

ON THE JOB

CAREERS IN THE OILPATCH

Jeff Young

Age: 40

Title: Estimation manager

Company: Vista Projects Limited

Location: Calgary

Length in position: Three years

Photo: Christina Ryan, Inex Photography

How did you get into this profession?

I'm a civil engineer by training. A lot of estimators come up through different routes, and mine happened to be through contracting and construction. I had field experience working on projects and then I started estimating and bidding tenders, winning them, and then going on site to run the job.

What does your field experience bring to your role as estimation manager?

My biggest goal is constant improvement. I'm not going to reinvent the wheel, but I hope I can make that wheel spin faster. One of the biggest challenges I came up against as a young estimator was keeping the big picture in mind in order to be competitive. If you throw in the kitchen sink, you wouldn't win the job. You have to be willing to take a risk—not a gamble, but a measured approach to what you know and what you don't know.

What sort of challenges do you find in bridging the gap between the designers and the field team?

One of the things I'm trying to do is to get the disciplines to recognize the impact they have. If you originally budgeted 400 cubic metres of concrete, but now your construction drawings contain 500 cubic metres

of concrete, you have a problem. You always look back, you check, you confirm. Change is going to happen, but it has to be identified early so that you can deal with it. There's nothing worse than getting caught off guard at the 11th hour. I want to make sure everyone keeps their eye on the bigger picture.

How do you make people aware of the consequences of their actions?

Basically, it's about informing and challenging people. You do this respectfully, but you need to bring it to their attention. Everyone wants to do a good job. In the rush for output, the context of the original design can be forgotten. So you have to ask the team to check their original quantity versus the current design and have them come to the conclusion on their own. It really does open their eyes.