

Reflections on Leadership

IN MEMORY OF JIM RYAN: THOUGHTS FROM AN EMPLOYEE

Reflecting on Jim Ryan's life and legacy, I cannot help but think of our country's current economic situation. In the wake of the consequences born of some rather damaging decisions, the discussions of the role business plays in our society and the responsibility of its leaders are especially relevant to all our lives.

And I realize: we can use more Jim Ryans in the world.

As the leader of a company that develops, designs, builds, manages and finances major projects throughout the country, Jim certainly understood how decisions could impact a community. What I admired about Jim was he never lost sight of people — the people he employed, the people who would live, work and play in the structures his company built, the customers whose businesses would function daily within those walls and the neighbors that would endure the noise and inconvenience of its progress. He had a way of making everyone feel they had a personal relationship with him, that he cared about them and their family, their well being. And that's because he did. He wasn't interested in building the tallest skyscraper or being the biggest company, he was interested in delivering the best for his customers and the community.

I don't mean to imply Jim didn't have a passion for development. He certainly did. I think one of the reasons why Ryan is known for the "hairy" projects is that Jim, with his partners Tim Gray and Pat Ryan, liked to achieve what others could not. Jim often asked his employees to meet stringent challenges that could make or break a project. The 800-1000 Nicollet development in downtown Minneapolis, Midtown Exchange, the LPI Linerboard Mill in Becker, Minnesota, are a few examples Jim often pointed to of what we could achieve as a company. He trusted his employees to meet his high expectations instead of micromanaging them. While pleased with awards and accolades from the media, he was especially proud to receive letters from his customers praising his people and what they were able to deliver. It's what he always called a win-win.



James (Jim) Russell Ryan, CEO, passed away May 28, 2009, at the age of 67

Jim talked about the same things being discussed in the media today: responsibility, accountability, integrity, community. I think "always do the right thing" and "building lasting relationships" are lasered into every employee's brains. What made hearing these words from Jim so effective when they might have come across as condescending from others was we saw Jim living these words every single day. He truly believed in delivering the most value to his customers. He went out of his way to ensure people felt good about their decisions. When you see that kind of example coming from the very top of an organization, someone who walks the talk, it engenders a sense of purpose and responsibility to do the same.

Jim also gave of himself — financial gifts as well as his time and talent. It isn't hard to guess the project Jim was most proud of — the Cristo Rey Jesuit High School/Colin Powell Youth Leadership Center in Minneapolis. With all the characteristics of a

typical Ryan project — i.e., plenty of hair — Jim, Tim and Pat spearheaded the fundraising campaign for the building as well as the design-build effort. Again, Jim trusted not only his employees, but his friends, customers and subcontractors to help make this school and community center for economically challenged urban youth and their families a reality. If you ever had the opportunity to speak with Jim about this project, you probably had some idea what it meant to him. Joy is the word that comes to my mind. Giving was just a part of who Jim was and his joy in giving was contagious.

As an employee at Ryan, I can tell you that while I miss Jim, I feel fortunate to have witnessed first-hand what real leadership looks like. He wasn't perfect. He made mistakes. His ability to laugh at himself is what made him completely likeable and therefore, relatable. Perhaps that is a trait that could be added to our discussions on corporate responsibility and leadership — humanity.

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To honor Jim at his funeral, employees adorned a construction truck with flowers