



Craig Miller (left) and Todd Miller stand next to a picture of the company's founder, Walter Myers, in the conference room at Myers Spring.

Myers Spring Company:

Applying an 80/20 Philosophy to Solve Customer Problems

By Gary McCoy,
Managing Editor

Todd Miller represents the third-generation to run family-owned and operated Myers Spring Company based in Logansport, Indiana. He says most of the growth that occurs at Myers Spring comes down to solving customer problems.

"We have six degreed engineers on staff, and more importantly, maintenance, CNC operators and office staff with decades of practical experience; that's because solving problems for customers is really where the new business is at," explained Miller, who serves as president and CEO. "And it always was here (referring to the past), but it's that much more important now.

"When we review customer designs, we do a thorough analysis, and it's because we engender a philosophy around here of 80 percent planning and 20 percent action," Miller said. "We try and emphasize that with our customers. You'll never hear, and I don't like my managers to say, 'Trust me.' It's something we earn daily."

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Continuing a Legacy

Trust is a legacy value passed down through the ages by Walter Myers, who started Myers Spring in his garage in 1946 with his partner, Don Lindley. Craig Miller, Todd’s father, served as president from 1985 to 2000 and now is president emeritus of Myers Spring.

Craig said his stepfather, Walter Myers, had many sayings he would repeat to employees and customers during his nearly 40 years running the company.

“Walt always said, ‘Make it right, because someday you may buy it.’”

Though geographically small, the Logansport area has sprouted many spring companies.

“Walt worked for Muehlhausen Spring, which eventually became Rockwell and later Matthew Warren, before starting his own company,” explained Craig Miller. “He worked with Walter Pesaresi, who later started Winamac Coil Spring in nearby Kewanna.”

Craig has fond memories of his stepfather. “He was a fine Christian man, a super guy; they don’t come any better. He had a sign on his desk that read, ‘I may not always be right, but I’m always the boss.’”

Though retired, Craig can often be seen at the Myers Spring plant mowing the lawn during the summer. He also remains active by delivering products to customers and picking up parts from suppliers.

Craig spent years 19 years teaching school before coming to run Myers Spring.

Back Home in Indiana

Though Myers Spring is in Logansport, Todd Miller grew up in in a small town nearby called Twelve Mile that is also in Cass County. Both his parents were schoolteachers, and Miller said he basically grew up on the farm. To make extra money, he often worked for area farmers doing whatever they needed, including baling hay and de-tasseling corn.

“I had the chance to mess around a lot with all things mechanical,” explained Miller.

Miller ended up at Purdue University, where he pursued a degree in mechanical engineering technology. His true passion was singing baritone in the school’s glee club. He eventually became manager of the glee club, which allowed him to travel the world and to spend time with the president of the university. He even once had

the opportunity to dine with astronauts Gene Cernan and Neil Armstrong.

Growing up, Miller said he knew a position at Myers Spring was always an option.

Miller remembers as a small child going out to dinner with his grandfather on Mother’s Day, because everyone else in the family was busy either hosting or participating in a Mother’s Day dinner at their church.

At that dinner, Miller’s grandfather, referring to Myers Spring, said, ‘Someday, this could be yours.’

Miller said, “Those words kind of de-incentivized my scholastic yearnings in high school.”

It was a view he called the “cushy seat syndrome.”

Miller’s grandfather died in 1985, and he figured he would join the business when he finished his studies at Purdue.

During his sophomore year at Purdue, Miller said he was cruising along with the “cushy seat” in the back of his mind, mostly getting average grades in college. “I woke up one day and thought, ‘Uh-oh what if I hate that place (Myers Spring)?’”

Miller said at that point he started “kicking it in,” and his grades went up.

After graduating from Purdue, Miller joined Honda of America at the Anna Engine Plant in Anna, Ohio. He worked there two years before moving to Japan as part of the company’s new North American Task Group.

“The reason I wanted to work for an international company is because my parents had hosted 11 exchange students. My parents started hosting international students after I left the house, but I always envied their guests and the opportunity to live overseas,” explained Miller.

Miller moved to Japan, got married to Gretchen and moved back to Indiana in 1996 to be closer to family.

Just one week after the birth of his daughter Eberle in 1996, Miller’s college roommate was killed in a fiery plane crash. These two events marked a pivotal time in Miller’s life and he and Gretchen decided it was time to move back to Indiana.

Miller recalls, “I said to my wife, ‘If we’re going to give this family business thing a shot, this is the time.’”

Taking a significant pay cut, the Miller family moved back home to Indiana and Miller joined his dad at Myers Spring.

“Once our daughter was born, we decided we needed a parent at home and Gretchen was going to be that person and she signed up for that,” recalls Miller. “That was



Recent Myers Spring team photo outside the company's headquarters in Logansport, Indiana. Photo by Rich Voorhees.

always our plan, so there were times when the checking account was pretty darn low.”

Miller said these events represented a massive financial and personal change. He said they lived lean for years during the transition that eventually led him to take over running the company in 2000.

Lean and Green

Myers Spring has adopted a tagline of “Built lean and green.”

Miller says the “built lean” part is driven by the relentless training they are involved with on lean techniques and Six Sigma. Myers Spring is TS 16949, ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certified.

“The green thing is our ISO 14001 certification,” explained Miller. “Anything that helps us drive productivity and efficiency improvements.”

The company once filled six dumpsters a month, but is now down to one dumpster every other month.

“We’re recycling, changing lights and involved in scrap reduction,” explained Miller. “Lean tactics and environmental stewardship go hand in hand, and that’s how we try to drive it.”

In terms of what Miller likes about the spring business and what he doesn’t like, he said it can be summed up in one word: “manpower.”

“It’s the best and worst part of the job,” said Miller. He said he all his managers read a book called “The Coming Jobs War,” in an effort to become more involved in workforce development.

Miller is part of a 10-county regional group called Wabash Heartland Industrial Network. The network has applied for private grant money, half of which Miller says will be used for workforce development.

He says the effort is similar to what SMI is doing with its recent decision to join the Dream It. Do It. program. Jim Parsons, executive vice president at Myers Spring, is serving as SMI’s champion to help lead the charge for the association (see related story on page 67).

Myers Spring has been a part of Manufacturing Day for the past two years and Miller says they are committed to doing this for the next 10 years. The company annually brings 350 fifth-graders for a tour and activities related to manufacturing.

“Our goal is to have every single fifth-grader come through our plant, with the long-term goal of changing the culture and attitude toward manufacturing,” explained Miller. “Our wages are considerably above the county averages, way above it, and it’s not the dark, dirty and dangerous environment that so many people think manufacturing is.”

Miller says Myers Spring gets stacks and stacks of thank you notes from the fifth-graders who attend Manufacturing Day.

“It is so great, and literally of the 350 fifth-graders that come through, I probably could hire 300 of them, because they all want to work here by the time they are done with the tour.”

Miller says changing the workforce issue comes down to “changing the culture, changing ideas and changing the way people think about manufacturing. It’s not pigeonholing all kids toward college.”

He says college is important for a lot of people and is the right place for them, but it's not the right place for most people.

Myers Spring is also involved in sponsoring a robotics team, and has donated CNC equipment to a local career center. Company personnel like Parsons are regularly out in the schools giving speeches on the viability of manufacturing careers.

Not Competing on Price

Miller says Myers Spring has been adding a lot of new part numbers lately and preparing for the future. He believes they can double the size of the business.

"I don't ever want any job on price," said Miller, "and we don't get jobs on price.

"What is the saying, 'If you're not unique, you've got to be cheap?' We stink at being cheap," he said with a laugh.

He said Myers Spring is always trying to build a better mousetrap. "We've developed a lot of new processes; we've solved a lot of problems that customers were having and we're getting noticed."

Miller says some of the company's new opportunities are coming from parts that are currently delivered from overseas.

"We've got our parts on test, and they're far exceeding what multiple customers are getting now," said Miller. He said this new product line is spring-related, and Myers Spring is vertically integrating when it can and doing more processes that they used to outsource.

"It's driving my engineers and production planners and everybody nuts!"

Miller says Myers Spring wants to be a single source for customers, and he says for many customers they are. He said for certain applications they will "punt" on, including Bellville washers and constant force springs.

Back to his 80 percent planning and 20 percent action mantra, Miller says Myers Spring wants to be the solution provider for customers. "My team works really hard to offer a better product, a better value."

At Home

Miller was introduced to his wife, Gretchen, through his grandmother. They met July 4, 1991, got married July 4, 1992, and immediately moved to Japan for Millers' job with Honda.

"I jokingly tell Gretchen she got a year-and-a-half island honeymoon!"

Their daughter Eberle came along in 1996. She's now 21 and a student in war studies at King's College in London. The couple's youngest daughter, Cecilia, is 18 and recently returned from Spain after a year as an exchange student in Spain.

Miller said the exchange student tradition that his parents started many years ago has been passed down. The Millers have hosted seven exchange students to date.

In his spare time, Miller enjoys being with his family, fishing, flying and photography.

He also believes in giving back to the local community by participating in and supporting his church, local nonprofits and politics.

Miller just turned 50 and says he's in a "solid midlife crisis" with the recent purchase of a motorcycle. He still enjoys singing and serves as the cantor for his local Catholic church.

Miller joined the Indiana Chamber of Commerce board of directors in 2010.

In an article in the November/December 2016 *BizVoice/Indiana Chamber*, Miller said, "My involvement in the Indiana Chamber is primarily motivated out of trying to help Logansport. The whole state is obviously important to me and we can have an influence. But I do think that each board member can have an influence (on their hometown)."

Miller was named the 2016 Volunteer of the Year by the Indiana Chamber.

In the article announcing his award Miller acknowledges that his family, in particular his wife Gretchen, is instrumental in his success. And does he think his grandfather, whose legacy he is now undertaking, would be proud of him?

"My dad said he would be proud, and that's what meant the most to me. I'd like to think he'd be proud, but a third person's opinion is important." ■