

# Your Greatest Asset

The right people with the right chemistry make the difference

By Joshua Lentz, Managing Editor

On a recent vacation at the beach, Andy Hannan wanted to ensure things went smoothly at work in his absence. As production manager for Bethesda, Md.-based Mark IV Builders, he is in charge of coordinating the project managers for this growing design/build remodeling firm. He often sends motivational text messages to his team using Nextel's messaging center, encouraging them to keep on track or to control their labor. In this case, when the team members in the field reached for their phones to find their daily message from Hannan, they knew he was on vacation. Collectively, here is the message they returned to him as he relaxed somewhere by the beach:

## From: YourTEAM

**Subject:** Lunch at Supers' Meeting

**Message:** Since you have been unable to leave work alone, it has been decided that you are personally going to buy pizza next Wednesday.

Love Your TEAM

On Wednesday, Hannan made good on that responsibility.

Many companies boast a mission statement suggesting its employees are its greatest asset, but not every company takes active steps to create a culture that reinforces that notion. Mark IV Builders has gone to great lengths to create a positive environment for its employees. Part of that environment is chemistry — a group of individuals with similar goals who understand how to communicate. Another part is teamwork — reliable people that trust one another. And of course, growth — both personally and as a company, the team must learn and grow. One result of the culture Mark IV has created is that there is no need for managers to worry about what goes on in the office or field while they are on vacation. Whatever the issue or concern, the team has it under control.

## Interdependence

Left to its own device, any office environment will take on a natural chemistry. Employees will naturally work together or apart. The environment will naturally radiate positive or negative energy. Many companies are

oblivious to the natural environment its employees work in everyday.

The four core members that make up Mark IV Builders are owner Mark Scott, production manager Andy Hannan, office manager Jeanne Casamento and lead estimator Kirk Van Camp. Scott started the company 15 years ago; Hannan boasts nine years with Mark IV; Casamento is working on her eighth year; and Van Camp has been with the company the last seven years. It is a unit with a lot of experience and cohesion. But they have spent time actively working to achieve and maintain that positive environment.

"We all know where one job stops and another starts," says Casamento. "We had to work at it. It takes a lot of trust. We're always growing; we're always looking to be the leader."

Casamento's role has grown over the years to include numerous duties, such as accounting, financials, payroll, filing, purchasing, marketing, billing, etc. She credits much of the success of the company to a culture that encourages a combination of personal responsibility and teamwork.

Hannan agrees. "A lot of companies hire just for profit, but there's more to it than making money," he says. "Your employees have to feel good about coming to work."

Owner Mark Scott has taken an increasingly hands-off approach in managing business development and relying more on Hannan, Casamento and Van Camp to drive the company.

"I think Mark phrases it best when he says he doesn't want people to be independent, and he doesn't want people to be dependent. He wants people to be interdependent," says Van Camp.

## Chemistry lesson

Two years ago, Mark IV had to let some employees go, an overhaul that changed the company culture. One of the employees was a veteran project manager.

"Emotionally, it was

Photo courtesy of Mark IV Builders



Photo: Hadley Photography

## MARK IV BUILDERS

Bethesda, Md.  
[www.markivbuilders.com](http://www.markivbuilders.com)

### COMPANY STATS

Full-time employees: 17  
Industry memberships: NARI  
Annual design/build projects: 100 percent  
Residential remodeling: 100 percent  
Average annual revenue: \$3 million

*Clockwise from left: Andy Hannan, Kirk Van Camp, Mark Scott, Jeanne Casamento. Mark IV Builders has learned that it takes active steps to create a workplace in which employees are both happy and productive. The company stresses teamwork and has used personality testing to improve communication among its employees.*

too much of a load to keep him in control," says Hannan. "He was very profitable but holding people back."

The experience prompted Scott and Hannan to take a look at personality testing. They wanted to assess the mix of personalities and communication styles of the current staff and learn how to hire new employees that fit that culture.

The Mark IV staff was evaluated by a system that measures and reports on four areas of behavior: response to problems and challenges; methods individuals use to persuade others; response to the pace of the environment; and response to procedures set by others. Scott hoped to gain a sense of how he and his employees naturally communicate and strategies to make that communication more efficient.

Possibly the most effective tool to come out of the testing was a list of communication do's and don'ts. Each employee that was tested was posted on a master list, a sort of cheat sheet, for communicating with the different members of the team. Under each individual's name is a bullet point list of strategies that should be employed to most effectively communicate with that individual. Likewise, there is also a list of things to avoid when communicating with that person.

For example, Mark Scott has been described as a motivated, quick-witted self-starter. He is results oriented and works extremely hard with a strong sense of urgency. He prides himself on being clever and creative and enjoys solving problems. The personality profile also suggested Scott may have a tendency to be short-

fused at times. He gets bored easily and may have difficulty dealing with people who don't think quickly. He is also very opinionated.

What is the practical application? Knowing Scott's personality traits helps employees better communicate with him. When they walk into his office, they know the



*The owner and three most tenured members of Mark IV Builders boast roughly 40 combined years of experience at the firm. Based in Bethesda, Md., the company specializes in residential remodels, such as the pictured kitchen and bath (separate residences).*

Photos: Hadley Photography

things they should do:

- Be specific and to the point
- Be prepared and support their ideas
- Persuade by referring to objectives and results
- Offer ideas for implementing action

They also know some things not to do:

- Ramble
- Be redundant
- Lose things or be unorganized
- Make up his mind for him

Others within the company are very different in the manners in which they most effectively communicate. The key is that each employee has access to the list and can use it to help create a more effective environment for communicating.

Mark IV is also using the personality testing to help in the hiring process. The company is poised for growth and looking to add two sales positions. With the help of the personality testing, an outside consultant and a full-circle hiring process that seeks staff input, Mark IV is searching for qualified people who fit the company culture.

"If we have tested an employee in the past who didn't work out and a candidate tests similar, he might not get the job," says Hannan. Casamento echoes that idea.

"We're going to try hiring to fit a profile we've established."

## Growth as a team

"Empower your employees," says Hannan. "Empower your employees, and they will do just about anything."

Scott and Hannan feel they have the right mix of employees, those that are trustworthy and work toward a common goal. The next step is to give them responsibility and accountability, and allow them to learn and grow.

Van Camp started as a carpenter and graduated to a lead carpenter. Two years ago, Scott asked him if he would take over as lead estimator, which Van Camp accepted. Along the way, he has attended company-paid training classes in estimating and leadership. The company also pays for CLC (Certified Lead Carpenter) training and Remodelers' Show attendance fees, where staff can attend seminars. His growth was inspired by

education and challenge.

As the production manager, Hannan rotates the job of labor coordinator among his project managers. He used to do all of the scheduling but now spreads out the duty in two-month cycles.

"Each super gets to be in charge of getting the work out to the field. If a super wants to move an employee, for example, he has to call the lead super," he says. It's a way for them to learn to organize and delegate responsibilities. "The whole core understands the vision, where we are, where we want to be. I can send any employee anywhere, and I trust they'll do the right thing."

All of what goes on in the field is mapped out by the company production board. "The production board is in the middle of the office. It is a two-week schedule that is evaluated every week and rewritten every two weeks," says Hannan.

This is the practice by which the project managers stay up to date on critical issues that need to get done. They each feel responsible to stay on schedule because they don't want everyone to see their project is behind, says Hannan. But it also allows each of them to see where all others are in their production schedules, and they are usually willing to lend a hand if one project manager needs help. It is a good policy for a company on the move.

In the time since Casamento started more than seven years ago, the payroll has quadrupled. Now on the verge of another growth spurt, Mark IV is relying heavily on its employees and its culture to make it grow smoothly.

"Business is changing again, and it's not just me driving it," says Scott. "I'm starting to watch my employees become teachers." •