increasing use of Building Information Modeling to help predict and control costs related to environmental management," he said.

Engineering and Environmental Consultants has grown slowly and steadily, but when he looks back over the past 20 years Hollingsworth wonders how they got this big.

"We started out on a shoestring. Now we employ 85 people whose livelihood depends on the company," he said.

Hollingsworth quips that what he likes most about being in charge is weekends.

But, more seriously, he

notes that he "enjoys the opportunity to be creative, solve problems, help others solve problems and be part of a team. I feel like my job now is to serve everyone who works here."

He also acknowledges that managing is more difficult than engineering.

"As an engineer I could work 14 hour days and feel fine. As a manager at times after an eight-hour-day I feel like I've been beat up," he said.

About eight years ago, as part of succession planning Engineering and Environmental Consultants moved to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan.

"We wanted to diversify ownership without selling to an outside party," Hollingsworth explained. "ESOP provides an incentive to develop leaders internally and puts employees on an ownership track. We want to create a culture where the buck stops at every employee's desk."

Engineering and Environmental Consultants has won several Copper Cactus honors, including an award as a Best Place to Work. Thinking about that award, Hollingsworth said "we need to be people oriented and fair. I recall how I was treated as an employee and we work to be better."

Like many executives, his biggest challenge is finding qualified professionals.

"We don't graduate enough engineers and scientists from our schools," he said. "The workforce is changing and managing the younger generations of employees is challenging. We have to be flexible and understand what they expect."

For someone considering executive management, Hollingsworth offers: "Don't walk into a job thinking you know all of the answers. You may know a lot about your former job, but you need to identify the questions before you figure out the answers."

If you're thinking of starting a business, he says "you have to have a passion for the work and for running a business. Give it your best shot. If it's for you stick with it, and if it's not, change your plan. Owning your own business takes a lot of time and you will need to make difficult choices."

I asked Hollingsworth about maintaining balance and he played Bob Marley's



Chuck Hollingsworth

Jamille Montenegro photo

"Get Up, Stand Up" in which says "don't give up the fight."

"Some people let things eat them up from the inside," Hollingsworth said. "I used to worry a lot. I kept things in and it would eat me up. I've learned to just get things out. It hurts a little at first but you don't have to bear the pain for as long. Worrying doesn't contribute to constructively solving problems."

Of Engineering and Environmental Consultants today, he says, "we bring a lot to the table. We are a group of accomplished engineers, scientists and professionals and we're still a great place to work!"

Contact Gary Hirsch at gary.hirsch@vistage.com or (520) 225-0373 to suggest a CEO or business owner for a future "Inner-view." Hirsch is a group chair and executive coach with Vistage International — www.vistage.com — and leads a group of CEOs, company presidents and business owners who meet monthly. CEO Inner-view is a regular recurring feature in Inside Tucson Business.

Biz Facts

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