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MEET the BOSS

Jim Meads

President and CEO, Sain Associates

BY RYAN POE | STAFF

Since 1972, Sain Associates has engineered some of the Southeast's most prominent projects, growing to nearly 40 employees at its Birmingham headquarters.

And at its helm is third-generation CEO and President Jim Meads.

Meads, who owns the company with his brother, Joe Meads, came to Birmingham about 20 years ago to start a transportation engineering firm – an effort that was eventually brought under Sain Associates' wing.

The company now has offices in Tennessee, Louisiana and Cullman, and expects to add more in the future.

With the company's 40-year anniversary this month, Meads took the time to answer a few questions about the company and his leadership philosophy.

What's the main quality you look for in an employee?

When I interview someone, I'm more concerned about their character and what kind of person they are. If we hire someone with great personal values, we can train them to do whatever. If they aren't a good person, it's hard to overcome that.

What's the biggest lesson you've learned?

There are a lot of ups and downs in business. I think you learn more from the things you mess up than the things you do well. I take mistakes and I try to improve on them. The big thing to me is trying to improve myself.

What's your biggest pet peeve in business?

People not communicating. People

make mistakes. If you make a mistake, I want to correct it with speed and effectiveness.

The way we communicate is so important. At the end of the day, that's how our clients evaluate us – not just how good our plans looked, but how we communicated.

What's the biggest risk you've ever taken? Was it worth it?

We've taken a lot of risks. We've opened branch offices. Some have succeeded and some haven't, but the ones that haven't, we learn from them. For example, we've started a branch-screening process.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

My grandmother, whom I was very close to, always taught me to treat other people the way I'd like to be treated. If you treat other people like that – with respect – it's hard to go wrong.

What keeps you up at night?

One thing is if we have a quality issue on a project. We don't have that very often, but when it happens, I want to get it fixed.

What's a book that has affected your career?

John Maxwell's books. We use them for some of our internal leadership training. I like how Maxwell brings in spiritual leadership and values.

What's your favorite thing to do outside the office?

I love to bass fish if I have free time or a free Saturday. I like golf, but I love to bass fish with friends and family.

If you had to choose another profession, what would it be?

I may not make much money at it, but I'd love to be a baseball coach. I love baseball. I coached my son growing up, and I think I was decent at it. I enjoyed teaching the kids and some still call me coach.

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Jim Meads says a lack of communication is his ultimate pet peeve.

