

SPARKING SUCCESS

By Bryan Hansen



Jordan Jolicoeur succeeds in building an electrical business that is making a difference in the lives of Indigenous peoples

Jordan Jolicoeur, president and CEO of Carvel Electric, didn't intend to build a prosperous business – one that now boasts Canadian Pacific Railway and Suncor among its impressive client list. But things don't always go as planned. Thanks to a decision to commit to a small side-business started by his father, Jolicoeur has succeeded in building a flourishing electrical business.

It was this commitment, in part, that led to Jolicoeur receiving the 2018 Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) Young Aboriginal Entrepreneur award. He continues to actively support CCAB and currently serves as a board member. "CCAB has done so much for the Indigenous community in Canada, and I'm proud to be so involved with the organization," he says.

"When I won [the award] I was so happy and very honoured...it was a reassurance that the vision we set out for our company is on the right path," says Jolicoeur. "My success is also my family's success because we are a family

company. I'm able to take risks in my life knowing that I have people beside me and behind me that are there for me regardless of the outcome. I think my story is a story that every Indigenous entrepreneur needs to hear. It is a story of coming from nothing and creating something."

Today, 70 per cent of Carvel Electric's staff is Indigenous – a testament to the company's commitment to diversity and inclusivity. As the company continues to expand, and as an Indigenous man himself, Jolicoeur recognizes the unique challenges that Indigenous peoples face, and he incorporates these sensitivities into the working culture of his company. "When one of our employees expresses that they are grappling with family and homelife issues, we truly comprehend the profound significance of their struggles and strive to provide tailored support," he says.

One could say that Jolicoeur's first step to business success had its roots in 1997, when his father founded Carvel as a part-time gig, balancing it with

his primary work at a power plant. "He had three kids, and to make extra money he would go around and wire houses on Indigenous communities in Alberta," shares Jolicoeur, a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta. "As a young kid, I would jump in the van and go help my dad when he wired houses on the weekend, doing things like putting boxes together and assisting. It's just what we did growing up."

As time passed, both Jolicoeur and his brother Joel, now Carvel's VP and director of quality, health, safety and environment, grew up and pursued their own careers. However, they continued working with Carvel during evenings and weekends. "Everyone knew that Carvel was there, and our big thing was customer service," says Jolicoeur. "We never advertised. We did good work at an honest price, and that's how it started off. Dad would hire local Indigenous peoples, always trying to give them skills, get a good trade, job and skillset."

An early lesson Jolicoeur learned was the power of steady employment and



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Jordan Jolicoeur, Carvel

the positive impact it could have on a family. Witnessing this firsthand, Jolicoeur determined that a good job leads to prosperity for one’s family and the people around them. “My dad was hired at TransAlta through an Indigenous hiring opportunity—he was hired as a Métis electrician,” Jolicoeur explains. “It changed our family’s life because our father was able to get holidays and health benefits.”

When Jolicoeur’s father began winding down his work in 2013, his two sons decided to take over the business and try to grow it into something more substantial. “Dad came to [my brother and me] saying he was going to shut Carvel down. At the time, [Carvel] was just a garden shed and a van, but I said, ‘Let’s give it a go,’” says Jolicoeur.

Starting with the same Indigenous clientele and working on small residential and commercial renovations, Jolicoeur, a journeyman electrician at the time and now a master electrician, says building the business was a family affair. “We bootstrapped it from the ground up. I didn’t really have business experience; we just grew up in a family that did electrical business,” he says. “And it’s how we bonded. My whole life was training with my family.”

When he took over Carvel Electric, Jolicoeur carried with him the values of hiring local and creating opportunities for Indigenous peoples – values that were instilled in him by his father. During the initial two years, Jolicoeur ran the business with just his brother.



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WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Eventually, they hired an apprentice and then, as Jolicoeur fondly recalls, “one day we got a break.” A friend working at an engineering firm with CP Rail as a major client helped Carvel secure a contract with the rail giant as an industrial contractor. “Then we got on the Trans Mountain Expansion... [and] it was little stepping-stones,” Jolicoeur recalls, noting that this initial success led to other industrial clients like ATCO, Suncor and Lafarge.

Jolicoeur attributes the company’s success to doing good work and maintaining strong core values. Most notably, his aim for the business was never purely about monetary success – it was about making a difference in the lives of Indigenous peoples. “When I took over in 2013, we had to ask ourselves: what’s our objective at Carvel? The answer was clear: creating opportunities for Indigenous peoples to thrive as tradespeople and making Carvel a platform for success,” Jolicoeur explains. “We are doing the work and take pride in

saying we are an opportunity company for Indigenous peoples.”

Jolicoeur’s upbringing in an Indigenous family and his extensive collaboration with Indigenous Nations have shaped his unwavering compassion for Indigenous peoples and deep understanding of their challenges. He acknowledges the importance of hunting seasons and other culturally significant events like Sundance, and he genuinely appreciates the need to accommodate cultural heritage within a work environment. By fostering an atmosphere of cultural sensitivity and adaptability, Carvel Electric aims to create a workplace that both respects and values the diverse experiences and traditions of its team members.

Reflecting on Carvel Electric’s journey from 2013 to the present, Jolicoeur acknowledges that scaling a business is not easy, especially with the age-old challenge of taking on larger projects. He shares the essential questions entrepreneurs need to ask themselves: “When do you invest in your company? How do you invest if you have no money? How do you allocate resources to health and safety?”

To facilitate growth, Carvel reached out to Apeetogosan (Métis) Development, an organization committed to providing sustainable funding solutions to Alberta Métis businesses to acquire essential equipment for larger projects, such as tools and trucks. Apeetogosan Development is part of a network of Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFIs) across Canada that specialize in providing capital to Indigenous entrepreneurs, who often face challenges vastly different from mainstream businesses.

In addition to pumping capital into the company to facilitate its growth and expansion, Jolicoeur also attributes his success to a profound sense of passion. With utmost conviction, he urges aspiring entrepreneurs to seek out an industry that ignites excitement, presents ongoing challenges and captivates their unwavering commitment. The journey involved in running a business transcends mere participation in the industry, he says. It entails actively contributing to the construction and evolution of



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the sector itself: "We are catalysts for change, constantly reshaping and adapting the industry to align with the demands of the economy."

Immersing himself in the industry, developing an in-depth understanding of its nuances, and actively striving to advance it are all part of Jolicoeur's daily work. Regardless of the current state of his business, his intrinsic desire to be an integral part of the industry remains unwavering. As an entrepreneur, his dedication to his chosen field serves as the driving force behind his company's enduring success.

Looking ahead, Jolicoeur says that Carvel is in a favourable position, with an impressive group of clients steadily growing in number: "We have many foundational clients, some of the top in Canada."

The objective going forward is to become a go-to electrical contractor for those clients, to maintain steady, sustainable growth, and to focus on hiring Indigenous talent. "When people think of an Indigenous electrical company, we want them to think of Carvel because of the work we're doing with our people," concludes Jolicoeur with pride. ●

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