
Education key to staff loyalty

CDS Architectural Metalwork was born in 2009 in Ballyfoyle, Co Kilkenny and now has some of Ireland's biggest companies among their client base. Their tagline is 'making metalwork less ordinary'.

Martin Stapleton is a director at CDS Architectural Metalwork and was recently discussing his growing company at Bank of Ireland's Grow Your Business event in Kilkenny.

CDS specialises in the manufacture of architectural metalwork designed by interior designers and architects using materials like mildsteel, aluminium, bronze, brass, corten steel, stainless steel and glass. The Kilkenny based company now has 21 staff and supply in Ireland, the UK and beyond.

Background

I began my career working with my father Michael in the farm building business before doing my apprenticeship in 1986. In 1989, I represented Ireland in the World Skill Olympics and finished third behind China and Korea. It was great to be there and it really fuelled the fire for me wanting to go into business involving high quality metalwork.

After my training, I realised that there was a market for quality metalwork in the construction industry which could be manufactured and installed to an extremely high standard, which was not an 'off the shelf' product but instead crafted to suit each individual project requirement.

Going into business

I always knew I would go out on my own in business. It was something that was just in me. It didn't appeal to me to go work for someone else. My father was my inspiration in getting started in business and that was how our workshops started.

Growing

When we started CDS in 2009, there was only six staff. We had really good contacts which was key to our early growth. We knew there was a need for high end metalwork so we were always confident we would succeed and grow. Having that network when started out was huge for us and it was so important for the company. We don't use print media at all to promote ourselves – we just found it doesn't work and wasn't suited to us. We do however use social media which has also helped our growth. LinkedIn is great for us and we also use Facebook and just starting out with Instagram.

Challenges in growing

Bringing in people you can trust can be challenging as a business owner. It's extremely difficult to get the right staff in at the moment. We've actually given up on the whole recruitment process and opted to give apprenticeships which works better for us and supports our growth. It's a slower process but we find it's more sustainable. Overtime we feel we are getting a better employee through this process. We also find our employees are more loyal to us because of this, as we don't really have a turnover of staff. You have natural progression of course, but for the most part our staff stay with us.

Clients

We're fortunate in that we have a lot of well-known clients. We've done fit outs in Brown Thomas, the Three Arena, the Gaiety Theatre, Accenture in Dublin, Agha Kan in London and the Guinness Storehouse. In getting these clients, we targeted architects and interior designers. While they couldn't nominate us for these jobs, they could request information samples and steer us. We did this through education. By educating them on metalwork, and what we can achieve together, it really resonated and hit home. It had nothing to do with price, it was purely to do with education which made us stand out. We're unique in that regard because the cost is always the first thing that determines these things but we rather focus on education. Other companies tend to say 'take what we have or we go elsewhere'. We listen to what the customer wants and we do everything in our power to make sure they are happy with our offering.

Tip for growing

Cashflow is obviously huge to any business, but I wouldn't call that a tip. I have a rule here in CDS where I create the environment myself where the staff can be the best they can be and achieve what they want to achieve. It's as simple as that. If you have all your staff singing from the one hymn sheet, it can only produce positive results for the company.