

The Wolf Organization

Whether the sixth-generation ownership or its committed employee base, The Wolf Organization's continued success after 162 years is rooted in family.



Left: One of the original locations of The Lumber Yard in Mt. Wolf, Pa., shown here in 1915, today this building serves as The Lumber Yard's headquarters. Right: Early 1900s lumber workers harvest trees in the Susquehanna Valley.



When you talk to The Wolf Organization about what's kept the company in business for 162 years, the conversation naturally begins with six generations of family ownership. But even with this feat, the relations that are most important here are the generations of employees who also have made this their family business.

Founded in York, Pa., in 1843 by Adam Wolf, The Wolf Organization today, still under family ownership, has grown into a \$385 million company with divisions that include Wolf Distributing Co. and The Lumber Yard, a pro dealer with 19 locations. Though the company has remained in the family for more than a century-and-a-half, continuation of the business was always more important than continuation

of family ownership, says senior vice president Jim Groff.

Instead, Groff points to the employee family as one of three main factors contributing to the company's success, along with process and technology. Employees are encouraged to take their jobs into their own hands for the betterment of the company, including during ISO 9000-2000 certification in 1997 in which they were called upon to delineate and document what they do. To this day, the responsibility of process improvement and how employees do their jobs remains in the hands of the individuals themselves. Empowerment "keeps people engaged over a period of time and also allows an organization to grow," Groff says. "We're most successful when that control was turned over to employees in the field."

The employees also are impacted by Wolf's strides in technology. The dealer runs an enterprise resource planning platform from SAP, which allows the company to share information and implement process improvements on a broader scale, Groff says, and has led to increased sales and profits without increasing staff size, benefits that are passed back to the employees through increased profit sharing, wages, and benefits.

"The culture of respect, accountability, and trust, those things are not only part and parcel with the success in terms of results, but also critical to the longevity of the company," Groff says. "I think that's been a hallmark of The Lumber Yard and The Wolf Organization for generations." —K.T.