

# Of Prime



OUR MISSION STATEMENT is: *People Building Excellence For People.* We have a saying up on our wall that says: *Companies Don't Succeed, People Do.* My desire is to create a company that is focused on people both internally and externally, our customers and our personnel. I think we are unique in that we foster an environment that is about taking care of people.

Besides having what we hope is the best pay and benefit structure as well as facilities and tools, we seek to provide everything people need to do their jobs. We also have some things that go beyond the ordinary. For example, we have something called the LEAF (Lee Employee Assistance Fund). Our employees contribute into this fund on a voluntary basis through payroll deduction and the company matches anything contributed to it. If an employee has an emergency financial need they can make a request to the

LEAF committee and funds are given to meet that need. Our employees have contributed thousands of dollars each year and we match that and distribute almost all of those funds annually.

Our emphasis is on people, both employees and customers. Our most valuable resource in this company is the people and we try to create the environment that allows them to do their best. If they are going to be in our industry and work for a mechanical contractor, then I want them to work here. Once they get here we try to create an environment that makes it easy for them to do their job and do their best. We then become competitive and can have an advantage in a challenging market. We also ensure that our employees understand that it's the customer who pays the bills. No matter how difficult or how wonderful they might

BY WILLIAM B. LEE

be, without them we are in trouble.

Our company is primarily an engineering company, but we are also in the construction business and the service business. Our industry, like many, is labor intensive. Labor is a big component of what we do and keeping a skilled work force is a challenge for any company. Getting people and keeping good people is not easy. Therefore, we must provide a work environment that people want to come to.

In order for a company to succeed the people that work there have to believe that the leadership knows they are valuable. I have to convince them they are just as important and as valuable as I, the CEO am. And that is accomplished by telling them and by showing them through my life and the way I run the company.

I grew up on a farm in the rural area of Tennessee and my father was a businessman but he was also a farmer. So I grew up in a farming environment, but I was a guy who wanted everything that life had to offer. I remember thinking that the most important thing in life was how much money and credit I could get. Getting and borrowing as much money as possible was my idea of success. I was very motivated by what I was going to have and what I was going to build.

Until recently I had a life that most men could only dream of having. I had a beautiful wife totally devoted to me and four beautiful kids who were healthy and happy. My wife and I had a very unique and wonderful relationship that was continually growing. I had business success and a nice home—a cattle farm in the country. I had a storybook life.

But on July 22, 2000 that life was completely shattered and blown into a thousand pieces. My wife and four year-old daughter were out horseback riding on our farm. As I came home from work I waved at them as they rode off through the pasture. Some time later while I was working outside I heard my daughter crying. I went and found that she was hysterical and very disturbed. I went further and found my wife, fallen from her horse with significant head injuries. We rushed her to the hospital by helicopter but she was in a coma and died four days later. I never spoke to her again. I remember just sitting there and thinking, *“My whole life has just disappeared.”* I also remember looking up to heaven and asking, *“What is this? What in the world is this?”* It was the most devastating moment of my whole life.

About two weeks before my wife died we were on vacation with my children in Yellowstone. It was probably one of the best days of my whole life. We went over a mountain pass and saw mountain goats on this pass and remarked how beautiful the setting was.


Several days later while I prayed over my wife in the hospital, knowing she was probably going to die that day, I had a powerful spiritual experience. As she lay dying the doctors told me that her breathing was stopping. So I made everyone leave the room and I lay down with her and I asked her not to go. Then suddenly a peace came over me and I said, *“Carol Anne, it’s okay, you can go.”* As soon as I said that she

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took one breath and she was gone. It was the most unforgettable moment of my whole life. Then I felt as though God were speaking to me saying, *“Bill, I am the same today on your worst day as I was on your best day two weeks ago. I love you deeply and am in control of your life. Your circumstances have changed but I have not.”* It was a powerful encounter for me because it allowed me to walk away from that circumstance without demanding answers from the Lord. It was a very sweet gift from Him that I could use to move forward.

I look back on the funeral of my wife and it is really a good memory. There were a lot of people there for one thing, over 2000 at the viewing and over 1000 at the funeral. I was completely blessed by the outpouring of love from our friends.

There have been a lot of dark days, especially facing the grief of my children. Raising four small kids alone is overwhelming at times. I never really had to trust the Lord before in my whole life. But when my kids are looking at me saying, *“We don’t have a family anymore, what are we going to do?”* then I suddenly realized that the emotional health of my children is completely out of my control. I’ve been forced to ask the Lord to restore and heal us. And He has been doing that. I just have to trust Him. I hope that you too will experience His love, as we have, no matter what it is you’re facing in your life. 

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*Bill Lee is the CEO of the Lee Company based in Nashville, Tennessee, one of the top 100 mechanical contractors in America. It began in 1944 and has grown to 600 employees with \$80 million in revenues in 25 states and Mexico.*