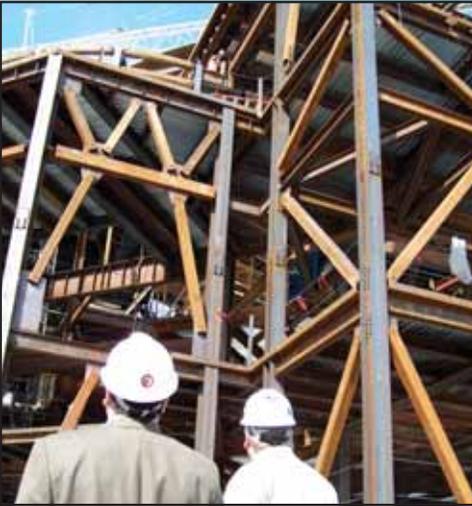


STRUCTURE OF SUCCESS



1

Shiel Sexton Builds Culture for Advancement, Fun



When visiting the Shiel Sexton offices just north of downtown Indianapolis, it's hard to keep your eyes from gazing in every direction. Photos and awards crowd bookcases – including one display made from extension ladders – at the construction management company. A toy train sits suspended from the ceiling in the reception area. Seldom does one office match the next as many feature salvaged materials from job sites.

Continued on page 20



Shiel Sexton

Continued from page 13

A visitor quickly realizes this isn't your average work environment, but that difference goes well beyond appearances.

"Give them the tools and let them work." That simple philosophy describes the management style at Shiel Sexton, where employees have freedom in how they do their job and are rewarded for performance and new ideas. It's also what shapes this year's No. 1 Best Place to Work among large companies.

The most important thing Shiel Sexton does for its staff of about 350 people is provide a career path with lots of opportunity and give them autonomy, asserts president and chief operating officer Mike Dilts. When the company has the right talent in place, the employees are what make Shiel Sexton succeed.

"That ecosystem is a huge deal," Dilts explains. "I probably worry about that as much as I worry about anything else – just getting the right personalities in here and moving them around to make sure they are in the right spots, because that's what makes this thing hum. And I then get out of their way."

Ideas and needs heard

For safety and quality director Doug Condon, that level of autonomy allowed him to create a safety department that



Shiel Sexton President and COO Mike Dilts describes the company's culture as collaborative and fun.

makes learning fun – while achieving the lowest recordable injury rate in the industry.

"That's not because we didn't take chances and we didn't innovate," Condon says of the safety record. "To work for an organization that gives you the freedom to fail, to have the ability to go out on a limb and do things that other people may say look a little crazy – that's the organization; that's what keeps me here."

One of those so-called crazy ideas came in the form of a safety fair, complete with a mechanical bull, children's rides and corn on the cob. All in the Shiel Sexton parking lot. The catch? The only currency for employees and their families was safety knowledge. Shiel Sexton executives manned the booths, requiring correct answers before anyone was given their hot dog or chance in the money booth.

"As much as everyone is having fun,

I'm in the background laughing because I know everyone is learning. Everybody's learning something about safety, and they're learning it in a much more positive environment than sitting in a classroom listening to me talk to them," Condon reflects.

Management also makes sure other work-related necessities are available for their employees. Whether it's phones to stay connected at the job site or computers, requests for equipment are "very seldom denied," relays senior project manager Mike Anderson.

Case in point: When project coordinator Carrie Wagner found computer software that would enhance her work, the company got it for her. "We are encouraged to step out of our box and not only that, we are given the tools to do it," she explains.

Road for advancement

Employees receive an average of 47 hours of training each year. That continual learning supports the company's overall focus in project management. Topics include safety, finance, scheduling, quality, sales and how to give presentations since many employees speak in front of school and not-for-profit boards about projects.

Dilts compares employees to an orchestra leader who needs knowledge of the whole system to succeed. "You have to understand the instruments and how it all works and then you are the person who has to bring both together."

Training also supports career advancement within the company. "There's a connection between 'if I do this, then I get more responsibility,'" Dilts says.

Anderson says the opportunities at Shiel Sexton outweigh those at many other construction companies. When it comes time for their annual review, his workers already have received feedback on job performance throughout the year. Instead, the first thing they want to know is the next three or five things they need to accomplish to continue on what Anderson describes as a "well-defined career path."



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Senior project manager Randy Warren started his 23-year career at Shiel Sexton as a laborer sweeping floors and digging ditches (literally). He first advanced to a leadership position in the field before shifting to the management side of the business.

"The success of the company facilitates a lot of opportunity for success for the individuals," Warren surmises. While opportunity has allowed him to grow, Warren says it's the company's ethics that have made him a lifetime employee. He's not the first in his family to feel that way either: His father's name dons one of the retiree hall of fame hardhats on display at Shiel Sexton.

Finding the right crew

For some employees, the path to becoming a tenured member of the Shiel Sexton team begins in the company's summer internship program.

"We try to get people from freshmen year in college on to try to get them in here and weed them out," Dilts notes. "We had 24 interns last year; and if you take all of them until they graduate, we may hire two or three."

That's how project coordinator Cameron Smith was hired two years ago. He spent two summers as an intern, learning both in the field and at the office.

Soon after he was hired, Smith learned how quickly opportunities can arise. He was chosen to become the green building expert for the company. Shiel Sexton paid for his books and test to become Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified; he just had to pass the test within three months. Since then, Smith has helped train his co-workers for LEED accreditation and some clients on green building principles.

Keeping it light

Beyond such training and advancement opportunities, employees are also given a positive atmosphere in which to thrive.

"I would describe the culture as collaborative, and we try to have an underlying fun theme to it. And I think our space kind of speaks to that a bit. Even as we've grown, we've always tried to have fun. If it isn't fun, why do it?" Dilts muses.

It's more than the furnishings that create that vibe at Shiel Sexton.

"I think the biggest thing is you try to get a group of people here that you want to be with. That makes work more fun," Dilts shares. "If you had to come to work everyday and didn't enjoy working with your neighbor, that wouldn't be fun."

How that culture is achieved has changed as the company has grown. Now it's more small work teams or group activities as employees participate in a Pilates class, Guitar Hero tournaments or on the company's softball team.

"When I started, there were six of us; you're all in one room, there are two cases of beer in the refrigerator and at 5 o'clock you open a beer and sit there and talk," Dilts recalls. "We don't want to lose that, but what's done instead of everybody doing that – because then you'd have 150 people and that would be a lot of beer everyday – it's probably more in pods."

The Shiel Sexton headquarters is designed to be an open environment, Dilts says. "We try to keep it as interactive as possible



While Shiel Sexton offers design-build, general contracting and real estate services, its main focus is on project management. The company is overseeing the construction of the Carmel Performing Arts Center.



Project coordinator Carrie Wagner says there are clear opportunities for advancement within the company.

so groups have to talk; they're in proximity and you're not just walled off into a bunch of offices." For example, the project managers' workstations are arranged so they can hear and see each other.

Lines of communication

While everyone is working to support the same goal, keeping everyone informed can prove challenging. While half of Shiel Sexton's staff is based out of the headquarters, the other half is working remotely from various job sites.

"So geography alone makes it hard for us to communicate," Dilts points out. As the company has grown, thankfully, so has technology. Text messages and e-mail have helped overcome the communication challenge; monthly meetings (that are "religiously kept") also play a key role.

Technology is paramount to keeping senior superintendent Tony Eisenhut informed while working remotely at the Carmel Performing Arts Center. The internal communications web site allows him and others to learn the latest on new jobs the company will be starting and how other projects are going, he states.

Anderson says employees at job sites are always curious about what is going on (such as upcoming projects they might want to be involved in) and usually have a grasp on 90% of what's happening within the company. Project webcams also help keep everyone informed.

Giving back

Shiel Sexton's commitment to being a good employer extends to the community, where giving back is a priority – whether that means as a company or supporting individual volunteerism. For

its various contributions, including services for the Providence Cristo Rey High School building, Shiel Sexton was given the Corporate Leadership Award from the Archdiocese of Indianapolis in 2008.

"We're an Indianapolis-based company and we think you have to be a good neighbor and a good steward," Dilts explains. "We encourage every employee directly or indirectly involved in our business (to give back)."

Wagner shares that she and others planned to participate in the 2009 Komen Indianapolis Race for the Cure. Outside of the office, Wagner coaches her daughter's soccer team. "They allow us the time to actually make it happen."

StructureMan – the four-ton, two-story abstract sculpture that stands guard outside the company headquarters – represents not only the company culture, but how Shiel Sexton hopes to be a good neighbor.

"We think that if you're going to be here, why not enhance the product you have around you; make the neighborhood better," Dilts notes. "So that is absolutely at the core of what we do. I think you've got to be involved; you can't just do work here and go home."

About Shiel Sexton

The commercial construction company focuses primarily on project management. Shiel Sexton's expertise can be found in Lucas Oil Stadium, The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, large and small universities across the state, along with many other structures in Indiana and across the country.

Current projects include the Indiana Convention Center, three buildings at Ball State University, two at the University of Notre Dame, a retirement community and an assisted living facility.

"We scale a lot of different directions this way and a lot of different directions that way in size, but our overall theme is we are a project management-based company," Dilts explains. Projects range from small ones like fixing a client's door to doing the \$300 million convention center project.

Shiel Sexton has a second office in Charlotte, North Carolina, and currently is working in about 10 states.

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Shiel Sexton at (317) 423-6000 or www.shiels Sexton.com

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