

A People Company

Interpersonal skills come in handy for Steve Crawley who credits success to his employees.

By David Abbott

KINSTON, NC

Crawley Timber Co. was the 2005 North Carolina Forestry Assn. Logger of the Year, presented by Forestry Mutual Insurance Co. It's not an unimpressive feat, considering that Steve Crawley had only been in the logging side of the business for five years. He gives the credit to his employees. "I didn't do this, my people did," he says. "I can't stress that enough."



Born in 1944, Crawley grew up working on his grandfather's farm in Halifax County. Besides the farm, Marion Crawley started Crawley Timber to supply wood fiber to Halifax Paper Co. Crawley's father Stanford carried on the small wood dealing business.

After meeting his future wife at Chowan College, Crawley enrolled in the pre-med program at East Carolina University. However, he left the school in 1965 and went to work for a small loan company, later owned by Manufactures Hanover Trust Co. Crawley excelled. By the end of his first year he was an assistant manager, and before the middle of his second year he was a branch manager. Soon he was promoted to district supervisor. By 1979 he supervised 13 branch offices.

But Crawley's career was not ultimately to be in the world of finance. When Stanford became ill, he called his son home to Kinston to help him run the small family company, which bought timber and hired subcontractors to cut and haul to Champion Paper, International Paper and Weyerhaeuser mills. Although his white-collar days were finished, Crawley knew that the people skills he'd developed would still be useful.

"You have to have a real good feel for your people," he explains. "It comes down to an ability to understand what they need in the leadership and support areas, and it is my job to be aware of each one's needs."

In 1985, Crawley bought the company from his father and continued to run it solely as a wood dealership, contracting with three independent loggers. In August 2000, he started his



first company logging crew. The decision was born from a concern with the quality of work being done by many loggers. "The people who contracted with us were good," Crawley says. "But to meet our long-term needs, I felt it was best we had control over how the job was done."

Today he fields two crews of his own and contracts two independent loggers. All of his crews perform thinning, select-cuts and clear-cuts. They also do prep work for reforestation on private land. All together, Crawley Timber hauls 3,000 tons a week, an even mix of hardwood and pine.

The crews haul treelength pine to the Weyerhaeuser sawmill in Ayden; pulpwood to Weyerhaeuser in New Burn; ply logs and chip-n-saw to Georgia-Pacific in Dudley; hardwood pulpwood to International Paper in Snow Hill; and hardwood logs to Josey Lumber Co. in Scotland Neck and Jerry Williams Lumber in Smithfield.

Crawley is proud of his employees. When his company received the award from Forestry Mutual Insurance, Crawley made individual awards for each of his employees to thank them for their commitment to the company and the quality job they do day in and day out. All of his loggers are ProLogger participants.

Two Crews

Crawley says both crews have a lot of talent and are equally capable of handling any kind of job. Moreover, he says they can run on their own, without him. "In a way they are like independent contractors," he says. "I'm the boss, but they don't need me out there. They call me and tell me what they need to work with, and it is my job to provide them with what they need to be successful, in parts, timber and information."



Even so, Crawley visits both job sites every day, partly to know what is going on but partly just to let the men know he is involved. He enjoys it. He listens to the suggestions his men have and then makes the final decisions.

Each crew averages 35-40 loads a week.

Brad Baugus supervises both crews for Crawley. His brother Jimmy Baugus runs the loader and oversees the first crew. Mike McKinney and Myron Brinson drive the skidders, while Walter Heath is the cutter man. The truck driver on the first crew is Ray Dillahunt, who is joined by several contract drivers.

Tommy McGee mans the loader and acts as foreman on the second crew. Thomas Hall drives the feller-buncher. Nathaniel Green runs a skidder. Anthony (Shorty) Wyatt drives a skidder.



Larry Brock limbs with a chain saw. Floyd Baugus, father to Brad and Jimmy, drives a truck for the second crew.

After deciding to start a company logging crew, Crawley knew the best thing he could do was to seek out and hire qualified and reliable people to run the crew for him, and then let them do their job. His first recruit was Brad Baugus.

"I knew about Brad because he had worked for a contractor that had cut timber for me," Crawley recalls. The contractor lost his health and was forced out of business. Soon after, Crawley contacted Brad and explained his intentions, offering him the chance to head up the crew.

"I told him it was not going to be a deal where I hired people and they ran to me. I told him, I'm going to hire you and let you hire everybody else. The crew needs to have an allegiance to Brad first." It was a sign of trust and respect that Crawley wanted to extend, indicating that Brad and the men he chose to recruit would be responsible for the jobs as stakeholders, not merely functioning as hired hands.

Naturally Brad enlisted his brother, father and an uncle, along with McKinney. The first crew started with four people operating one skidder, one loader and one cutter. Gradually the operation expanded. Crawley started a second crew, hiring McGee, Wyatt and Green, in February 2003.

Turnover has been minimal, though he has lost a truck driver due to "bad habits" on the road. "If I can't have a truck that's safe on the road, then I just won't have one."



Crawley is planning to add a skidder and loader to one crew and eventually split the larger crew into two smaller crews. "With the amount of timber we have bought, we need more production to keep up with it. We are almost to the point of having to turn timber down. If we don't buy any new timber for a year, it will take us two years to cut what we have right now."

The logging crews are set up as separate companies from Crawley Timber and are paid like independent contractors. They have separate checking accounts and draw from those accounts for machines purchases, repair and maintenance costs and payroll. "Keeping it separated is the only way I can tell how we are really doing," Crawley says.

Crawley figures that both crews combined haven't missed a week's work in the last two years.

His crews usually stay within a 35-75 mile range of Kinston and within 50 miles of the various mills to which they haul. Each tract on average takes three to four weeks to complete, with tracts ranging in size from 25 to 150 acres. Moving from tract to tract can

vary in time, but with two lowboys the crews can move quickly. "I can move off a finished tract and be hauling wood off the next tract by that afternoon," he says.

Besides the men on the logging crews, Crawley Timber maintains a small office staff, including Crawley's wife, Marie, and son Malcolm, and a team of timber buyers. Foresters Donald Canady and Willie Robinson have been wood buyers with Crawley for 25 years. He describes them as two of the most valuable assets he acquired from his father. Two of Crawley's sons also work as timber buyers. John has been with the company for 15 years and Cecil for 10. All in all, the company employs 19, not counting independent contract loggers and truck drivers.

After all his years in the wood dealing business, Crawley says having his own logging crews has been an educational experience. "I've learned you have to have a lot of patience. A lot of people out there have a lot of ability and talent. You just have to find a way to let them bring it to the surface, and they will if you give them the opportunity."

Machines

The Baugus crew works with two John Deere 648 skidders, a Timberjack 460D skidder, Tigercat 720B cutter with 22 in. head, 611 EX Hydro-Ax with 22 in. head and 310 Prentice loader with CSI 4400 deck saw. The McGee crew fields similar iron, including two John Deere 648 skidders, a 726 Tigercat feller-buncher with 22 in. head and Prentice 310E loader with CSI 4400 deck saw. All tractors and cutters have 44 in. rubber tires, except the 720B Tigercat cutter, which has 30.5 tires, and all have factory heads and grapples.



Equipment dealers include Lassiter Equipment in Washington, NC; Pioneer Machinery in Greenville, NC; and R.W. Moore, also in Greenville. Crawley buys all his tires from Colony Tire in New Bern. He says they always give on-the-spot service. "We ran over an iron spike in a skidder, and we called them. They were about an hour away, and they were there within an hour and a half fixing that tire. That's consistent with them."

Crawley says he runs a pretty good maintenance program that allows him to keep a machine until R&M costs exceed the expense of trading in on a newer model. "The way things are now, you really have to maintain your equipment well and try to get the most out of it you can, because new equipment is so expensive and the payments are so high," Crawley believes.

Every machine is greased daily. Radiators, engines and manifolds are also cleaned out daily with an air pressure hose. Oil is changed the first week of every other month "like clockwork," with just less than 200 hours of work between.

Among the many hats he wears, including filling in on any machine, Brad is the company

mechanic. He generally handles most repairs in the woods. In fact, Crawley says that if he has to bring a machine into the dealership for repairs-if it's something Brad can't fix-the service manager knows he has a serious problem on his hands.

Crawley uses contract truckers and owns five tractor-trailer rigs of his own, including Peterbilt, Freightliner, Mac, White and International models. "I'm not partial," Crawley says. "I try to give every brand a fair shake." He owns Pitts and Johnson trailers. One of the trucks is reserved for moving equipment and another is a spare.

Industry Issues

Crawley offers his views on the industry: "I think a lot of our environmental issues are being addressed, and I think the logging force, for the most part, is doing a real good job of following the best management practices and the forest practice guidelines. I am concerned that we don't have a younger generation interested in logging. I don't know what's going to happen when today's loggers get too old to work. I'm fortunate in that I have my sons who can handle it when I get ready to let it go."



Crawley says his biggest obstacle in logging is not as much wood prices as it is the weather. "And sometimes I don't think I'm smart enough to see as far down the road as I need to."

Fuel is as big a problem for Crawley as it is for everyone else, and he tries to find ways to cut costs in this area wherever possible. The men sometimes carpool to save on fuel. They also leave service trucks parked in a safe spot rather than driving them back and forth every day. Maintenance is also a key factor in conserving fuel. "Sometimes spending more money on maintenance saves a lot of money on the other end," he says.

Crawley comments that he pushes safety strongly. He holds weekly safety meetings, including regular updates and first aid and CPR training. He says maintenance plays a role in safety, too; a clean machine is less dangerous.

Sagging red oak prices have hurt many loggers and hardwood mills, but Crawley used the dip as an opportunity to open doors to new markets for poplar with several mills.

The move into logging has been a successful and profitable venture, according to Crawley. "If I had known this was going to work as well as it has, I would have done it sooner," he says. He's very satisfied with his company. "I don't know of anything I would change."

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