Mike Rogers

THE PRESIDENT OF ROGERS & WILLARD, INC., IN MOBILE DISCUSSES ISSUES IN THE INDUSTRY, THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPASSION, AND WHAT HE LEARNED FROM HIS FIRST CONSTRUCTION JOB.

by Hugh J. Rushing

ACN: How long have you been in the construction industry? And how long with your present firm? **MR:** I have been in the industry since 1982. And I’ve been with Rogers & Willard, Inc., since our inception in 1989.

ACN: What was your first job? **MR:** My first job was tending tables at the Holiday Inn on Dauphin Island. My first construction job, besides being a handyman, was working at an international paper mill rebuild in Georgetown, S.C., for Fluor Daniel. That was the summer prior to my freshman year in college, and it was a great experience. It was the hardest physical work I ever performed—not only the hardest but the dirtiest! I was on a labor crew in a mill that had never had any major capital improvement. The memories I had from that work helped get me through college. I knew that I didn’t want to be on a labor crew anymore.

ACN: What’s the biggest issue facing the construction industry in the next decade? **MR:** I believe it is the same time that we were facing in the last decades attracting workers to this industry. While there continue to be advancements in technology, I believe that our industry still lags overall in implementation of new technologies. If we are going to move the industry forward, we are going to need people who understand these technologies and are able to implement them.

ACN: What’s the last book you’ve read? **MR:** *The Agony and the Ecstasy: A Biographical Novel of Michelangelo*. This is a great book because it has a lot of things in it that I love—art, architecture, and Italy.

ACN: The most current CD that you own is? **MR:** A couple of years ago, I loaded all my CDs onto my iPhone. I have almost 6,000 songs covering everything from country to opera! I mainly listen to satellite radio and enjoy The Spectrum, First Wave, and the 70’s station.

ACN: What is the one personality trait that you put above all else? **MR:** Compassion. I believe that compassion makes you a better listener, which makes you a better leader.

ACN: What computer technology do you feel has benefited our industry the most? **MR:** E-mail and Internet. When I got out of school in 1987 and went to work for a large general contractor in Nashville (Hardway Construction), we would get monthly phone logs. As a project manager at the time, I averaged over 40 hours per week on the phone. I now probably average less than one hour per week on the phone, but I have probably doubled my productivity. The ability to use e-mail and the Internet for bidding projects and documentation has totally changed the way we do business. While it is a helpful technology, it does sometimes create its own set of problems, as I think most people are finding out. The sheer volume of e-mail can be overwhelming, and the speed at which people want a response creates challenges.

ACN: Share your business philosophy in a single sentence. **MR:** "Do the right thing." I learned this from Hall Hardway at Hardway Construction in Nashville. I do not think that I have ever been in a situation where I did not know what the "right thing" was, but choosing to do the right thing, that is sometimes difficult to do. It sometimes means losing out in work in place, or refunding money, or apologizing to someone. If you do the right thing, you will be able to sleep well at night.

ACN: If there is one thing you could "do over" in your life, what would it be? **MR:** I would have started applying myself in school earlier. I was fortunate to have great teachers all of my life, but I did not always take advantage of what they were teaching. I would pay attention this time!

ACN: Your advice to younger executives in construction? **MR:** Work hard and you will be recognized and rewarded. I believe our industry provides great opportunity for advancement and the potential to make a good living. Get involved with organizations—industry-related and civic—and meet people. People recognize your commitment, and it serves not only to prove your worth as a leader but also provides a lot of personal satisfaction.

ACN: What is the most important trait you look for in a new hire? **MR:** Character. A person’s character is his or her trademark. If you surround yourself with people of good character, I believe you will succeed.

ACN: The world would be a much better place if... **MR:** We could go back to having politicians that were not career politicians. If we had businessmen that ran our country, I believe they would be more in touch with the constituency.

ACN: You have ABC’s logo actually printed on your firm’s hard hats instead of using a sticker. Why did you decide to do this? **MR:** Technology! It is relatively inexpensive and looks better than a sticker. I think it shows our commitment to ABC. We have been an ABC member since we started our business, and we intend to always be a member. ABC has meant a lot to us over the years and has helped us grow as a company.