



PROACTIVITY POWERHOUSE

Chris Moura talks so passionately, proudly and astutely about how he has built his kitchen cabinetry and custom woodworking business, you would never know that he never really intended to get into the industry for a living. He is, you see, a master electrician by trade. “I had just gotten my licence and my father said to me, ‘I either need to find someone to manage it or I have to sell it,’” Moura recalls. “At that point I thought, ‘I want to be my own boss one day and this might be a better opportunity than starting a company from the ground up,’ even though it was nothing I had any experience with at all.”

Moura’s father, who has been building homes in the Cambridge, Ont., area for 30 years, started Andex Kitchens and Custom Woodworking in 2003 out of dissatisfaction with cabinet makers who had been supplying his home-construction business. “It was just to supply the houses that he built,” Moura explains.

However, the adjunct business quickly proved too much for the senior Moura to manage and keep busy because he was building new homes intermittently, not constantly. “It just wasn’t working out. And then he came to me,” Moura says.

Taking over a cabinetry business when you are a trained electrician is a bit like jumping into a quarry pond for the first time without knowing how deep the water really is.

“I could tell the difference between oak, maple and cherry, but that is as far as I could go,” says Moura. “I really didn’t know anything about building cabinets or how to manufacture them.”

He adds, “I thought, ‘How hard can it be? It’s boxes and doors.’”

After all, he was driving a backhoe when he was 13. “My dad had heavy equipment...I remember driving a backhoe at 13 or 14 and I didn’t think anything of it because I was in the middle of a field and what could I hit out there?” Moura recalls.

Fortunately, he knew what it took to run a business, having both worked in his father’s business at a young age, and having watched both his immigrant parents each run their own successful businesses in Cambridge.

So, with an entrepreneurial spirit all Moura had to learn was the actual ins and outs of cabinetry. “I knew guys in the industry and when I had questions, they would answer them for me,” says Moura. “I had a lot of people giving me insight but I would think for myself. A lot of times I used my own instinct, asked people questions and listened as much as I could. Sometimes I would ask four or five people the same question and try to come up with the best answer. I did anything I could to get out there and ask people certain questions.”

The first couple of years were tough, he candidly acknowledges. “The first couple of years I did a lot of consultations without getting anything back. I think my closing rate the

first year was five percent.”

He was only 24 when he got into the business, but he’s a very astute person and Moura knew instinctively what he needed to do to make Andex Kitchens and Custom Woodworking successful, and grow the business: invest in it constantly. “Every year we’ve been in business, we have invested in equipment. We’ve either updated something that has needed to be replaced or we have invested in something that is cutting edge, something that is going to make us better,” Moura says.

He has invested in the business in other key ways, too: growing it by forming partnerships with other regional cabinetry companies and home builders, and by growing Andex’s capabilities when other companies weren’t doing the same thing.

In 2008, Andex started making its own doors, which was virtually unheard of. Says Moura, “A lot of cabinet companies do all their own cabinet manufacturing and finishing, but they outsource all the doors from companies that make just doors. I thought, ‘Why are you doing that? It makes no sense. You’re essentially building only half the kitchen... you can’t promise anything (to contractors), because now you’re relying on somebody else to give you something so you can finish your job.’”

Moura says that as soon as Andex started making its own doors, he started getting calls from other cabinet makers asking if he could make doors for them as well. By proactively expanding his capabilities, Moura has become the go-to person when other shops in the region need doors made or mouldings custom-milled, or need him to finish edges because their equipment has broken down. He has even branched out into distribution — Andex is making kitchens for Home Hardware showrooms in the area. The industry is competitive, but Moura has forged a cooperativeness that helps everyone grow their business while respecting each other’s territories and customers. Along the way, Moura has grown his staff from two shop employees to 15 and his own business exponentially.

“At the end of the day, I am helping

them and they are helping us and it’s more business because it is another avenue in getting work out there,” Moura says.

He adds, “That investment (in making doors inhouse) was definitely worth it. You’re now manufacturing everything inhouse...and that is what I think made us grow as fast as we did.”

In the last couple of years, Andex Kitchens has expanded to 20,000 from 10,000 square feet. That is a small shop in the industry pond. However, the company, located on a rural road in North Dumfries Township in Southwestern Ontario, has become a small shop with big capabilities in both solid and engineered wood. Moura has seen to that by making sure Andex has all the CNC equipment necessary to do a wide range of jobs, and by making sure that top-quality product is going out the door.

It is not unusual to see him out on the shop floor, for example, personally inspecting the finish on cabinet doors or checking the grooves cut by the CNC router. “I live in this community and I don’t want to feel like I have to hide from people because I’m known as the guy who does bad work,” Moura says.

Finding ways to grow Andex is what helped Moura weather the 2008-2010 recession. He had jobs lined up with contractors prior to the recession, and had picked up some new contractor clients just before the economic downturn. “I didn’t let one person go and we stayed fairly consistent,” he says. “The bottom didn’t drop out like it did for some people. Those three years, yes, it flattened out. It didn’t get better but it didn’t get worse. And then it just picked up to right where it left off in 2007.”

These days, Moura no longer does everything himself, as he had to do in the beginning nine years ago. When he

first took the business over, he would manage shop operations and design cabinets during the day. Then he would go out at night to do consultations. When he had to stay late to get a job done, he’d often sleep in his office. To him, it was just all part of being an entrepreneur. But his priorities have changed. In those days, he was single. Today, he has a 14-month-old daughter and another baby on the way. Although his wife Crystal is very understanding, Moura says he makes a conscious effort to separate home from business.

“I do that now more than I used to,” he says. “When I get home my phone pretty much sits on a countertop and it does not ring when I get an email or a text, and it does not ring when somebody calls me.”

He tries not to come into the office on Sundays, but concedes sometimes he has to when he needs to make sure that “the job is ready to go out to the client on Monday. But it’s tough.”

And he is always in on Saturdays. He checks inventory two or three times throughout the week, and then does a full inventory count on Saturdays. Inventory management and purchasing is the one thing he can’t bring himself to delegate. “That’s the one thing I don’t think I could ever delegate...because you have to have your finger on everything,” he says. “You cannot be doing a job and discover that you are out of white melamine.”

Moura’s mother looks after his in-



Chris and one of his staff sharing their views about a door that has just been power sanded.



Being a local business with a reputation to maintain, quality is extremely important to Chris Moura. On a Friday afternoon, he inspects some recently finished doors.

fant daughter Chloe during the day. However, Moura makes sure he is home in the evening when his wife

Crystal, a personal trainer, has client appointments. “I have to make sure I look after my responsibilities as a dad,” he says. And when he and Crystal have made plans for an evening, he makes sure not to let business interfere with them.

He is never far from family in the business. Moura’s brother Andrew is part of the Andex team, and so is an uncle. He also still works closely with his father, who is still building homes. “It is a different relationship with him,” Moura laughs. “Technically he is a customer and I work for him. It is kind of strange because he gives me a lot of business.”

Working with family can be challenging at times, he freely admits. “Working with family is tough. Because you have to sit down to Sunday dinner with them...you have to make sure you don’t overstep your boundaries, and you have to respect them the say way [you respect other employees and customers].”

Moura is not just a business owner and a boss. He is a leader. “I don’t ask

my employees to do anything that I wouldn’t do myself,” he says, “even sweeping the shop floor.”

He is trying to make Andex a leader in the local industry, too.

He has, for example, always made sure that his staff had work so they could meet their financial responsibilities, even in the beginning when there wasn’t much actual work to do for customers. Moura found make-work projects, such as building display kitchens in the Andex showroom.

In early September, the company had a new waterborne finishing unit installed. Moura is proactively switching to fully waterborne finishes. “We’re going to be one of the first companies jumping into it fully,” he says.

“We have been dabbling in it, testing it to make sure everything works okay, and now we’re confident and are going to do a full change. A lot of states and provinces have already mandated water and outlawed VOCs. Why wait until you’re forced to do it? Why not just do it? I like to be proactive.” 

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