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# Family Values

FOUR GENERATIONS HAVE PASSED THROUGH THE DOORS OF WILEY, AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND OWNER RODNEY WILEY SAYS THE COMPANY'S VALUE SYSTEM IS STRONGER THAN EVER.

**H**arry Taylor established the original company, H Taylor and Son, in 1918 after serving in the Australian Flying Corps during World War I. Years later, Gordon Wiley joined the company as an apprentice carpenter and eventually married the boss's daughter. During the Second World War, many of the workers, including Gordon, left the company to serve their country. On returning to Australia, Gordon completed an engineering retraining course and worked with James Hardie. In 1961, Gordon re-joined the firm and renamed it GW Wiley and Co.

Gordon's son Rodney joined the company in 1971 and has successfully grown the company to where it is today. He currently fulfils the role of Executive Director. "When I first started working full time at ARC Engineering,"

Rodney explains, "I continued my study at night for my structural and civil engineering qualifications. I then went off to England for 12 months or so for a company called John Lang. I returned to join the company when my father's junior partner retired due to ill health. The company operated from under my father's house, exposing me to every aspect of a small business, which was a great learning experience. I learnt from the bottom up.

"My early work experience was from a design background, and I very quickly came to the conclusion that we should start designing our own work, and shortly after we employed a draftsman and started to design and build projects."

Rodney says his father, Gordon, was a significant source of inspiration. "There are a lot of people in the construction industry who have a seat-of-the-pants approach, and he didn't. He was an analyst. He didn't have a degree or anything; he was a carpenter, but he'd done the engineering training and he would have made a fantastic engineer. So, obviously, he had a big influence on the way I thought about and approached things." ❦





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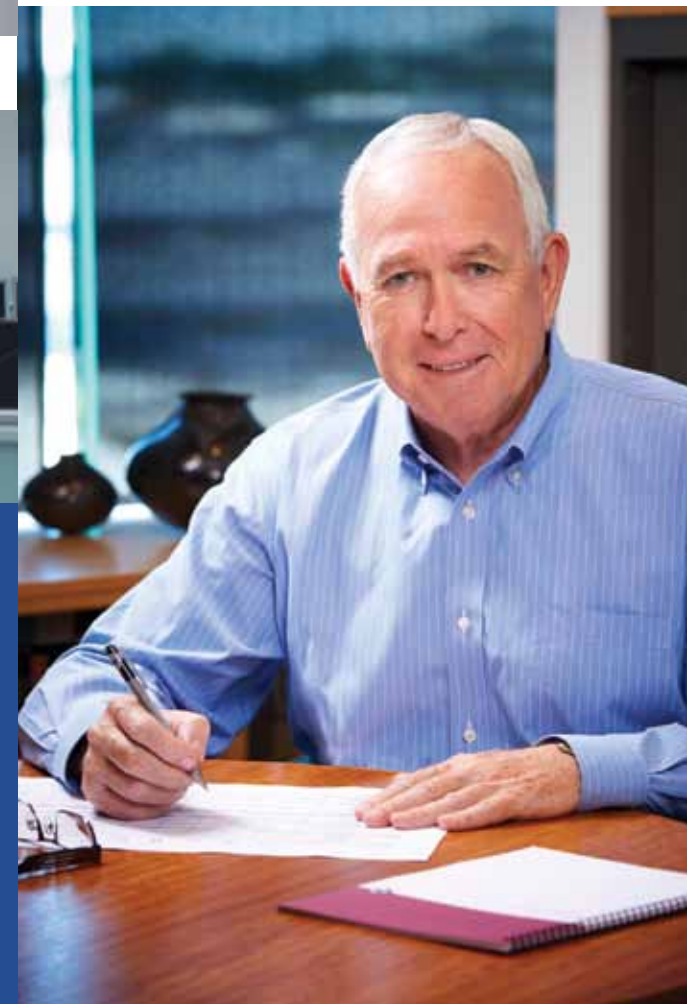
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- Rodney Wiley



Rodney's son Tom Wiley joined the company in 1994 and has now assumed the role of Managing Director after sharing the position with Rodney for a time. Rodney explains how this was not just a simple five-minute handover: “We take our approach to family succession very seriously. He's been groomed for a good 10 years, and I've always pushed this approach throughout the organisation at all levels. We have a board with an external chairman, and we are quite formal in the way we operate the company. Tom has gained extensive experience since joining Wiley, working in all aspects of the organisation, as well as completing a range of degrees and qualifications.

“His [Tom's] mission was to introduce a more corporate approach to manage the changes in the company we began experiencing due to our ongoing growth. You can't have a one-man-band organisation the way we started. We've matured as an organisation over the last few years, primarily in the way we approach business. Tom was the one introducing these changes and empowering the teams to evolve and match our progress.

“The most important advice is to not lose those family values. We have a very strong value system and we emphasise this throughout the organisation. We've got five key value items and everyone knows what they are. It does take a while for our new employees to understand that we're quite different from other construction groups. We take care of not only our family but all the families within the group. And I think that's the thing that I emphasise the most – don't lose sight of our value system.”

Wiley invests in its people, making a range of training schemes available to workers. “We go to an enormous amount of trouble to make sure we get the right candidates with the right mix of diverse backgrounds and experience at the beginning. We have young kids come in and we put them through diverse training. That's not necessarily academic training. It also involves site experience and sometimes secondment to consultants and subcontractors. We focus on exposing each person to the different disciplines throughout the organisation, to make sure they understand the other roles and can work together as multidisciplinary teams. So they get to know a much broader base than an office that only does structures or only does architecture. We mix them all together,” says Rodney. ❦





Wiley is the leader in the design and construction of complex food-processing facilities. Rodney says the decision to focus on food manufacturing plants was made early on in his career at Wiley. “In the early 70s, there were a lot of contractors, low barriers to entry, and a very competitive government business market. Back then, we used to have credit squeezes and very high interest rates. All of these things conspired to make it a very fluctuating business to be in, so we decided that if we were a specialist in something like food then we could add some more value. We had done a lot of this work and learnt some valuable lessons, which was handy because there are lots of traps in the food industry.”

This proved to be a successful approach, with Wiley today leading the industry. “Our business has grown to the point where nearly all our work is in the food industry. The food business is very competitive, and, to survive, the manufacturers need to look at new technologies – and that’s changing very rapidly. To combine all the food regulations required in a building with all the regulations that are put on building operations and engineering, and finish up with

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something that conforms, is a major task. And it is even more difficult when it’s a brownfield project, where you’re working on a manufacturing plant that’s actually operating. You have to maintain health conditions during construction, which is extremely difficult. This is where our practice and experience really kicks in and becomes valuable.”

Additionally, Wiley sets itself apart from competitors by its ability to see a project throughout each stage of design and construction. The company’s one-stop-shop approach has allowed it to integrate services and create a more cohesive process. “A lot of our work was industrial, working in small food plants or doing maintenance for big companies,

and building silos. There was a lot of demarcation between the various players in the design-build process. So we came up with an efficient solution that integrated all aspects of delivering these complicated projects, and, really, that’s what I’ve been doing for 30 years. My master goal has been to cut out any overlaps and open up communication lines between all the professions, trades and subcontractors – so that in the end you get teams working collectively and not adversarially.”

This streamlining of the construction process allows Wiley to cooperate with a variety of companies. “Most food companies can’t afford a bunch of engineers sitting in their office, so they use people like us. If you’re working for a small entrepreneurial company, you deal with the managing director and he makes the decisions. But if you’re working for a big corporation, they have processes that they need to go through to procure services. So we have to adapt to those, and consequently the service we offer to a big multinational company is quite different to the service we offer to smaller companies.”



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Rodney believes many companies need to analyse and streamline their own operations. “We work with some of the largest companies in Australia, and the fact is that because they are so process driven and big, it gets to the stage where it doesn’t matter what their employees do as long as they do it in a certain way and they tick all the boxes. So much can be lost by doing it this way, and it is very inefficient. I’ve got a passion to try and get to the stage where even big companies get the benefit of some innovation and maybe bend their processes and challenge them. A country like ours cannot afford to have big, inefficient companies, and I always actively try to get those messages across when I can. Other CEOs think it’s not necessarily that important – but it is!”

Wiley is exploring new technology and management systems that will transform its business. One system that it is slowly introducing is the building information management system (BIM), which allows workers to construct 3-D drawings of a project while incorporating scheduling, estimating, and providing ongoing facility maintenance if the client requires it. “One of the things we find is, because the construction industry is so fragmented and there are so many small

consultants and contractors, businesses don’t have the ability to buy expensive IT equipment and software, as it’s very expensive to run and to train the operators. There are also issues with split liabilities. One of our advantages, being integrated as we are, is we can do it for ourselves and we can use some of these integration services and software packages that are available now,” explains Rodney.

These changes will be primarily made under the direction of Tom Wiley, with Rodney assuming a more strategic role. “I’m going to maintain my role as a director. There’s a lot of things strategically I want to work on, but I don’t want to necessarily be as totally involved in the operations as I was. I’m on call. I mentor a number of people within the group and outside the group as well. I won’t have 100 per cent contact time at the office; I’ll have projects that I can do for them and lead for them. But that doesn’t mean that I have 100 per cent contact time.”

However, despite these advancements, Rodney says Wiley’s values will remain the same. “Since 1918, we have had a family tradition of being involved and caring about the broader community in which we operate. We strive to be the place to work, the place to do business, and the company to emulate.” •

### WILEY’S CORE VALUES

**A sense of community:** At Wiley, we value relationships that include nurture, and support our people as we would a family. We actively seek life balance by working hard, having fun, and celebrating openly. We care passionately about the environment and our surroundings with an eye to making a difference where we can.

**Integrity in all we do:** At Wiley, we take responsibility for achieving the best we can with the hand we are dealt. We keep our promises and always follow through. We do not hide behind half-truths, excuses or blame. We respect each other equally and act honestly with courage. There is one set of rules that applies to everyone.

**Quality first:** At Wiley, we take pride in what we do, and we do what makes us proud. We pursue excellence in a professional way through continual improvement. We set high standards for ourselves and others. Our passion for presentation and form is the tangible way we communicate our commitment to quality.

**Future focus:** At Wiley, we plan and act with the big picture in mind. We enable and challenge ourselves and our clients to lead. We are always receptive to new ideas. We embrace change and the future with enthusiasm. We take pride in our ability to creatively problem solve and find the best solutions in every situation. Our belief in continuous learning reflects a pure delight and appreciation for creative discovery and innovation that leads to elegant solutions.

**Empower our people:** At Wiley, we actively encourage and enable our people to develop and grow to their greatest potential. We embrace individuality, and provide a flexible working environment in which there is room to learn from our mistakes. We support personal development and autonomy, yet encourage teamwork and collaboration. By recognising and celebrating our individual and collective strengths, we empower our people.

