



Walk in the Park

Matthew Glascott started Glascott Landscape and Civil on his own, and has developed the company to become the giant it is today.

Images by Scott Ehler

Now one of the largest landscape construction companies in Australia, Glascott Landscape and Civil is a homegrown success story. Director Matthew Glascott started the business more than 25 years ago and built it up through hard work, determination, and a passion for the environment. With a number of prestigious projects to its name, a renowned expertise in commercial construction, and offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Canberra, the company is on a continuing upward trajectory.

How did you come to found the company, and how has it grown and expanded over its existence?

I started the company 27 years ago. I decided to go into the business on my own as a youngster, having studied

landscape design and horticulture and completing small-business courses. I decided I would venture out into the world of business on my own, starting out doing the work myself with my ute, my radio, and my pet dog, Mulligan. That's how I started out, and I've built it from there to a business that crosses the eastern states of Australia employing over 100 people. The company has been a success in the sense I started from scratch without any assistance, borrowing \$1,500 from the bank to buy my ute, and off I went with all the confidence of a 21 year old and built a business from there. I built the business up in Sydney originally in the residential market, and then I branched out into the commercial market because I wanted to deal with professionals rather than with the mums and dads of the residential world. I felt more comfortable in the commercial area.

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How would you describe the key values of Glascott?

Our key values are a very important part of the DNA of our company. We spent a lot of time workshopping these values with the senior members of the company, and we had consultants come in to help us with this. We came up with four values that we identified as important to us as members of the company.

The first one is 'Real'. Real was something we agreed on because we all think we are real people. We generally are very easygoing and sociable without ego problems. We're confident, real people, and that was something we put down as a value.

The second value is 'Commitment'. Although it's a common requirement in any business, we think that a strong commitment to >



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the company, its people, and its clients is a key value.

Third, we identified 'Integrity' as the most important key value. Integrity, underpinned by honesty, respect, and loyalty, is the cornerstone of the company. We pride ourselves on being honest, respectful, and loyal with the clients and with each other.

The fourth value is 'Team'. It is essential in this industry that we work as a close and strong team, that we're flexible and supportive, understanding, and helpful with each other. These four words really sum up the values of our company and who we are, and when we employ people we look for these values.

You set up an advisory board for Glascott. Why did you decide to set up the board, and what purpose does it serve?

We got to a certain size as a business, with state managers in four different states. We were growing, and I wanted to bring in a different sort of expertise to the business, with finance and marketing. I also wanted to have people to bounce ideas off, independent of the business itself and its daily operations. In short, I wanted to have a different set of eyes looking into the business, rather than those working in the business. And I guess being in business on your own can be relatively lonely at the top, and I think it is important to have someone to confide in on different strategies and ideas and problem-solving. It's been a really positive step in the development of Glascott, and I think it's going to bring a lot of value moving ahead to what we do, where we go, and how we go about it.

What processes are in place to ensure safety on the job, and why is it so important to clients that you have a good safety record?

Safety today is very different to what it was 27 years ago; it didn't really exist. You used common sense. But today it's a key component of the construction and everyday workplace. The safety of workers is our responsibility. We make sure they are working in a safe environment, using safe work practices, and it's the responsibility of CEOs and management to make sure they're up to date and trained thoroughly. We took that on board, and we felt if we really wanted to play in the big end of town with the tier-one builders and developers, we had to make sure that we were well qualified in WHS to sell and market ourselves to work on those sites. It's an area that we haven't always been strong in, and we've invested time and money to ensure we got qualified in all four states nationally.

We recently won the Master Builders Association & Cbus Excellence in Building Award for our work in WHS, for our policies and procedures on site, after being audited by independents. That was very special. Work health and safety is a crucial part of the everyday operation of the business now. We found it could be our competitive edge moving forward. We decided that if we are practising and qualified at the highest level, that might put us in a better place among our competitors as well. But more importantly, it's about making sure that our workers, who work with heavy plant and machinery, are trained to operate this equipment in the workplace safely.

How do you work with suppliers to achieve success?

There's a lot of loyalty involved. You treat them with respect. It's all about being honest with them and being fair. We realise the importance of a long-term relationship with our subcontractors and suppliers, and we try our best to maintain a good relationship. That's not always 100-per-cent foolproof; things do go wrong at times and relationships do sour. But we treat them with the utmost respect because our business is only as good as our staff, suppliers, and subcontractors. Without them, we really can't operate; they're integral to the success of our business.

What have been some of the challenges you've faced, and how have you overcome them?

People, for one. Employing the right people and having the right people around you is of the utmost importance. Choosing the right people to be on the bus with you is very important, and making sure they're in the right seat is just as important. People are the most crucial ingredient in developing any successful business, and I have looked back over the past 27 years and realised the importance of employing the best people. I have been very fortunate in my business to have long-term people who have

Matthew Glascott (right) with Glascott Landscape and Civil General Manager Matt Bourke



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been with Glascott. Most of my senior managers have been with me over 10 years. There's been long-term loyalty both ways; they've been loyal to the company and the company has been very loyal to them. I have no doubt that one of the reasons this company has been able to grow and become successful is the retention of good people.

Have there been any projects you're particularly proud of?

There have been many. The wonderful thing about being in my industry is that you see finished products and you drive past them regularly and see them growing and being used, especially the parks and public spaces. It's a great satisfaction to know you've helped beautify the landscape and the environment. I look back and see Cockatoo Island, one of the landmarks of the harbour. We spent

12 months remediating the northern side of the island. We landscaped the area, built campsites, and restored the foreshore, and the area is now a popular tourist attraction. Working on and visiting that site is something I will remember always, and the end result gives me great satisfaction.

More recent projects I'm very proud of are the Moorebank Units Relocation—the largest defence infrastructure project since World War II and the biggest project we have undertaken. It was extremely large and of a sensitive nature, requiring highly detailed project management and landscaping skills—and the Chinese Gardens in Canberra. The gardens were a gift from Beijing to Canberra and presented a few unique challenges, but the end result is a beautiful 5,500-square-metre area of traditional gardens. •

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