

Transitioning to a
100-year company:
*what's essential
is leadership
development*

Heroes: *Kris Maynard, CEO, and Justin Jordan,
General Manager, Essential Ingredients, Inc.*

Goal: *Expand leadership team and sharpen
leaders' skills to grow sales while maintaining
company values and culture*

Kris Maynard and Justin Jordan were friends long before they joined forces to start up and run the chemical distributor Essential Ingredients in 1996. As the company grew, other formative leaders came and went. But Kris and Justin remained at the helm, determined not only to grab hold of opportunities for continuing growth, but also to create a leadership incubator within EI so they would become dispensable and the company could outlive them by generations.

Kris and Justin approached Trebuchet at this crossroads in 2014. EI, an employee-owned company, was indeed growing, but the two men were feeling a lot of pressure. The company's success and operations rested squarely on their shoulders. They knew they needed to expand their leadership team and develop the new leaders. But they also realized they needed help doing it.

"Kris and I go way back," said Justin, "but as we brought more people to the leadership table, we needed help getting all ten of us into that degree of relationship."

"We needed to create more clarity and accountability," said Kris. "We had talented people, but we needed to build immense trust that we're all on the same team. We needed alignment behind collective goals and objectives as well as individual responsibilities."

guidance

Trebuchet worked with EI's fledgling leadership team to establish ground rules for meetings and to create conflict norms. They agreed to rules like "Speak like you're right; listen like you're wrong" and "Fearlessly participate." The rules have been such game-changers that they're now posted on the conference-room wall.

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Kris Maynard, CEO,
Essential Ingredients, Inc.

“We had the ‘disease of niceness,’” Kris said. “Our company purpose is ‘being a blessing to others and inspiring others to be a blessing as well.’ That’s paramount to us. But we also needed to be able to speak directly to one another about problems and solutions. We weren’t doing that.”

“I use the term ‘sweet tea,’” said Justin. “At work, we had a tendency to empathize with others too much and take on their burdens.”

For example, a problem arose in which key products were going out of stock. The supply-chain manager said his team just couldn’t keep up with demand. “‘Sweet tea’ meant we wouldn’t challenge the supply-chain manager that we’d all agreed on a level of stock, and he wasn’t getting it done,” said Justin. “But with Trebuchet’s help, we learned how to have that essential conversation and then to support each other’s roles in effective ways.”

“Instead of saying, ‘What I need is...’, we now say, ‘What the company needs is...,’” Kris said. “There’s no disease of niceness, but there are also no personal attacks. It’s always about what’s best for the company.”

happy ending

El’s leadership team is now both deep and skilled. Large opportunities have been successfully captured, and revenues have doubled.

Thanks to Trebuchet, succession planning is also underway.

“Back in 2014, we didn’t have a lot of bench strength,” Kris said. “We hadn’t been very intentional about developing leaders. As Justin and I have worked to handpick internal leaders, Trebuchet has helped us grow and develop those leaders to their fullest potential. It’s also meant moving some people out, too, which is difficult.”

“Trebuchet has helped us create a toolkit to develop principled leaders who embody our core values,” Justin said. “This is what ensures the business will continue on into the future in alignment with our culture, values, and principles.”

“I used to feel very lost and hopeless about the company’s future without me and Justin,” Kris said. “But today I feel confident that the company will continue to thrive after we’re gone.”

“We used to give lip service to being an evergreen company, or a 100-year, intergenerational company, but now we truly are one,” Justin said. “It’s night and day.”