

Executive Q&A: Todd Jackson, CEO Jackson Design

■ By STEVE ADAMEK



Todd Jackson, president and CEO of **Jackson Design and Remodeling (JDR)** entered the remodeling business at age 20, became a licensed general contractor at 23 and built his first addition by age 24. An industry leader since 1989, JDR has been named one of San Diego's 100 Fastest Growing Privately Held Companies by the **San Diego Business Journal** and is ranked on **Inc.** magazine's 5000 list. The company employs 62 people and had 2018 revenue of \$21.3 million.

JDR has won acclaim for its unique design build processes. Jackson spearheaded

JDR's development of proprietary custom designed Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software, which introduces a new approach to client relationships and communication management.

JDR has been honored with the **Better Business Bureau Torch Award for Ethics** six consecutive times, most recently in 2017. The company has earned multiple regional and national honors for design and professionalism.

How did you get into design and remodeling?

I knew from a very young age that I wanted to work for myself rather than for someone else. I started out on my first construction job looking for opportunities. I have always learned best from a combination of formal and hands-on training. When I had the chance, I started working as an apprentice on the jobsite, building my expertise in as many skills as I could. Before long I decided to venture out on my own. I arrived at a pivotal moment about 12 years later when I decided to create a design build remodeling company rather than an "installation" or "interior design" business. At the time, design build was a new concept and rare in San Diego. Jackson Design and Remodeling was one of the first local companies to make an imprint in the industry, and I consciously decided to take

design build to a new level by offering comprehensive "all-under-one-roof" services.

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TODD JACKSON

What is the toughest part about the business?

One of the challenges I address is meeting the sometimes dueling expectations of the "three-sided stool" that comprises any company — employees, trade partners, and — always at the top of the list — clients. My goal is to create and run a company that is fair to all.

One can be a great builder or designer but not have business skills to run a company. How did you develop your business skills?

I think most successful business owners

have some innate skill. I've also continuously educated myself over the years. I belong to an organization called **Remodelers Advantage**, which brings together remodelers from across the country to share information and gain knowledge from each other. I learned some of my most important skills by building my tolerance to risk, which can only be done by taking risks. One of the best decisions I made was buying the building next door to JDR's Design Center and starting a new business there — **Home Expressions** by JDR.

Is it tough finding employable talent? Do you have any type of apprentice program? How do you motivate your workers and has that change with new generations?

While JDR's reputation is such that we are sought after as an employer, it is harder finding employable talent in general over the past few years. For us, it's a challenge because we hire for culture more than experience. We're looking for people who are able to invest in our commitment to excellence in everything we do and who know how to be effective as a member of a unified team. We do have apprenticeship opportunities in our design and architecture departments, which has helped us to develop some amazing talent straight out of design school. I made the

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leadership decision to be as transparent as possible with our team, sharing a high level of information about our budgets, goals, progress, and results to strengthen a sense of ownership, accountability, and motivation.

You offer design and remodeling seminars. Is that a big driver of business?

We've been holding our free seminars since 2007 and they are an essential element of our outreach to potential clients. We market our seminar with press releases, radio, TV, newspaper, magazines, email blasts, social media and online. JDR seminars are an important component of our drive to educate clients about the remodeling process.

Tell us about the management system you designed?

Because our architects, designers and construction professionals are all JDR employees under one roof, rather than contractors or consultants, clients access the benefits of working with one dedicated team. Jackson Design and Remodeling simultaneously develops the design parameters, construction methods and budgetary goals of each project, and communicates this process to our clients every step of the way. Designs, material selection, project feedback, budgeting, permitting, and scheduling are streamlined and tracked, making the remodeling process transparent ... We invested in the development of proprietary custom designed Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software, an innovative approach to client relationships and communica-



Photo courtesy of Jackson Design and Remodeling

Jackson Design and Remodeling staff gather for a group photo. The company says it hires more for culture than experience.

tion management. ERP keeps everyone in our company accountable to our clients and to each other. One of the best decisions I ever made was establishing a leadership team, which involves all department heads in decision making and goal setting for the company. At monthly meetings, the leadership team shares information with each other and gives candid feedback about ideas and results, fostering a culture of ownership

and accountability. **You've reached an interesting time in your career. Do you find yourself looking back more or looking ahead?**

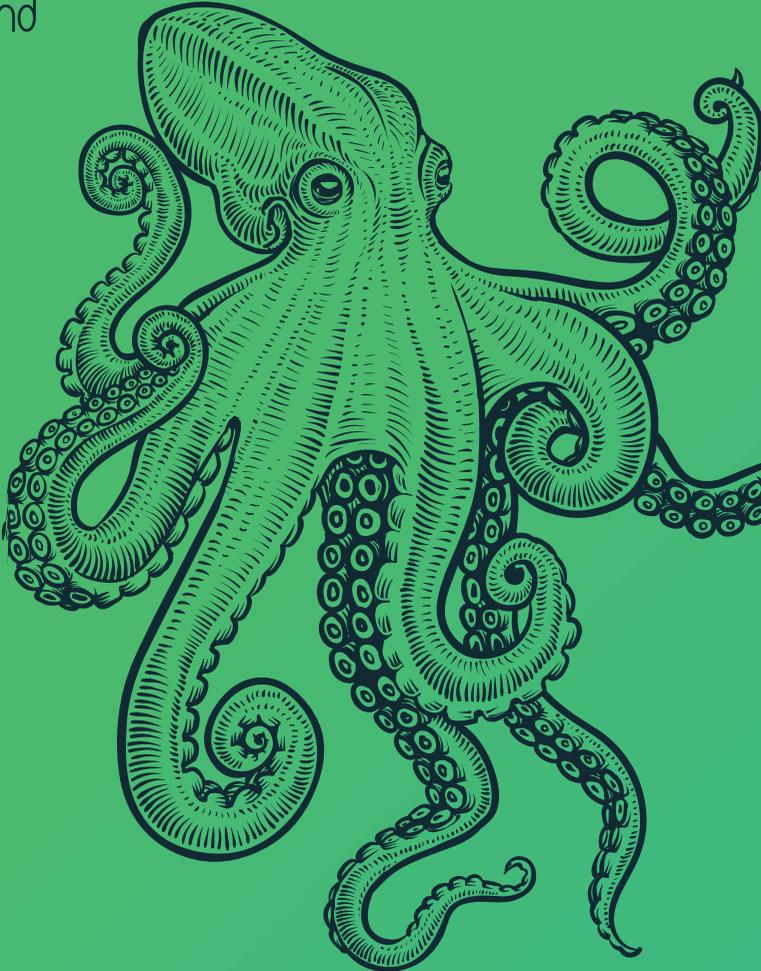
I'm more of a "look ahead" person, while also taking some time to appreciate the foundational values that helped us build such a successful company over three decades. There are still some things I want to accomplish on both a personal and professional level. One example is

that we are opening a new company in the manufacturing segment of our industry and I'm excited that the company will have a national imprint. More to come on that soon.

Is there anything you'd like to add to the interview?

One of my favorite life lessons my Mom passed on to me: Learn all you can because you don't know what you don't know, but you still have to pay for it. ■

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Did you know an octopus has nine brains, three hearts and uses tools to solve problems?