

Chuck RUSSELL

Discipline and clarity in his business and personal life keep priorities in focus for this driven CEO.

Few would compare life in the pest control industry to life in the military, but Chuck Russell, president of Eradico Services, Novi, Mich., does just that. Growing up, his was sometimes an “Army brat lifestyle” he recalls, since his father’s work moved them around. In those days, Russell’s father, Bill, was a “trouble shooter” for Terminix going in and working with a branch that was not performing and getting it back on track.

“Just as you got settled and made friends, you moved on,” says Russell. But the moves weren’t all bad, Russell, now 46, observes. In fact it actually made the family members closer and more supportive of one another. “It created a glue for our family which was very helpful later on in life,” Russell says.

This “glue” likely had other unplanned effects on Russell’s life as well. Little did he know, he’d stick with the pest control industry as he embarked on his own career.

FORMATIVE YEARS. Russell was a freshman in high school when his father, Bill, began working for Eradico Services, and in 1979, his father along with three other employees, bought the company from its

founder, entrepreneur Myron Sempliner.

“I worked in the business during the summer and vacation breaks. We were a much smaller organization at that time,” Russell added.

Russell attended Central Michigan University in 1982, majoring in history, but admits that college wasn’t particularly important to him in those days. “It’s not that college doesn’t provide a valuable educational opportunity; it’s just that I wasn’t interested,” he says. School had always come easy to Russell, but when the relative freedoms of college ensued, Russell didn’t want to sit still. “I just found that there was more to glean from hands-on involvement in various college activities, than from actually sitting in a classroom and dealing with theory,” he says.

One hands-on college activity that did grab Russell’s interest, though, was his four-year involvement on the school’s rugby team. “I actually learned more about leadership and working together for a common goal during my two years as a rugby captain,” he says.

Russell, who played football during high school, says he got into rugby as an alterna-



BRIEF...

NAME: Chuck Russell

COMPANY: Eradico Services

HEADQUARTERS: Novi, Mich.

POSITION: President and CEO

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS: Has worked as technician, account representative, service manager, service center manager, sales manager, division manager, and vice president; served as President and Board Member for the Michigan Pest Management Association; served on MPMA Government Affairs Committee

PERSONAL: Married 22 years to wife Kelly; three children — Jordan, 16, Austin, 13, and Cole, 11; active member and volunteer for the Freedom Center Assembly of God Church, Fenton, Mich.; certified instructor for Judah’s Lions Christian Karate Club; certified instructor of the F.A.S.T. Defense martial arts program; member of numerous volunteer associations including Right to Life, Christian Resource International, Hands on Haiti, and the Wounded Warrior Project

tive way to stay physically active throughout the year. The year-round nature of the sport appealed to him, as did the close-knit friendships it cultivated.

“I think there are a lot of similarities to participating in team sports and operating a business,” says Russell. “The leadership principles are the same.”

Russell also met his wife Kelly on a blind date while at Central Michigan. He was set to attend a sports banquet, but his date subsequently canceled. Kelly attended with Chuck at the request of a friend. The couple dated for three years and married following college.

Just one semester away from earning his degree, Russell was offered a business opportunity from his father — running the Lansing, Mich., office of Eradico Services. Although Russell says he hadn’t intended to enter the family business, the offer sounded good, and he took it.

Once with the company, Russell quickly discovered there wasn’t really an office in Lansing, just some routes. “I worked out of my apartment,” he recalled. “The technicians would check in each morning and review accounts while sitting on my couch.

“It wasn’t long after that I went to my dad and his partner and said, ‘OK guys, time for a storefront, I can’t keep having the technicians checking into my living room,’” Russell remembered with a laugh.

So the partners leased an office in the Lansing area and the operation began to thrive, its growth also sped along by acquisitions the company had made.

Russell was then tapped to assimilate those companies into Eradico. Like many



Eradico Services draws annual revenues in excess of \$9 million, making it one of the industry’s 100 largest companies. From left are David Sidder, vice president of administration, PCT’s Dan Moreland, and president Chuck Russell. Partner Steve Russell was unable to attend the Top 100 Awards ceremony earlier this year.

businesses in the late 80s, sales were on the rise. A corporate office was established, and soon Russell was heading up sales and management for the pest control division.

CONSTANT VALUES. Russell says the company has always strived to live by the Golden Rule: treating employees, customers and business partners the way you in turn want to be treated. “It’s pervasive across our organization,” he says. Toward that end, Russell has worked to build a company that supports its people and their families. “I didn’t want it to be about being

a profit-driven business first. I always felt like if you take care of the human element, the profits will come.”

Russell admits keeping the philosophy of “people first” isn’t always easy, especially when employees don’t perform well or disappoint management, but he has a procedure in place. “Before we terminate someone because they’ve failed to perform or are difficult, we say to ourselves, ‘Have we done *everything* we could to help that person succeed?’ If we have done everything possible, the next action is appropriate, but only then.”

Eradico’s Name Says It All For Employees

Chuck Russell, president of Eradico Services, says the organization’s values are more than just a statement on the company wall. In fact, every Eradico employee is asked to adopt and live by the following values, integrating them both professionally and personally.



- E — EXCELLENCE.** We will strive for the best in serving others — our clients, our co-workers and suppliers.
- R — RESPONSIBILITY.** We are mutually accountable in our actions as we live, serve, work and play.
- A — ATTITUDE.** We will share our best with a smile regardless of any circumstances.
- D — DISCIPLINE.** Through our disciplined thoughts and purposeful action — our goals and objectives will be attained.
- I — INTEGRITY.** We pledge to deal honestly and do the right thing with ethical leadership at all levels — in all we do.
- C — COMPETENCE.** With improving procedures and methods of service, our ability to do a job “well done” will exceed expectations — and our competitors.
- O — OPTIMISM.** We choose to believe in the best of others at all times in our community, our organization, and our nation.

It's a philosophy that has served Eradico well, particularly during the recent recession. In recent years the business partners also began emphasizing transparency.

"We opened up our books and went from office to office on a traveling road show, describing exactly what happens to a hundred dollars in our organization," Russell explained. "I talked about what we were doing to cut costs and where we planned to make investments in the business. I wanted to get ahead of the situation."

In January of 2009, Russell decided to post the company values on a board and take it to company meetings. "I told them, 'I'm going to review each of our core values and ask you to pledge to live by those values by signing the board.'" Russell wasn't sure how employees would react to this request, but says the effort was well received. "It helped create some unity for us as a company," he said. (See "Eradico's Name Says It All For Employees," at left.)

This sharing of information has become a quarterly tradition at Eradico, Russell says, providing such valuable fodder for discussion as health insurance, fuel costs and other issues.

"It helps us understand where we need to focus our efforts," says Russell. "This helps employees to also realize that everything they do, every moment of every day, has an impact on the organization either positively or negatively."

But while Eradico promotes its values internally, those same guiding principles aren't aggressively touted to the public, Russell notes. "If we're living our values, our clients are going to see that."

Eradico now has 120 full-time, year-round employees, and as many as 140 during the busy season. That's due to Russell's brother, Steve, vice president of corporate development, who has seized upon several other service opportunities, namely holiday lighting, lawn care, and Weed Man sub-franchising (Eradico has sub-franchise responsibilities for Weed Man for five states).

"Now we have a family of services," explains Steve. "We began to implement

cross-marketing and are starting to have some pretty good effects. Clients like the idea of working with a single company for multiple services. They know us, trust us and have faith in us."

FAMILY VALUES. Russell says he is a lot like his father, a patient man who values experience for the wisdom it ultimately provides. "We have very similar traits," said Russell of his father, who retired from the business in 2005. "We tend to keep very



For Russell, time away from the office is dedicated to family and church. The two were combined in the family's recent participation in their church's mission trip to the Navajo Indian Reservation. From left are Jordan, Chuck, Cole, Kelly and Austin.

low profiles. We don't like being in the limelight. We can be very competitive, driven and goal-oriented."

However, there are differences too. "My father tends to be a much nicer person than me," Russell observes. "He's more patient than I am. If people look at me and say 'He's half the man his father is,' I'd consider that a huge compliment."

Meanwhile, Russell describes his mother as the spiritual center of the family, who placed a high priority on attending church and maintaining a positive environment in the house. "You should never underestimate the power of a praying mom," Russell mused.

Toward that end, Russell also credits his mother with helping him value religion in his own life. "Mom did some rock-bed

things to instill faith in my brother and me," says Russell. "I rebelled against it initially, but came back to it over time. Faith is something that is extremely important to all of us," as evidenced by the numerous mission trips they have taken over the years, as well as their active involvement in various outreach activities.

Like many leaders, Russell views his free time as precious — "as a business owner, you're never *not* working," he says. So Russell knows where his priorities lie. Time away from the office is dedicated to family, their activities, and church.

He and wife Kelly have been married 22 years, and the couple has three sons: Jordan, 16; Austin, 13; and Cole, 11. "I'm a blessed man," he says, referring to his family. "I'm having so much fun with them. You kind of wish you could freeze time, but you know you can't," he says wistfully.

In recent years Russell has also started a Christian-based martial arts club called Judah's Lions. The club follows the principles of F.A.S.T. Defense, which stands for Fear Adrenal Stress Training, a short-course self defense program focusing on the use of words and body language to prevent physical conflict. Russell has found the program so rewarding, he's become a certified instructor, and he teaches

the technique to individuals, businesses, churches, clubs and other groups. "It's a great program, he notes, "particularly for women."

Russell also feels blessed when reflecting on the business he's helped to build with his partners, brother Steve, and David Sieder, vice president of administration. "I'm just a small cog in this organization," he says. "We're blessed with good, loyal employees. And we're blessed with good, loyal customers."

"It's been a journey," Russell observes. "It's one of those things where you're learning, growing and developing incrementally. While early on I thought I was right all the time, it didn't take me long to learn I wasn't. The idea of wisdom is learning that you're not always right." 🙌