

Julie Rainville, **co-president of Fraco**, talks to Lindsey Anderson **about healthy competition, product updates and how transparency in business is vital.**

Climbing the ladder

Julie Rainville never expected to be co-President of Fraco. After receiving a bachelor's and second degree in sociology, Rainville's dream was to organize and work in refugee camps helping people.

"One day, my dad called me in for a meeting and offered me to work at Fraco with my sister who was already there," she tells me. "He said, 'I know this is not what you studied for, but I want to make sure you will never tell me that I didn't give you this opportunity!'"

A year later, after working reception, answering phones, becoming a legal assistant for the company's lawyer and becoming accounts payable, Rainville had had enough.

"I told my sister I was done at Fraco," she recalls. "She then asked me, 'Is there something you would like to try here as a job?'"

Rainville piped up; "Project management."

"I fell in love with the job," Rainville says. "Contributing to building projects, managing customer expectations and relationships and working with management and the installation team was a great challenge."

Rainville had made her decision: she wanted to build a career at Fraco.

"I thought back to my childhood and how I grew up around the masonry business, since my father was a single dad raising three children and managing his masonry company from home," she says.

Today, Rainville and her sister Emmanuelle are

co-presidents of the company, taking over from their father in 2016.

Business models

Rainville says the day-to-day at Fraco consists of a few basics: making sure the company is in line with the strategic plan it has built, developing new products, projects and partnerships and supporting the directors in their roles and challenges.

But that's where the fundamentals stop. "We have two types of management," she says. "One is what we call a participative management."

Participative management is exactly how it sounds – keeping employees involved, and also being highly transparent.

"We share all information with our employees – from everybody's salaries to our financial results," Rainville explains.

"Because we strongly believe that if our employees know what our plan is, along with our objectives and challenges, then their contributions will be much more interesting.

"We spend more than

eight hours per day at work. It is the place where employees invest most of their energy and creativity, and people need to feel they make a difference in the big picture."

On the strategic side of management, Fraco structures its business on the Gino Wickman method. The technique involves: regular meetings, efficient communication, measuring success and focusing on problems and how to solve them versus just reporting them.

Both Fraco presidents went to entrepreneurship school for a two-year program where they were introduced to the rigorous method. >

Fraco continues to innovate and build new products, and customers can expect debuts in 2020.



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These styles, coupled with a strong North American market for both rental and sales, have put Fraco in a position to launch new products.

"We introduced the elevator line and it is accelerating our penetration of the market, along with our line of construction and permanent elevators," Rainville says. "We are focusing on developing strong partnerships with fleet owners that choose the path of diversifying their range of products by adding elevators to their fleet of mast climbers or refurbishing their fleet of mast climbers with newer equipment."

Rainville expects 2020 to be "as good as 2019."

"We are already signing great contracts for next year and what we have in our sales pipeline is very promising," she says. "Our dealers are very optimistic about the American market, as well."

European waves

Fraco has been involved in the overseas European market for 20 years, but, Rainville says, it is a niche market because Fraco's products are mostly designed for North American needs and customers.

"Each country has its own particularity in terms of working habits and regulations, and we have a tendency to underestimate those differences," Rainville notes. "It is just like cultural differences. Even in the same country, you have different ways of doing things depending of the area."

Rainville references the company's recent acquisition of Spain-based Torgar.

"We are convinced that Torgar, with 40 years of experience, is in a great position to take bigger shares of the market with our support," she says. "Torgar is also a great opportunity to develop a smaller range of products for the American market."

"As we speak, a lot of companies in the U.S. are already using European products, but how many of those are really complying with the American standard? The importer is taking all the risk since he is fully liable if something happens."

"Fraco wants to supply small complying products to American fleet owner and users. We want to back up our product just as we do for the Fraco line right now because it is a part of our mission to offer full service and support with our product. We will do the same with the smaller [Torgar] products."



Bright and challenging horizons

Fraco is currently working on an addition to its high-rise line of products, which will be geared to a "new trade," Rainville teases. On the masonry side, the company is also developing "something very interesting," but as it is in the early stages, Rainville kept the details close to her vest. "I can't give you more info right now, but stay tuned for the next World of Concrete."

When asked what some of the biggest challenges facing the mast climbing work platform market for Fraco is right now, the first answer Rainville notes is as simple as it is annoying: rust. Fraco became acutely aware of the issue when they performed an inspection procedure for a customer.

"Rusting of paint on the equipment is a problem," she says. "We have chosen to galvanize every component since we have

Fraco units on a recent jobsite.

noticed the danger of rust from the inside of the tube that was not being managed by the market."

Another challenge for the MCWP market, like many in our industry, is the lack of skilled labor for contractors. On top of this, Fraco is also fielding requests on how to increase productivity on jobsites.

"Customers still ask for a simple unit but I strongly believe that we are on the edge of a complete change with the new generation of user and buyers," she says. "They live in a very technological world and there is no reason for them not to ask for the same technology on both their elevator and platform."

The industry is also facing increased competition, which Rainville says her view regarding it "changed completely since 2008."

"In the industry I grew up in, competition was the enemy, but as we went through the financial crisis, people working for different brands became much more open to each other," she says. "We were trying to help each other and create some synergy."

"When I look at our industry today, I see a world of consolidation. You have the big guys and the others. If we want to survive in this world, we should help each other and build synergy."

But why would two companies spend their time and efforts on the same type of project and share the market? To work together and optimize potential, Rainville says.

"We actually did work with most of our competitors in the last 10 years and that is the way I want to continue to go," she says. "Competition is positive because it brings the level of expectation where it should be, and it keeps us out of our comfort zone."

"A comfort zone is a killer and does not serve the customer well," Rainville says. "To be honest with you, by our nature, we love to create synergy. We are targeting not only America but the world as well. It is such a privilege to contribute to the success of all those contractors who are building the cities of tomorrow." ■

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