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Growing your company? It takes hard work - by Craig Jewett

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Craig Jewett

Working hard has always come easy to me. I've always had a fast-paced drive and the energy it takes to push through to get the job done, whatever that may be. It may sound strange to some, but when I am working hard I am most comfortable.

For Jewett Construction, 2017 was the busiest in our 45 year history. We've grown nearly 400% over the past few years, with more clients in more markets than ever before. Thanks to a solid core of existing and long term repeat clients, we have achieved and exceeded our growth and revenue goals. I am incredibly proud of this accomplishment. As I look back at the whirlwind year that was 2017 and push forward in 2018, I can't help but reflect on what it has taken to grow our company.

Get Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable

We've always been a relatively small, family-owned construction company. We've had a handful of projects, a manageable staff size and as President, I've been able to oversee and keep on top of all of our work. We have had some basic processes in place, but our flexibility and get it done attitude has helped us push through most unexpected challenges.

In 2016, our growth was anticipated and I knew that we needed to start surrounding ourselves with people who have more knowledge in more areas of expertise than I do. As the leader of a company, it is important to recognize what you don't know and bring in the people who do know it. In just the past two years I've hired a director of pre-construction, director of marketing, director of construction and chief financial officer. This team of individuals challenge me and push our company forward every day. Does it make me uncomfortable sometimes? Absolutely, it is never easy to hear about the things that my company needs to improve on. But we have a rule here at Jewett that we "check our egos at the door." Nobody is immune to that, especially not me.

Take Time to Work ON the Company

When we were smaller, I was always working IN the company. Visiting clients, managing jobs, covering vacations and getting into the weeds on each project. For a smaller company, that was okay, I was busy but I had or made the time to stay involved. It has always been go, go, GO! This year, as we have grown and expanded, our team came to a quick realization that we all needed to take more time to Work ON the Company, rather than IN it. So we have blocked out time every

week to work ON Jewett Construction.

We have worked on our Mission Statement and redefined our core values. We have talked about what and where we want Jewett Construction to be this year, in two years and in five years? How will we get there? We have carved out time to work through each item and hold each other accountable. If we just talk about it, we will never get there. We have made standard operating procedures a priority for each role in the company, redefined and reallocated roles, and solicited feedback from all staff to improve processes.

The Year of Our Associates and Embracing Technology

Looking forward to 2018, we have decided to call this year, The Year of Our Associates. In many ways, I'm old school. When I was first introduced to the construction industry it was all about rolling up your sleeves, working long hours, evenings, weekends and doing whatever it takes to get the job done. Sure, those things are still valuable and can help us push through to close out a job or to reach a major milestone, but with today's modern workforce and new technology, we must reinvent ourselves.

Today, technology has us all connected to our work at all times. Being on the job no longer means being at the seat at your desk. Smart phones, tablets, drones, 3D modeling, and project management software connect our employees to the office and to the field without physically being there. Our meetings are mostly digital, we rarely print physical plans and we deliver close out packages on a thumb drive or through a file sharing service.

All of these things make exceptional performance possible, while maintaining flexibility. Work life balance is more important than ever, career development, employee culture and a fun and rewarding work environment are not only desired, but expected. Finding quality workers is more difficult today than it has ever been before. As a result, we need to constantly evolve to stay competitive and to attract and retain talent.

Changing Engines Midflight

If there is one lesson that I have learned more than anything else in 2017, it is that it is okay to make a change if things are not going according to plan. I like to use the analogy of "changing engines midflight". We are 30 thousand feet up, cruising along and all of the sudden we realize we have a bad engine. The only way that we are going to get the team and the aircraft onto the ground safely is to change it midflight. It is scary, there is uncertainty and there are certainly no guarantees. But what option do we have? At the end of the day, I'm flying a plane with a team around me that supports and believes in what we are doing as a company. If something does not work or fit, it's okay to slow down, make a change and then push forward.

I could never have imagined what a crazy ride 2017 would be for our company. I am proud of what we have accomplished and I am excited about where we are going. Growing a company is fun and it can be incredibly rewarding but get ready, because it is hard work!

Craig Jewett is the owner and president of Jewett Construction Co., Raymond, N.H.

