



Executive of the Month: Glenn Foglio, president of Graciano Corp.: Increased company's sales and profitability year after year

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When your career takes you from construction-site laborer to construction-company president, sometimes you look back and try to connect the dots.

"I guess I was always into how long it took to do something," said Graciano Corp. president Glenn Foglio. "Even on that first summer job, I used to watch the project manager and think, 'That's the guy I'd like to be some day.'"

Foglio, 52, has occupied the president's desk at Graciano since 1991. During that time, he has consistently increased the company's sales and profitability year after year. The innovative, accurate bidding and production control systems he introduced get credit for driving steady growth in Graciano's customer base and bid opportunities, as well as his perceptive nature about selecting key personnel at every level from craftsman to estimator.

With offices in N.Y., Pittsburgh, and Brielle, N.J., Graciano is respected nationwide for specialized expertise in masonry, concrete, and historic restoration. Among the 95 year old company's projects are such N.Y. landmarks as Queensboro Bridge, Rockefeller Center, The Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Waldorf=Astoria, The Cloisters, Farley Post Office/Moynihan Station and MetLife Tower. With Foglio at the helm, Graciano has earned high-profile awards including the International Masonry Institute Golden Trowel Award, the Bricklayer and Allied Craftworkers Best Restoration Craft Award, and New York Construction News Best Rehabilitation Project Award.

Foglio said, "A lot of our projects involve complex work on high-visibility structures. Each one brings its own set of constraints. Our job is to pinpoint what needs to be done, work around those challenges, and deliver the best possible result. Fortunately, with almost 100 years of experience, we've developed evidence-based production standards for every restoration task we're likely to run into."

"With all this information, we can assess a project, and estimate it, with exceptional accuracy. It helps us eliminate guesswork, maintain quality standards, and control costs," he said.

Foglio was already a budding production standards guru on that first summer job back in 1978. "I was studying engineering at the University of Pittsburgh, and my family knew the business agent at Local 9, the Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Union. He was able to get me work on restoration projects with the Graciano Corp. I apprenticed under some of the best craftsman in the field, and came away with a great respect for not only their talent, but their hard-working, dedicated passion for the craft."

With no idea that he was making a lifetime connection, Foglio realized that the industry suited him. "I liked the work. I liked the people. And, even that first summer, I saw a few things that could be done more efficiently. For a kid, I was pretty good at spotting opportunities for process improvements."

Foglio approached one of the owners and proposed a class project using Graciano as a model for developing some database methods. The owner had the foresight to agree.

After earning his B.S. and M.S. in Engineering, he worked as an industrial engineer with the Babcock & Wilcox power generation division, then joined General Motors as a systems engineer.

In 1985, Graciano remembered Foglio's initiative and that sparked an invitation to join its estimation and sales team. From there he advanced to the positions of VP mining and civil division, then VP/general manager, then president.

Down through the years, Foglio said, he found that "Working with my hands taught me some valuable lessons. The first was 'Study really hard at school,' but the life-changing takeaways were about the work, in all its phases. In engineering school, I could understand the theory, not just in the abstract, but in terms of the real world. And, in turn, the classroom knowledge would help me do a better job when I got back in the field."

"To this day, a big part of my job is to review estimates, and I know what I'm looking at because I've actually done this kind of work," he said.

Illustrating the point, Foglio describes the production standard database that he championed, designed, developed and implemented for Graciano in the 1980s. "It was probably the most important thing I've done in all my years with the company," he said.

The effort was revolutionary for its time and involved cajoling a successful, motivated, opinionated organization away from a yellow-pad-and-sharp-pencil estimating system into the world of database management.

The first step was compiling the information. "I realized that, over all those decades of craftsmanship, problem solving and project management, our company had never systematically collected the data from actual job performance and put it into a system that would statistically give you an accurate production standard with a high confidence level built into it," he said.

The early stages were statistically sophisticated, although technologically rudimentary. "We were feeling our way, recording the data from each job manually and filing it in a binder," he said. As the available technology caught up with his vision, he said, "we coded the data so we could do statistical analysis on it and build 95% confidence intervals around our production standards, all based on historical data."

"Now, for example, our estimators can call up a line item and see that caulking should be so many tenths of a man-hour per linear foot, and that's the basis for our bid, for our schedule, and for our success on the project," said Foglio. "It's one of the things that separate our company. We're outstandingly confident of our production standards. When we can document the fact that we've eliminated 95% of the uncertainty, that tells our client two things: One, our number is not just competitive but super-tight. And two, we really can do what we say we're going to do."

For a confessed "systems guy," Foglio retains a deep respect for the masters of the craft he worked with decades ago. "It's more complicated now," he said. "The close oversight from engineers and historic architects, the specifications, the recording procedures, the safety standards, the CPM scheduling software...But it all ties back to the stonemason in the field. He doesn't need to read the specs. Come on —" he wrote the specs."