



# Enhancing Environments

Taylor Construction Group has built its success on strong relationships with its clients, employees, and partners.

Images by Scott Ehler

**I**n a competitive and often cutthroat industry, Taylor Construction is a refreshing reprieve. Established in 1994 by Mark Taylor, the company was built on the idea of investing in strong and stable relationships with clients.

Mark believed that there was a desperate need for a relationship-based construction company that could deliver a holistic building experience to clients. This attitude is upheld throughout the company's network of relationships, extending from clients to valued employees, suppliers, subcontractors, and strategic partners.

As a result, the company has thrived, developing and delivering iconic projects throughout New South Wales. At every stage, Taylor Construction has aimed to exceed industry standards and set new benchmarks in the construction sector.

*The CEO Magazine* recently got back to basics with Mark and discussed his unique approach to

good business, which has seen Taylor Construction become one of the most well-respected businesses in the industry.

**The CEO Magazine: What led you to establish Taylor Construction Group 20 years ago?**

**Mark:** It kind of traces back to my childhood. I can remember in my preschool days jumping in a ute and going to work with Dad on a construction site. I suppose as his career developed so did my enthusiasm and passion. I've never known anything different; it was always about construction for me. All through school I worked on a construction site.

Dad moved on to Civil & Civic and later became managing director of Lend Lease. He then moved on to a number of different construction companies and held the role of managing director of Fletcher Construction. I always had that mentoring pedigree coming through from his tier-one corporate background. He always took me on site tours and really

introduced me to construction sites at a young age, so he kind of led me down that path. It's that old-school thinking that if you can't do it then you can't manage it, so all throughout my life my school holidays were spent labouring on a construction site somewhere around Sydney.

That led me to do a Bachelor of Building and Construction Management. When I was at university, I got a couple of part-time jobs with a number of small builders because my Dad still encouraged me to get more hands-on experience, rather than just a desk job. He could have got me a job at one of those tier-one companies but I would have just ended up in the copy room.

While I was working in construction part-time, one of the opportunities we had was working at a private school. A relationship blossomed between the school and I, and they had a five-year master plan of construction work, and that was enough to start a business on. I was still in my third year of university when I started >

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- Mark Taylor



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Taylor Construction. That first relationship gave me a pipeline of work and the ability to go out there and get more. Dad encouraged me because while he decided to climb that corporate ladder he recognised the opportunity for me to go out there and do something on my own.

### So that contract was the beginning of the company?

Yes, it was an ongoing relationship. In the early days, a lot of the work that I did was in the private school sector. You normally found that once you built a relationship with the schools they constantly had a pipeline of work or a master plan of construction. There were a lot of schools where you'd find that you were back on site every year. They'd give you a project each year or spanning many years. One client I worked with for around 15 years.

You soon learned that being relationship-led was vital because

*"Mark and the Taylor Construction team are a professional, well organised company, which Crest prides itself to work with. Their professionalism, timeliness, and dedication to all aspects of their projects, further enhances Crest's ability to successfully deliver the complete mechanical solution."*  
- Andrew Johnson, Managing Director, Crest

it created that repeat business. It was the private school sector, so if you look at that sector, they're run by a lot of church-based organisations. Obviously, there are a few more requirements when constructing churches, and we built a few back then. A lot of these organisations and non-profits also run aged-care facilities, so there were almost three market sectors that opened up to me when I started from those early relationships.

### What do you believe are the key values or principles that drive Taylor Construction's success?

My typical mantra is that we're client-focused and relationship-driven. That's what we're all about. I spend a lot of my time making sure that the team is entrenched in that philosophy. Ultimately, our client relationships will somewhat reflect our own internal relationships between staff and management.

We do a lot of staff engagement activities throughout the year, from team-building weekends away to partners' parties, awards nights, family picnics, and other events. We have a corporate calendar throughout the year to really work on the company culture internally. I think if you can work on it and get it right internally then hopefully that'll lead to the establishment of positive external

client relationships for the business to grow.

It's one thing to be sold to and it's another thing to get them to engage with the experience and deliver what they need. I could get out there and sell to a client and promise them the world, but unless the staff engage with what I'm selling and integrate it into the delivery model then it's just a sales pitch.

Our clients experience the value we create. We enhance their built environment through a deep understanding of innovation and technique.

### Since establishing the company, what have been some of your proudest moments and significant projects?

It feels pretty good to reach that 20-year mark. There have been times with staff engagement and seeing that growth in individuals which have given me a lot of pride. There's also a huge sense of responsibility. Suddenly, you realise that a lot of families rely upon you now. They're dependent on the success of the company and I take that extremely seriously. I want to be able to give everybody that's engaged in the company some sense of certainty. At the same time, being able to see employees grow in the company, develop relationships, buy their





first home, and have a family gives me a lot of pride.

Also, when we've completed landmark projects, those have been some pivotal points. Some of them might have been of significant financial value and some of them might be landmarks that give the company good branding and recognition. For example, Atlas at Norwest was a good project for us. It was probably the first project that we did of that commercial size and nature. It led us on to a couple of other opportunities at Macquarie Park with Goodman, which was one with Optus and one we finished recently for Canon's new headquarters.

There have been a number of other iconic projects that we've completed like the North Bondi Surf Life Saving Club, which has received a lot of recognition. There was an Audi dealership that we did in Mosman. The year that we completed that dealership it was

probably the smallest project on our books, but I guarantee that I got a comment every day about it from someone in the market. It was probably one of the most recognised and well-branded projects we had.

**What have been your biggest challenges over the years?**

The industry has been operating on a very low margin and there has been a certain level of competition that's been technically trading insolvent. With the collapse of some of these companies, opportunities have come up because there's been talent and skills in the marketplace that normally wouldn't be looking for employment. There was a period of time when you had to survive and compete with those companies, and they were really under-quoting work.

To me, I always saw that Taylor's key assets were its people and so over the last few years I've focused



on investing in people. We've been really fortunate in recent years to get some key staff on board, which has enabled momentum to continue our growth because I had a strong team behind me that were able to deliver. In my view, we're very much a people-orientated and -centric industry. We're a service-based industry, so it's really about the people that are delivering that service.

**How do you communicate and collaborate with suppliers and strategic partners?**

When I talk about our internal relationships I probably do extend that to include our relationships with suppliers and subcontractors. I spend a lot of time engaging our key suppliers and some of our key contractors that I have relationships with because they're integral. We don't physically do the work—we're management—so we're only as good as those skillsets on the ground.

There are so many different levels and ways that we engage with suppliers and contractors. We have a suppliers and subcontractors party at the end of every year. It's not about clients; it's just about those guys, because they're just as important. We wouldn't have clients without them. Even through to how we deal with them on an ethical level, all of our suppliers and subcontractors know that they

can always pick up the phone and contact me if there's ever an issue. Some of these are very personal, long-term relationships for me. I'll help them, mentor them in business, and give them advice where I can.

There are just some fundamentals that you have to get right. You've got to pay them. It's amazing how many businesses in this industry don't pay on time. It's something that I've always prided myself on in our business. Every month we pay our bills. There's never been a month where we've delayed a payment. Regardless of whether we get paid each month by our clients, I want to pay the people that I owe and sleep well at night. I think we're well-respected in the market as a result of that attitude.

**What does the future hold for Australia's construction industry and what kind of role will Taylor Construction play in that future?**

At the moment, we're still focusing on New South Wales. Certainly in the next two years it looks very positive. I haven't heard any forecasts out in the market beyond that; I don't think anybody's brave enough to forecast beyond those two years. In the next two years, we'll remain strong.

I always put it from the point of view that we don't want to be the biggest; we just want to be



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- Mark Taylor

the best. To me, we're not after turnover for turnover's sake but we'll certainly grow with our clients and grow in those relationships.

My father said to me many years ago that if you look after the relationship then the money will take care of itself, and I've found that to be true in so many fundamental ways, even to do with growth. If you focus on building client relationships then naturally you'll grow with them.

If you get the right team and you look after the relationships internally with staff then ultimately you're doing a good job and you're doing it right. You'll see the results in turnover growth. Obviously, you need financial viability and you've got to be diligent with the economic side of it, but we don't target turnover. A project has to be about some sort of long-term relationship.

Celebrating 20 years has been a significant milestone. There's a positive momentum at the moment but at the same time it makes you work harder. You hold onto those core values so they don't become lost. ●

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