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SEALEVEL SYSTEMS, INC.

Tom O'Hanlan, Owner

Driven, fun, academic, family-oriented, caring, generous, rebellious

What is the best advice you have ever received?

To pursue an engineering degree ... and that was good advice! Another piece of advice I received was that you learn more with your ears open and your mouth shut. I learned early on that it is important to listen to others who have done similar things, not be cocky or vain (even when you're right), and get all of the facts before making a decision. In business, however, you must lead, and that means making those tough calls after weighing all the options. Trust your gut instincts.

What is the one small thing that always makes you happy?

I'm blessed in that all my kids and grandkids are within 30 miles. I didn't know either of my grandfathers, so I'm enjoying being one. We do a lot with our grandkids from travel to playing on the farm. They are learning (along with me) all about the farm. I've tried to show them that you can do, be or build anything. We make and paint Christmas ornaments in my shop. We recently devised a quad marshmallow roaster stick holder for making s'mores.

What have you done for the community that you are most proud of?

I have helped shape the community through economic development, job creation, urban re-development and education. Hopefully, I've set a good example. I have served or am currently serving on several boards and elected positions that benefit the community. I currently serve on the Baptist Easley Hospital Board of Directors. In the past, I've enjoyed serving on Liberty's City Council and with the gifted people on the Clemson University Research Foundation board.

How did you get your start?

I took apart electronic things as a kid, and I eventually learned how to put them back together. I was learning to play bass guitar, but I didn't have an amplifier for it. My first guitar amplifier was my parents' old record player, modified for a bass guitar pickup. I started my first band in the seventh grade. That was a good early business experience. In school shop class, I built the big speakers for the PA system.

What made you start your business?

Losing a job and having the desire and groundwork in place to start out on my own. Sealevel's first two products were developed prior to the formation of the company in 1986. The IBM PC was increasingly being utilized to replace older minicomputers or to allow implementation of new corporate manufacturing and monitoring operations. I was consulting on textile machine monitoring. The PC was the ideal "brain," but lacked the interface electronics to connect to factory equipment. We still sell the equivalent of both of these products.

What advice would you give a young person just starting out in business?

Customer service is the largest single factor to success. A dime cut here will cost you dollars, but a dime spent here will net you dollars. Don't burn bridges.

What does your company do best?

Sealevel provides solutions to real world problems that move the ball forward—whether that be in military communications, hospital bed controllers, boat navigation or 911 call process/monitoring and control. We always deliver what we promise: quality designed, manufactured and well-supported products. A few years ago, I wrote about my promise to our customers. To read "Tom's 5 Promises to Sealevel Customers," visit my blog at www.sealevel.com/community/blog/toms-5-promises-to-sealevel-customers/.

"All ya gotta do is give 'em what they want" comes to mind.

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