

40 YEARS, THOUSANDS OF PROJECTS, COUNTLESS FRIENDS: DAVE ANDERSON BIDS FAREWELL TO FABCON

Dave Anderson will tell you it took him about 15 seconds to say yes to a job in sales at FABCON in 1978. He'd already put in four years working as a draftsman, but he was ready for a new opportunity. He never would have guessed that his FABCON career would ultimately span 40 years.

"I never would have considered myself a salesperson either," says Anderson. "I always felt like more of a consultant."

When he joined FABCON, Anderson had been accepted to the University of Minnesota's architectural program and his wife Joyce was pregnant with their first child. He considered school but realized it was time to go to work to support his family.

"I knew it was a good opportunity," says Anderson.

40 years later, Anderson has consulted on thousands of projects with hundreds of clients. His daily interactions with his coworkers and clients and dogged determination to get it right have earned him praise as one of the most devoted, hardest working and most reliable employees FABCON has seen.

"Nobody cares more than Dave," says Amy Holliday, Anderson's former sales assistant who will take over some of his clients when he retires. "He's very passionate about everything he touches and that rubs off on people here in a positive way. He makes us all better."

Holliday says she's learned everything she knows about sales at FABCON from Anderson, including pre-planning and extreme attention to detail to eliminate some of the unknowns to ensure projects run smoothly. It's a habit Holliday learned early on.

"Everyone knows if you're working on a project with him, you'd better be at the top of your game. He has high expectations," says Holliday.

Client praise

Holliday will soon take over the RJ Ryan Construction account, one of Anderson's longest running clients.

"Tom and I have been here for more than 30 years and Dave has been a part of our work life every day," says Jack Grotkin, co-president of RJ Ryan Construction.

He and co-president Tom Ryan have completed over 250 projects with Anderson and are awestruck by the sheer magnitude of the work they've accomplished and by Anderson's commitment to every single venture.

“Dave is one of the most professional guys ever – and someone we pick on relentlessly,” laughs Grotkin. “He thinks everything but the dog house should be made out of precast.”

“We certainly did more precast work than we set out to,” adds Tom Ryan, co-president of RJ Ryan Construction. “He really represented that company well. He’s a great guy and we’re going to miss him terribly.”

“And we hope Amy has thick skin,” he laughs.

Another long time client, Brad Strehlow, President of Hy-Vee Construction agrees with their sentiments.

“Dave has always been a class act. He’s always very professional and courteous,” says Strehlow. “If anything happened, we’d yell, ‘I just need my damn panels!’ He understood and knew what we were up against and he always figured it out for us. I really appreciate all that Dave has done for HyVee.”

Strehlow recalls a photo they dubbed “The Three Amigos” of Anderson and two other vendors who worked extensively with Hy-Vee. The three were asked to put on straw hats for the photo.

“They were great sports about it,” says Strehlow. “Those three worked through a lot of issues for us and we appreciated it.”

For Strehlow it wasn’t just about the hard work, but about accessibility.

“Dave would always take my call – even on vacation,” he says.

Humble beginnings

Gary Janisch, owner of HJ Development and former Vice President of sales and marketing for FABCON, remembers how it all started. He hired Anderson. Anderson had been working as a forklift operator and took a pay cut from his lucrative \$13,000 a year job to work for FABCON.

“I can’t say enough good things about Dave, he was great to work with and always an honest and ethical guy,” says Janisch. “I never had to double check anything on his paperwork, either, because Dave was so detailed, I knew he would have it down to the penny.”

Janisch says Anderson always took care of his customers.

“I always respected him but his customers LOVED him,” says Janisch. “They kept coming back to work with him. His projects always made money for the company, too, so everyone walked away happy.”

“When you’re in a sales position, you have a huge responsibility to put in the effort and hours to make sure your coworkers have jobs to go to every day,” says Anderson. “I never took that responsibility lightly.”

Teachable moments

Anderson’s efforts didn’t stop with clients and internal workload. He was always looking for ways to pass along knowledge.

“He wanted people to succeed and felt that it was his duty to share knowledge and help the young people coming in,” explains Jeff Nadeau who worked in sales with Anderson for most of his career. Nadeau, who retired in 2010, says they were competitors and teammates at the same time.

“I think he wanted the best outcome for the company and the individual,” says Nadeau.

He recalls Anderson’s attention to detail, saying he saved the company thousands of dollars in back charges. He would scour the spreadsheets to make sure everything was right and would point out mistakes as he found them.

“That’s why they call him Felix Unger on his water dogs team,” says Nadeau.

He also remembers comparing sales proposal letters with Anderson.

“You could count on Dave to have his letter done a day ahead of time,” says Nadeau. “I’d be doing it at the last minute and he would do it a day ahead, getting there first with the most detail included.”

“He is a wealth of knowledge. He can tell you details about projects we worked on years ago because he remembers everything,” adds Mike Duch, Anderson’s sales assistant.

Duch has realized through watching Anderson how well projects can run when communication is clear and concise.

“He takes the time to explain things,” says Duch. “He really gets involved in helping me understand the ins and outs on any given project. He’s an excellent teacher.”

Moving forward

After Anderson leaves on April 10, he plans to keep fishing with his Water Dogs team, play racquetball, go biking, volunteer with Habitat for Humanity and most importantly, spend as much time as he can with his granddaughters. Not one to sit still, he’s already making plans.

“My brother keeps telling me I’ve got 20 years left and the first ten will be better than the last so I’d better get out there and do something I enjoy,” says Anderson.

He manages to squeeze in a pool league with his son once a week, and volunteers with Ron Schara's fishing clinics that teach kids how to fish, help the disabled on fishing excursions and clean up local parks.

"My wife and I took a road trip to Memphis awhile back and we didn't make any plans beyond the first night," says Anderson. "That was really fun. I'd like to do something like that again."

"I keep asking him how he's going to unwind when he quits working," says Ryan.

Despite the jokes and constant teasing from his RJ Ryan friends, there's a strong undercurrent of loyalty and friendship.

"We've enjoyed working with Dave," says Ryan. "We wish we had employees as good as him. He's poured his heart and soul into his job."

Anderson might not miss the fast-paced world of FABCON and juggling dozens of projects at once, but there's no question he'll miss the people he interacts with every day.

"I've told everybody that my cell phone number won't change," says Anderson. "It's hard to get off the merry-go-round after 40 years of getting up at four or five in the morning and putting in long days. I've worked with some wonderful people."

Gary Janisch is sure a part of Anderson will always be there. "If someone asked him, I'm confident that Dave would help," says Janisch.

And Amy Holliday says she'll try hard not to call him when she's looking for advice.

"I've tried to tell him how important he is to me and I get all emotional about it so I can't," says Holliday. "I'm going to write him a letter and give that to him instead."

Pullout quotes

"Nobody cares more than Dave. He truly cares about his clients and about doing his best." - Amy Holliday, FABCON.

"Dave has always been a class act. He's very professional and courteous. I just appreciate all the Dave has done for Hy-Vee. If there were ever any issues, he would always take my call - even on vacation." - Brad Strehlow, President, Hy-Vee Construction.

"I can't say enough good things about Dave. He's an honest, ethical guy who always made everyone else on his team look good. We were always proud to have him representing the company." Gary Janisch, Owner, HJ Development and former FABCON employee.

"Dave takes the time to explain things. He really gets involved in helping me understand the ins and outs on any given project. He's an excellent teacher." – Mike Duch, FABCON.

"Dave is one of the most professional guys ever - and someone we pick on relentlessly." - Jack Grotkin, RJ Ryan Companies.

"He was always sharing knowledge with the new guys coming in. He felt that it was his duty to help them. I think he wanted the best outcome for the company and the individual." – Jeff Nadeau, former FABCON employee.

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