

DEMOLITION

RESILIENCE RECOMMENDED

Amidst often volatile economic conditions, is there a secret to demolition teams becoming more resilient? RVA Group's Richard Vann offers his thoughts.

Resilience is an increasingly referenced term in the business environment, but as is often the case with overused words and phrases, its meaning has become somewhat lost on many. So, before the secret to resilience can be considered, it is firstly crucial to know what it really means.

Defined as the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions, resilience may have recently come to the fore given the constant ebb and flow of the economic climate. But irrespective of the internal or external factors imposed on demolition firms, resilience is something that successful businesses have always had to demonstrate.

Looking Back

It's easy to look back on our memories of 'the good times', and – as a profession – we are quite a reflective bunch. I've lost count of the number of times I've heard recollections of 'it's not as good as it used to be' or 'you could really make money back in the day'. But in the absence of a time machine there's not much we can do about the 'glory days' of years gone by.

Also, whilst perhaps a slightly cynical viewpoint, I would suggest that over any period of say, 10 years, there will have been good – and not so good – moments.

Demolition businesses have always had to evolve and adapt to succeed. The crux of the matter, however, is that in recent times the pace of the need to change has probably been more furious than at any point in the previous 50 years. The justifiable promotion of HSE excellence to the top of the priority list, clients' heightened expectations, an increasingly complex legal framework, the

cost of funding and managing the continuity of a business, and the change in geographical market locations, are just some of the factors at play.

Yet these factors will change again in the next 12 months, and beyond. They will probably become even more challenging. To mitigate the situation, a 'survival plan' must therefore be implemented.

Special Case

Demolition has long looked at itself as a 'special case' – the 'Cinderella of the civil engineering sector'. And perhaps it was. But to thrive and grow, it must jettison the self-flagellation persona and accept it is an industrial service just like any other. It is responsible for its own success or lack of it. And here is where the resilience begins.

As individual organisations we must focus on the basic principles of any free market entity that aims to progress and be successful – we need to deliver the right product, to the right market, at the right standards and right price, at the right time. Technical skillsets are, without question, key assets for any demolition company, but those alone – in the absence of professional business management, service development, training and investment – are unlikely to break the pattern or create resilient organisations. A mindset shift is of paramount importance.

Companies that have already adapted their mentality from small family-run enterprises to robustly-managed corporations, are reaping the rewards. But a long road still lies ahead for the majority.

With more than 35 years' demolition experience, Richard Vann is founder and managing director of decommissioning consultancy RVA Group. He is also past president of the Institute of Demolition Engineers and the Institute of Explosives Engineers.

