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Perfecting The Recipe For Success

The Secret Is In The Sauce At Engineering Excellence.

By John R. Hall
Of *The News* Staff

CINCINNATI — Engineering Excellence, Inc. President Thomas J. Winstel believes the secret to his company's success is in its "sauce."

"If someone went to a recipe maker and asked, 'What is the secret to your sauce?', they would be taken to a vault and shown the recipe," explained Winstel, before adding, "If you ask us, all you need to do is look around and see the people who are here. They are the secret to our success. Our 'secret sauce' is our people."

The commercial contractor has a lot of people "stirring" that sauce — approximately 150 employees in its three Ohio locations: Dayton, Columbus, and the main office in Cincinnati. The total includes 104 service techs and installers.

Ask around and you will get favorable feedback from employees concerning Engineering Excellence, a company that works hard to distinguish itself from competitors. Ownership has managed to get its employees to buy into team participation, which has resulted in a win-win situation for all parties.

Because, in part, commitment is shown on both sides of the fence, Engineering Excellence is the Midwest/Great Lakes Region winner in *The News*' "Best Contractor To Work For" contest.

"More than ever, today we have to wrap our arms around our customers and take care of them," said Winstel. "We do that by taking care of our employees — defining processes and team players. This award goes to our employees."

Company Background

The bulk of Engineering Excellence's market is in the engineering, installation, and maintenance of industrial and commercial HVACR systems. The company was founded 18 years ago by Winstel's father, Thomas A. Winstel, who is the company CEO.

"My father had a vision to create a company different from others — dedicated to servicing building owners," said the younger Winstel.

His father had to be creative to fund the new venture. He acquired a four-man shop with start-up capital from the sale of some of his antique duck decoy collection.



"Back then, we had enough work for three technicians, if two of them were sick," said the younger Winstel, "and our secretary could only type in capital letters. Her husband [who also worked for the company] would not drive on major roads."

The company has come a long way since those early days, but

Just The Facts

Winning contractor: Engineering Excellence, Inc.

Owners: The Winstel Family

Location(s): Cincinnati, Columbus, and Dayton, Ohio

Years in business: 18 years

Bulk of market: 100 percent industrial and commercial

Total revenue for 2003: \$23 million

Total employees: 150-plus

Total service technicians and installers: 104

Average hours employees spend in training: Approximately 48 hours annually for service technicians.

Benefits offered beyond medical/dental insurance: Paid vacation and holidays; emergency service bonus days; 401(k) retirement; tool purchase plan; safety allowance; educational assistance; technician truck benefits; breakfast meetings and dinners; birthday presents and celebrations.

Industry association and contractor group members: American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA), Association of Energy Engineers (AEE), and National Environmental Balancing Bureau (NEBB).

The News selected this contractor because: The employees sold us on Engineering Excellence, Inc. They told us of the care and concern that owners have for them and their families. The owners and managers value their employees as the lifeblood of the company.

the goals have remained the same. Its mission is still to provide the best service and maintenance for building owners — and to continue to grow in new directions.

“We are looking to expand our business into the multi-location side,” said Winstel. “Clients are looking for a company that understands their critical information needs and they look for us to step up to be their HVAC building management firm.”

Proud Of Relationship

In the eyes of Winstel, Engineering Excellence, Inc. has become a big player in the national accounts market, having backstopped an initiative to perform start-ups and maintenance on Lennox rooftop units.

“We had been looking to partner with a manufacturer and at the time a salesperson from Lennox was calling on us,” he said. “At the time they were doing road shows and a salesperson was dragging an L-series unit around on the back of his Taurus, spewing transmission fluid all over our parking lot.

“Lennox asked us if we would like to use our national accounts service management center to partner with them to administer a punch list program to customers around the country. The first year we started up over 8,000 rooftop units. We worked with about 80 service providers that first year and today we work with over 700. We are no farther than an hour from any location that needs service.”

Winstel is proud of his relationship with service providers around the country, many of whom he met through his company’s involvement with the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA) and the MIX Group that his company belongs to through ACCA, titled Contractor’s Information Group (CIG). They have been involved with CIG for several years, with Winstel calling it his board of directors. They share best practices with all of these contractors.

“We want to work very closely with service providers around the country,” he said. “They are integral to our business. They are



Engineering Excellence, Inc. management team



Above: Engineering Excellence, Inc. employs roughly 150 people in its three Ohio Locations. **Left:** The Engineering Excellence field service managers prepare for another busy day. **Bottom left:** Family is a tradition at Engineering Excellence. Seven families are represented among the company's work force. (Photos by Mark Lyons.)



fellow contractors who I meet at ACCA meetings.”

In its entry form to *The News*, Engineering Excellence representatives stated: “Reality hurts and challenges us. We understand today’s technician may perceive our company as a commodity. That is until they get to know Engineering Excellence, Inc. With thought-out retention and benefit plans in place, we work to successfully distinguish our company from our competitors.

“The key to success of our plan is total participation by all parties. Employees are taught the value of total participation. Prospective service technicians and current technicians are trained to recruit and sell Engineering Excellence continuously.”

The company identifies the basic needs of its technicians and breaks them out into four major groups: fair wages, recognition, opportunities for growth, and human resources (benefits).

A key to the success of the company is the continuous training that technicians go through. The owners believe in presenting a knowledgeable and expert work force to customers, while allowing employees to advance their knowledge, work capabilities, and worth in the industry. Technicians spend an average of 48 hours annually in training and many are encouraged to attend special manufacturer’s training, too.

One of the four major groups — recognition — is also very important to retaining employees. The company’s “Team Leader of the Month” award goes to the employee who is recognized by a customer for outstanding service. The winner gets dinner for two and a plaque.

“People want to have a rewarding career,” said Winstel. “I have seen incredible personal development and growth from the people in our company.”

Many employees expressed why they believe Engineering Excellence, Inc. is a great place to work. Sample answers included:

- “They believe in their own employees. They listen and they hear us when we have concerns. We are treated with the utmost respect that motivates us to take pride in the work we perform for them. Here, we are individuals, not a number.”
- “It is a growing family-owned business that has maintained its





Engineering Excellence, Inc. National Training Center, where technicians receive annual training

small business standards.”

- “The ongoing training. It’s the ability to excel from field to office work.”
- “Because we work well as a team, when it is crunch time and deadlines have to be met, everyone jumps in knowing how important the end result is to the customer.”

One employee told of the closeness of the employees and owners when the wife of a fellow employee was seriously hurt in a boating accident. Management set up a bank account to pay for medical expenses and employees donated vacation time so the worker could spend more time with his stricken wife. ©

Engineering Excellence *inc.*

Winner “Best Contractor to Work For” by The NEWS

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