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BUILDING a Family

As a family business, SOL understands the importance of looking after its people and giving them the necessary tools to grow and gain independence.

Images courtesy of SOL Palvelut

SOL can trace its heritage back to Lindström Oy, which is one of the oldest businesses in Finland that's still in operation. Over the years, the company has grown and expanded, remaining a family business throughout its lifetime.

Juhapekka Joronen, Managing Director of SOL Palvelut, has spent his career working within the family business. "Because we're a family company, I've never had any jobs outside of this company. There was maybe a couple of months with another company while I was at school, but I didn't get any salary. All the jobs I've done during summertime and training were here. When I was a little kid, I already thought that I would be in the family company because I'm the fourth generation; it was my mother's grandfather who bought the company.

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- Juhapekka Joronen

"We were a part of Lindström Group and we got out from Lindström Group in 1991, so we have been SOL now for 23 years. I have studied economics, but not at university level. I was at university, but because I was working so much I didn't get my degree. I have been the managing director of SOL Palvelut, which is the biggest company in the SOL Group, for more than three years. Before that, I was working for eight years and responsible for our international businesses."

Juhapekka shares responsibility with his sister, Peppi Kaira, who is the managing director of SOLEMO Group. "My mother has some shares within the company, but she got the shares so that she can vote. So it's a two-person set-up, but she's the most important."

The owners of SOL believe responsible owners are the

backbone for steady growth. They have a central role and steady experience in the development of the company. They expect responsible operations from the employees in line with the company values. SOL is an active member of the Finnish Family Firms Association, which promotes an operational framework for and responsible ownership of family enterprises.

Since taking up the position, Juhapekka has faced numerous challenges. "If we're talking about the situation in Finland, over the last three years things in Finland have gone badly. The economic situation has declined a lot, which has affected our 3,000 customers in Finland. If our customers have some challenges then we have to take part in those challenges—this has probably been one of the greatest challenges that we've faced. >



“Also, we are a people business. We have many businesses, but SOL Palvelut means cleaning, property maintenance, and security. These are all people businesses. In Finland, we have around 8,000 people and almost 4,000 outside of Finland (Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia) so there are always challenges around how to take care of people and how to handle them. And of course, now we’re looking at those mobile and digital issues—how to use them to our advantage. Everyone has mobile phones, but we don’t use them to suit our business. If we can find something before our competitors then this will be a great bonus for us.”

SOL has a vision of being an outstanding service provider to its customers. The company aims to be the best operator in the field of environmental issues, both for customers and staff. SOL has built a good reputation as an employer with capable and committed staff, which the company regards as its

most precious resource, and is a leading service provider with high levels of customer satisfaction.

All employees are offered the opportunity for constant development and learning. “Staff training and development is a big issue for us and we invest nearly 2 per cent of our turnover towards training our people, which is huge money. The SOL training program consists of field-specific training courses, each with their own extensive coaching and training programs. In addition, the regions have their own training. Internal job orientation online and in local training provide the basic information and skills needed for work. Online training is part of day-to-day learning.”

Through support and guidance, SOL strives to give its employees the chance to be responsible and independent. The company appreciates new ideas and encourages staff to take the initiative and be creative. SOL

wants all personnel to see their work as a joyful thing. The company passes on positive feedback from customers to the person responsible for the work both orally and as a note on their personal ‘quality passport’.

Young people have the opportunity to build their career in the service sector and work at SOL during their studies or gap year. Apprenticeship training and degree training in the sector are viable alternatives for young people who are wondering about their career paths. SOL participates in the Responsible Summer Job campaign that aims to provide young people with jobs, respecting good summer work practices. SOL will employ about 800 seasonal workers this year. Youth events give students an opportunity to familiarise themselves with property, security, and laundry services. The event features a CV workshop, job interview preparation, information on different business lines and SOL as a company.

SOL takes good care of its personnel and their wellbeing. The company customises its staff training and development to meet customers’ expectations. “We have five full-time trainers who are training in our headquarters in different classes and across different places in Finland, like in our customer places, where we gather 10 people and show them how to do the work.

“We’re also using our suppliers, where we buy machines, or chemicals, or equipment, and we have good cooperation with them. Sometimes we have one-day training, so some companies have two or three hours, and then we have two or three hours with another company. So we have strong cooperation with our suppliers. We are quite a big company and we have to have to be one of the first when new things come to the market. We work quite closely with our suppliers; if they are doing something new, then they come to

us and discuss it. Then we may have to fix some things, and then we take it to the market.”

The joy of working and an encouraging, team-spirited atmosphere is important to SOL. The company regularly monitors employee satisfaction with the ‘joy barometer’ questionnaire and develops operations based on the feedback. “One of the things we focus on is handling people well and taking care of them. However, our responsibility levels are quite low; people are taking responsibility, but the level it is at is low.

“The customers have said that the biggest difference with us compared to our competitors is that people are taking their job seriously and when you ask them to do something, you don’t have to ask someone else; it just takes one call and then everything is okay. Of course, our first value is to have sunny and satisfied customers because they are paying us and we



have to earn every day within the service business.”

The key values of SOL are to have sunny and satisfied customers, to highlight the job of working, to encourage everyday creativity and entrepreneurship, and to always be reliable. The management philosophy of SOL emphasises freedom, responsibility, trust, creativity, and goals, plus pleasant and professional work methods and results. The management at SOL is based on a positive image >

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of humankind, and this guides the work of each service manager in their daily tasks. People are responsible and want to do a good job. Every one of them has a need to succeed and SOL aims to provide each of them with the tools to do so.

Aside from the work that SOL does with its suppliers with regard to training staff, the company also relies on supplier assistance and expertise in particularly difficult scenarios. “If we have a problem with a customer when we’re doing our job at our customer’s place, if it’s something that we can’t fix then we’ll go to our suppliers and ask if they have experts, like chemists or someone that will go to a laboratory and then give advice to us and our customers. That’s good for customers also, because they know that if we can’t do it, we have good cooperation with our partners and we’ll ensure someone can help them.”

As suppliers are such a vital aspect of SOL’s operations, the company strives to work with the same suppliers across the various regions its works in and aims to build longstanding relationships with them. “If it’s possible, we will use the same suppliers that we have in Finland as the ones in Sweden, in the Baltics, and in Russia, because we have the training modules that are based on our suppliers.

“If our expert is going to Russia then obviously it is easier if they are using the same chemicals or machines as what they’re used to. Sometimes, of course, a supplier can’t give the same service or the same price that they can give someone else, particularly in Russia, because the situation is so different there. In those cases, we will use someone else, but most of the time we will try to use the same supplier.”

Casting his eyes forward, Juhapekka sees a bright future ahead. “We have a vision towards 2020, so after six or seven years, our turnover should be €670 million, and this year I think we will reach something like €300



million, so we will have to make more than double in six to seven years. This means that we have to grow. Finland is quite limited but we’re still growing in Finland; however, we are also focused on Russia. I was in Stockholm recently and they are expecting more than 10-per-cent growth next year.

“We’re also checking to see if there are other countries we can enter. Because we are a family company, there is no one telling us where we have to go. If it looks like there are some good opportunities, then we will have a discussion about it. Every time we speak with companies, we ask them and they ask us, so there are further possibilities—maybe Denmark, Norway, or Germany. Regardless, in six years, we want to be a strong brand within Europe.”

Regional expansion doesn’t just mean moving into new countries, but also introducing new capabilities to SOL’s operations. “I’ve only spoken about SOL Palvelut, but we also have laundry



services and personnel services, which is for when companies need extra workers or relief workers. That is our newest business; we introduced it about five years ago and we are seeking growth for that business. When we bought the company five years ago it was about €2 million and today it would be about €25 million.

“So that is going well and it is mainly in Finland, but we’ve also done it in St Petersburg, Russia,

because we have quite good processes for getting people. Our involvement in personnel services in Russia happened quite accidentally and now it’s a growing business in St Petersburg. As with many of our services, because customers were always asking if we can do this or that, it’s not just cleaning in Russia; we are very flexible and we can do anything because we have the people there and we know the place.”