

HOW TO LEAD YOUR COMPANY INTO A NEW NICHE

Big Guns Energy Services' Dickson Lee shares seven measures for taking your business to new heights

By Julie Schaeffer



MEET DICKSON LEE

A black belt in karate, CEO and CTO Dickson Lee has learned the values of focus, determination, and discipline, and he's applied them to his career. Winning the war may mean losing battles, he says, but karate-inspired discipline helps one refocus, overcome the feeling of defeat, strategize for the next battle, and prepare mentally for ultimate victory.

1

Stay on top of market trends

One of the best qualities a company can have is the ability to recognize change and adapt. So when Calgary-based Big Guns Energy Services (BGES) saw a need for diversification in the market, it recognized it could fill the void. Formerly known as Big Guns Perforating & Logging, the company began 18 years ago as a specialist using large perforation guns to make holes in oil-well casings. Over the years, its focus has shifted to include more wireline services, which, in the oil and gas industry, reference a cabling technology used by operators of oil and gas wells to lower equipment or measurement devices into the well for the purposes of well intervention, reservoir evaluation, and pipe recovery. Then, three years ago, the industry shifted as natural gas prices declined precipitously and fewer services were required by conventional wireline companies.

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Understand how the trends affect your clients

These changes impacted the oil and gas companies served by BGES, which provided integrated technology and information solutions—testing, analysis, and engineering services—to oil and gas companies operating in the Western Canada Sedimentary Basin. According to Dickson Lee, CEO and CTO of BGES, a deep understanding of market trends such as these is required to understand your clients' challenges. "You need a 360-degree view," he says.

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Value innovation

“What we think the customer needs is not necessarily what the customer needs,” Dickson says. Because of this mentality, BGES seeks to innovate. “We look upstream and downstream, at the whole life cycle of a project, and think about how we can provide more value,” Dickson adds. “For instance, is there more we can do outside of our conventional scope? If there is, we can redraw the boundary or scope to align with what the customers really need.” That, Lee says, is how BGES got the idea to transition into a different business.



HOW ARE YOU GROWING?

“Growth requires the ability to zoom in and out of the business—define where we’re going, how we’re getting there, and what we need to do to get there while not losing sight of why we’re doing what we do.”

Dickson Lee, CEO & CTO

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Be distinct or become extinct

Once you understand the challenges your clients face and have considered innovative options, you have to identify a solution that solves their problems. For BGES, this meant major change. “To stay on top, we needed to find a niche market and continuously evolve to cope with the new norm,” Lee says.

The end result has been a continued focus on and cultivation of that evolution. “We don’t try to appeal to the masses; we only focus on a distinct group of clients: people with similar values,” says Lee, who, in the process of transforming BGES, divested business lines that were less aligned with the company’s new focus. “We veered away from the commodity business; today, we’re a full-service business integrating professional consulting and field services, with a special focus on caprock geo-containment projects.”

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Put people first

“In our business, equipment will depreciate over time, but people will appreciate in value if you spend the time to invest [in], develop, and retain them,” says Lee, who places significant emphasis on getting the right people into the right positions. This involves professional development, but more important is hiring, during which Lee focuses on values—chiefly, the ability to be highly adaptable—rather than skills. As a result, Big Guns’ “team members can adapt to a dynamic business environment and today’s ever-changing world,” Lee says.

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Follow the hedgehog

There are three questions Lee asks repeatedly: What drives Big Guns’ economic engine? In what areas can the company be best-in-class? What is the company passionate about? The last one, Lee says, is particularly important. “People buy *why* we do, not *what* we do,” he says. “We have a higher purpose in coming to work every day; it’s much more than having a job and making money. Making money is a by-product of our higher purpose.”

That higher purpose is reached only when keeping those three questions in mind for every potential endeavour, and the best results come when the three overlap. “If they fit in that sweet spot, it’s a go,” Lee says. “If they don’t, it is a no-go, no matter how profitable the venture could be.”

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Have a “stop-doing” list

Most people have a to-do list. Lee advocates a list of things one shouldn’t do. “Do you ever see yourself or the company making the same mistake over and over again?” he asks. “Can you think of a few things that you can see yourself or your company more successful if you stop doing them?” The “stop-doing” list is the key to changing bad habits and preventing the company from making the same mistakes.