



CLEANTECH



Brad Miller

CEO, IMW Industries Ltd.

Brad Miller has a motto: fail often, fail fast and fail cheap, then get back to the drawing board. Perhaps not every entrepreneur would embrace failure with such enthusiasm, but it is this willingness to take risks and accept the consequences – good or bad – that has brought Miller so much success.

Five years ago when Miller bought IMW Industries, a Chilliwack-based manufacturer of compressed-natural-gas equipment, it was a small operation that offered reasonable returns. In other words, a safe bet.

In 2006 the Canadian dollar soared and that safe bet quickly became “an absolute dog,” as Miller puts it. At risk of being shut out of the market by South American and Chinese competitors, the safest option would have been to cut costs and hope for the best. Instead, Miller took a gamble. The company reduced prices on its natural-gas compressors while increasing production and investing heavily in more efficient equipment.

“Instead of just working harder and trying to gain five per cent here or two per cent there, we looked at a whole new way of doing it,” says Miller. “Those were some intense years, but looking back it was the best thing for us; it’s what allowed this company to be competitive internationally.”

Revenues increased from \$8 million in 2006 to \$52 million in 2008. Annual production capacity rose from 32 natural-gas compression systems to 600. The company, which has subsidiaries in Bangladesh and Colombia, expanded to China. It recently opened a manufacturing plant in Shanghai and landed a \$30-million contract with ChinaGas Holdings Ltd. to equip natural-gas-powered taxi and bus fueling stations.

This from a man who admits he had “no aspirations” to go into business. Miller, a mechanical engineer, was just out of college and beginning his career when he realized his employer, Advanced Bending Technologies, was on the verge of insolvency. He decided to buy a majority share in the company and eventually turned things around

and bought the rest when he was just 25.

The move wasn’t just about saving his job, explains Miller; it was the challenge of solving the company’s problems. Though Miller admits he is sometimes more eager to fix things than he should be, taking on what some called a hopeless case early in his career paid off. “Now when a tough time hits, I know what I have to do is adapt and adjust and stay focused on the future,” he says.

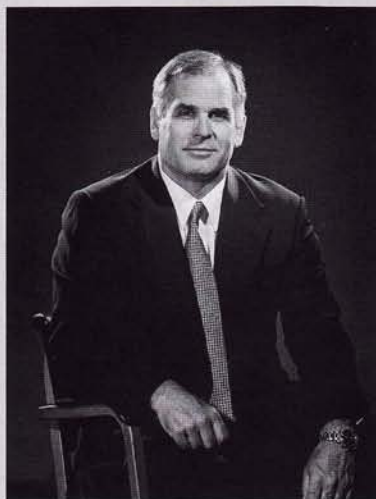
The future for IMW Industries, says Miller, is to become the manufacturer to the cleantech industry. At a time when environmental and economic concerns are top of mind, it’s a prescient move.

According to Miller, IMW’s compressed-natural-gas equipment has already displaced about a million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide. Although North American adoption has been slow, the economic and environmental advantage of natural gas over petroleum is catching on.

The company recently added contract work to its business model and is now building fuel cell components. Miller says he wasn’t initially interested in contract manufacturing, but, as a result of his willingness to test new waters, he is looking at expanding his Chilliwack plant at a time when many others are downsizing.

“It was partly my way of looking at things differently,” says Miller. “That’s the way I’m wired. I’m always mulling things over, thinking, ‘How can I do it better?’ And I know I’ve got more ideas than I’ve got life left in me.” – *Colleen Kimmett*

RUNNERS-UP



Jonathan Rhone

PRESIDENT AND CEO,
NEXTERRA SYSTEMS CORP.

Jonathan Rhone spent most of his career working in the energy field. A graduate of environmental studies at UBC, he’s long had an interest in cleantech. In 2003 Rhone and his partners established Nexterra to develop a technology that allows clients to generate their own clean, low-cost energy using biomass. Rhone plans to build on the successful introduction of Nexterra’s technology at the University of South Carolina and the U.S. Department of Energy’s Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee. – *Maged Sedky*

Ross MacLachlan

PRESIDENT AND CEO, LIGNOL ENERGY CORP.

Ross MacLachlan’s first task as executive chair of Lignol was to recruit an advisory group of industry experts and put together a team of senior executives. “I began to build the business from there,” says MacLachlan, who was a member of Canada’s national rowing team. He adds that people are crucial to building a company and planning for its success: “The one thing in rowing that you get is that there isn’t a hierarchy in the boat. Everybody is pulling together in unison.” – *M.S.* □