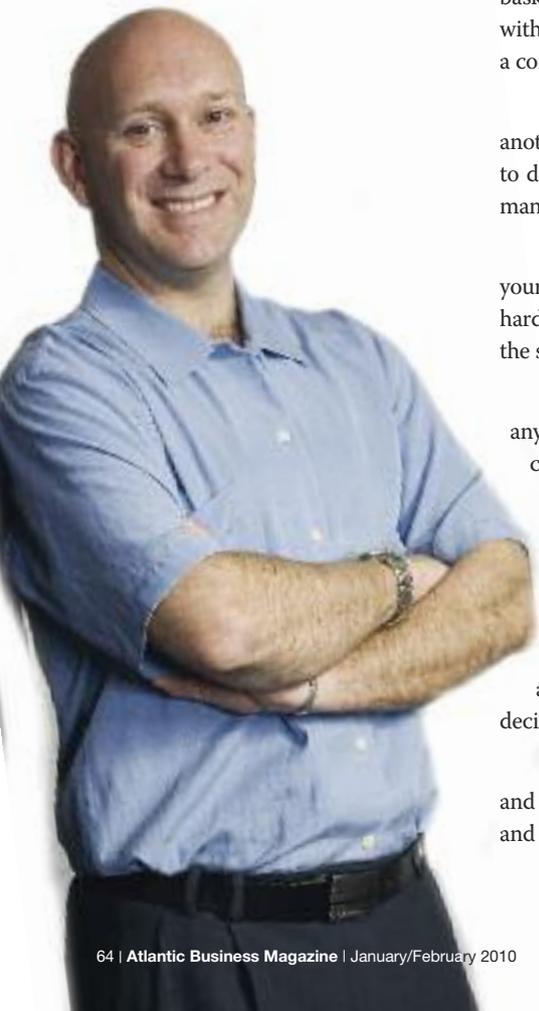


in conversation with...

Lee Bragg

Chief Executive Officer
EastLink, Halifax, NS

Lee Bragg, son of John Bragg, was appointed CEO of EastLink in 1999. In the decade since, he has successfully led the integration of 12 cable companies, resulting in an innovative telecommunications provider serving communities across Canada. As the company prepares to add wireless offerings to its customer base, he sees no shortage of exhilarating challenges ahead for him, his team and the next generation of Braggs.



The leader of a family business should have a sense of responsibility to the business and the employees that supersedes his or her personal goals and objectives. If your success keeps pace with the success of the business, that's fine, but the business comes first.

When you acquire a business, you need to consider three things. Does it have strong management? Does it have growth potential? And is there a sustainable strategic advantage? In other words, what is the edge the business offers you, and what can you bring to it? If someone else has better finances, or can provide better management, they should own it.

We were raised with a sense of humility, an understanding that we were no better than anyone else. My dad would say, 'If it's a tough year and I have to tell a blueberry farmer that prices are going to be down, that message is meaningless if I show up driving a Cadillac.' I try to live by this advice and instil it in my children.

I like to delegate a lot of authority. I'll communicate the business plan, ask for input, ensure people know how they fit in, and encourage them to do their best to support the business objective. I'll let them know when we get off track, but I won't call every play. We have some very smart people here with great instincts and valuable experience. I rely on these people every day.

My basketball coach at Mount A used to say he'd rather have five athletes than basketball players, because he could teach athletes to play basketball. When you have the right people with the right cultural and philosophical fit, you can accomplish anything. That's the key to building a competitive, successful organization.

Everybody should walk away happy when a deal is done. Sure, you can push for another five per cent discount from someone just because you think you can get it. But you may want to do business with that person again, and people talk about how you treated them. I can point to many examples where being fair in one deal helped us secure the next one.

My leadership style has traditionally been management by walking around. If you visit your operations and talk to enough people, you get a strong feel for what's going on. It's a little bit harder to do so now that we have interests in places like Sudbury, Ontario and Cold Lake, Alberta. But the same principles still apply: show you care, ask a lot of questions, and be seen in the field.

The jobs I had initially were far removed from my father. He told people, 'Treat Lee like anyone else: if he's not working, kick his \$#@; if he's doing a good job, tell him.' There wasn't a constant feeling that I had to do more than everyone else, but I sure as hell couldn't do less!

The recruitment process is never one-sided. The candidate is interviewing you to see if you are the right fit. After all, the wrong hiring decision is bad for both sides because it's a waste of time and money for your organization and for that individual. The best candidates have choices; we need to present ourselves as the right choice.

Being privately owned allows us to take a long-term approach to business plans and decision-making. We're not slaves to the analysts; we don't have to make bad long-term decisions in order to meet quarterly or monthly objectives.

One of the biggest challenges I face is how to get my children involved in the business and instil in them the same philosophies handed down to me. Two of them already have summer jobs, and not pretty ones, so their education is just beginning. 🍷

Interviewed by Kevin Stoddart, vice president, Knightsbridge Robertson Surette – Atlantic Canada's leading recruitment and human resource consulting firm. Leader's Insight conversations are published in each issue of Atlantic Business Magazine. Feedback: dchafe@atlanticbusinessmagazine.com