



Dan Votaw, Votaw Electric

When Dan Votaw headed to college, he wasn't thinking about working in the electrical contracting business his father had recently opened.

"My father moonlighted doing electrical work while I was growing up, and I remember going to job sites with him as a boy. Then, he started Votaw Electric as a full-time electrical contracting business," says Dan Votaw, Chief Executive Officer, Votaw Electric. "I wasn't planning on going into the business. But I graduated with a degree in business during the 1972 recession and came back to Fort Wayne to work temporarily in the company."

Votaw Electric was a small company at that time, operating from the family's home. Dan started out working in the field, wiring houses and hog barns, for example. As he gained experience, he moved into other aspects of the business, including estimating.

"The first job I won was because in my bid I left out an entire component of the system," Dan says. "My dad said, 'you're going to do the job and cover it' and I did. I didn't make that mistake again."

Through Dan's leadership over the years, Votaw Electric has grown to include services in electrical contracting, control systems, communications, and power quality. Today, the company employs 120 people and serves commercial, industrial, institutional, and healthcare customers. Services are delivered to general contractors, construction managers, architects, and directly to owners through conventional bidding as well as negotiated arrangements.

"We've grown by adding services to respond to the needs of our customers. But, in responding to those needs, we also learned that we couldn't do it all," Dan says. "Now, we are able to team with others, relying on their expertise to seamlessly deliver what our customers want."

As the company added services and technology, it also added other family members, including Dan's younger brothers. Mike Votaw manages special services, such as industrial controls. Tom Votaw leads the voice, data, and security services.



Throughout the company's successful 50-year history of providing consistent workmanship and productivity, Dan has been committed to maintaining Votaw Electric's focus on people.

"Even in this age of technology, we are as focused on people today as we were when this was a small company and my mother was the person answering the phone," Dan says. "We want our employees to gain experience and build their own sense of entrepreneurship and ownership."

The trust Dan has placed in the company's employees was furthered through succession planning efforts a few years ago. As a result, 70 percent of the company is now employee-owned.

"People are what give an organization its value," Dan says. "I believe how we treat people and value them is vital. This decision to ensure corporate continuity through employee ownership has been especially rewarding."

Dan says he has always been a student of business and entrepreneurship. He believes good leaders are good team members first.

"Good leaders must be good team members, because the same qualities are important in both roles," he says. "I also believe in servitude, putting others before ourselves. That concept of servant teamwork is how we work at Votaw Electric, and it's how we want the company to proceed into the future."

Valuing others is how Dan also lives his life.

"Business is not about valuing money. It's about valuing hard work, initiative, responsibility, and inventiveness, and then sharing every success with the team," Dan says. "In the end, we're all people, and our relationships in business and in life are more relevant than ever before."

