

Benefits of Experience

Leaders of Longtime Member Companies Share Insights

By Charlee Beasor

Take it from ancient Greek playwright Sophocles – “*Success is dependent on effort.*” While that is true – success doesn’t come without putting forth tremendous effort – some of the hardest working people and their organizations just don’t make it in the long run. There are other keys to a company having the staying power to last through the decades.

BizVoice® spoke with representatives from four companies – BMW Constructors; Denison Parking; Myers Spring Company; and RR Donnelley – that have been members of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce for more than 50 years (each has been in business even longer) about how they have survived wars, depressions and recessions, technological changes and much more.

Read on for insights into how these four companies have remained successful and overcome challenges through the years.

Still Going Strong

What have been your company’s keys to long-term success?

“It’s really simple. We have a formula that is just based on performance and marketing; in our performance, what we concentrate on is integrity with the client. We do what we say we’re going to do and if we can’t, we tell them that.”

“On the marketing side, our philosophy is we look for clients for life. We want to be a preferred provider for a client. We don’t chase projects; we chase clients. Those are the two pieces of the recipe that have been really successful over the years.”

– Brian Acton, BMW Constructors

“The history of the parking business has been largely a cash business and, as such, revenue controls are at the top of the list when it comes to running a successful parking business.”

“The other element is that we try to provide an environment for our employees – competitive wages, benefits, including health insurance and 401(k), etc., so that we try to take good care of our employees. In turn, I think, our employees are customer focused and friendly, which is an important face for the company.”

– C. Perry Griffith Jr., Denison Parking

“I think everything comes down to people. My grandfather (who started the company with partner Don Lindley) always treated people with dignity. Ultimately, business is about people and we try and keep that in mind as much as possible. Reminding yourself that respect for the individual is the cornerstone of any venture.”

– Todd Miller, Myers Spring Company

“Listening to customers and responding to their needs with innovations. During the 1930s, a customer said that they wanted to introduce a new magazine that would feature crisp black and white photography in order to illustrate what was happening around the world. RR Donnelley responded with an innovation called heat-set printing, which enabled the publisher to achieve the goal of putting out a ‘magazine with 50-cent quality for a dime.’ It was *LIFE* magazine.”

– Doug Fitzgerald, RR Donnelley

RR Donnelley was founded in 1864 in Chicago. Today, the Crawfordsville plant is a book manufacturer; in the 1920s it produced the Indianapolis Telephone Directory.



It's Not Always Good Times

How have you overcome challenges in your business, past and present?



Myers Spring Company has been producing quality fine wire precision springs since 1946.

“We always have done a very good job of planning, trying to look ahead as far as we can. In years past in construction, you were able to see a year to two ahead. We can't see more than three to six months ahead (now). It goes back to planning; you always try to plan for the worst and be prepared for that.

“We never settle for the status quo. If you don't keep growing, you're going to die. Never rest on the past project, always stay customer focused and then we flex with our customers, always looking at continuous improvement and providing opportunities for younger up and coming leaders.”

– Acton

“In the parking business, there are a lot of national operators, regional operators and smaller local mom and pops, if you will, and we fall into the regional operator category. The real challenge for us is how do you differentiate yourself to a prospective client. We have a very focused business, going back to the basics of revenue control and making sure all systems are run extremely tight.

“The competitive environment in the parking business is pretty extreme, both from national competitors and from regional competitors. So, that has been, as we have tried to grow over the last five to 10 years, really our primary focus – differentiating ourselves from our competition in a positive sense.”

– Griffith

“Globalization just puts so many unknowns out there. I worry myself to death; if we just focus every day on really trying to improve, I think it's the only way I can keep my sanity. We've got to get our mitts around regulations like the Clean Air Act. We've got to figure out how this globalized world will work. That part is still a mystery to me.

“Pressure causes us to every day continually improve. If no one has the attitude that work is a four-letter word, you accept it for what it is and move on. Every day we've got to get up and do the best we can; that's really the secret. We've got great customers and great employees, and I feel very fortunate to be part of something my grandfather started in 1946.”

– Miller

“Perhaps the greatest challenge that RR Donnelley faced was an event that took place shortly after the company was founded ... a fire began on (Chicago's) southwest side and it quickly spread. By the time the fire had exhausted itself, 40% of Chicago's buildings had been burned to the ground, including RR Donnelley's new plant and the one from which it was planning to move. With no more collateral than a piece of ledger paper on which prominent business people had written their endorsements of RR Donnelley, the company was able to borrow enough money to rebuild.

“Since then, economic depressions, world wars, technological changes and other events have challenged RR Donnelley. They have been overcome through the hard work, innovation and dedication of our employees – who have always remained focused on delivering exceptional value to our customers.”

– Fitzgerald



Despite the effects of the recession, BMW Constructors fared well by concentrating on the projects it was able to secure and by running lean.

Individual Challenges

Passing of a CEO

Chairman and CEO Thomas E. O'Brien passed away in January. How did that impact your company and how did you carry on its mission?

"From a business standpoint, there was really no impact, because we had been planning the succession and the transition with Tom for the past two years. It caused us to speed it up a little bit, but there were pieces in place and from a business standpoint, there was little to no impact.

"The employees had an impact. He was the heart and soul of our company. They were worried about changes, and that's normal with any new leadership change. I've been with the company for 27 years, and they quickly found out that I'm not going to change our culture and our business model."

– Acton, chairman and CEO of BMW Constructors, a general industrial contractor with locations in Indianapolis and Munster; founded in 1955

Super Bowl Traffic Influx

With the Super Bowl coming in February, are you viewing the event as a challenge, an opportunity or both?

"Well, we are working very closely with the Super Bowl committee, and we view the upcoming Super Bowl in the global sense of introducing Indianapolis to the folks that just haven't seen it before or been here. I think a lot of people are going to be flying in, a considerable number driving in. In terms of coordinating parking with the Super Bowl committee, we're developing plans on how that is going to be handled."

– Griffith, chairman and CEO of Denison Parking, a parking management system with locations in Indianapolis and several other areas throughout the United States; founded in 1934

Standing Out as a Hometown Manufacturer

What are the trials associated with being a family-owned, community manufacturer and how have you overcome those to stay competitive?

"It comes down to management. We do strategic planning and in about 2000 we moved to a new facility and more than doubled our floor size. We used Jim Collins' book *Good to*

Denison's first parking facility was a gathering spot for Hoosiers during the 1958 Indianapolis 500 parade. Denison still manages the garage, built in 1934, on that site.



Great as a rallying cry. We try to stay up with as much modern management as possible. We don't live off our depreciation line; we constantly invest in new technologies and training."

– Miller, president of Myers Spring Company, designer and producer of quality fine wire precision springs located in Logansport; founded in 1946

Dealing With Changing Technology

In an increasingly digital and e-book world, how has your company been impacted by the technological changes?

"No organization is immune to the impact of technological changes. The important factor is to take advantage of both the opportunities as well as to confront the challenges. Many people are surprised to learn that RR Donnelley designs and provides the packaging in which many of the most popular consumer electronics products are distributed.

"Catalogs and other printed communications continue to be widely used because they break through the electronic clutter to put compelling visual messages directly into consumers' hands."

– Fitzgerald, corporate spokesperson for RR Donnelley, book manufacturer and global provider of integrated communications, with several locations in Indiana as well as throughout the United States and globally; founded in 1864 (1922 in Crawfordsville)

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Brian Acton, BMW Constructors, at www.bmwcnstrs.com

C. Perry Griffith Jr., Denison Parking, at www.denisonparking.com

Todd Miller, Myers Spring Company, at www.myersspring.com

Doug Fitzgerald, RR Donnelley, at www.rrdonnelley.com