

A CEO's Unconventional Secret to Success: **Elevate Others First**

Despite the monumental success of his 38-year-old custom homebuilding company, you won't find Desert Star Construction (DSC) CEO Jerry Meek at the top of an ivory tower. In fact, you'll find him at the bottom, giving a boost to everyone around him.

Whether you call it servant leadership or simply investing in others, Meek's driving ambition isn't to elevate himself. Yes, he leads by example in his relentless pursuit of excellence. And yes, he embodies DSC's values of passion and stewardship. But his goal is to elevate his people—which, in turn, elevates his clients and the company as a whole.

"We believe that by strengthening the individual you increase the power of the team," Meek says. "Nobody has ever accomplished anything great alone, which is why we sow into our team members' lives."

At DSC, sowing can look like many things: paying for employees' continuing education, providing lunches at work sites, sponsoring corporate retreats, or hosting keynote speakers. In 2008, during the national housing crisis, it looked like Meek foregoing his salary in order to avoid layoffs.

"We serve our team because they have a choice of where to work, and we want them to know we appreciate them choosing us," he says. "I'm constantly asking them, *How can I help you succeed?*"

Leadership Translates to Success

It could be easy to assume that benevolence equates to lax expectations, but make no mistake: Meek demands the highest performance. "I want your best or nothing. I have a low tolerance for average, because people of our clients' caliber expect the unexpected," he says.

That's not to say mistakes never happen, but in the rare occurrence that they do, Meek is the first to own up to them.

Meek also demands constant improvement, such as incorporating technology's ever-evolving advancements into his company's best practices. "I want to improve every year to the point of being unrecognizable in five years," he says. "We have a culture of open, honest, and direct communication. The best idea wins—and it's not always mine."

It's this mindset that paved the way for DSC to build Arizona's first LEED Gold-certified restaurant in 2010 and complete 27 LEED-certified projects to date, including residences priced in the tens of millions of dollars. And though the company is poised to continue growing in both size and stature, Meek says it will never pursue growth at the expense of compromised quality or relationships.

"We must get better before we get bigger," he concludes, "and that only happens by investing in our people first."



DESERT STAR CONSTRUCTION

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Jerry Meek
is the CEO of
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