

Noonamah, Northern Territory

S & J EARTHMOVING



The name 'Sid Rusca' is synonymous with the earthmoving industry in the Northern Territory. His company, S & J Earthmoving has been involved in major projects throughout Northern Australia, including road construction, airstrip development and open cut mining. Besides the quality and efficiency of their work, S & J Earthmoving is held in high regard in terms of their affinity with the traditional owners of Territory lands, and the company's ability to recruit, train and retain Indigenous

The Story So Far...

S & J Earthmoving is the inspirational story of Sid Rusca and his family. Sid was part of the stolen generation. As a young child, he was taken to Croker Island Mission. He returned from the Island as an 18 year old, with just a shirt and shorts, and no shoes. He found work as a ringer on stations, and this provided him with a taste and love of working with machinery. At age 22, Sid started operating machinery full time, and purchased his own grader. With wife Jenny, he carted a caravan behind the grader around the Northern Territory. Thus began one of the biggest earthmoving businesses in Northern Australia.

Through joint ventures and stand alone projects, *S & J Earthmoving* can now boast successful operations in terms of –

- bulk earthworks
- sub division projects
- major road works
- airstrip development
- open cut mining
- haulage

- barge landings
- tailings, dams and decants
- floodways and causeways
- pavement rehabilitation and stabilisation
- car parks
- sewerage, storm water, waterman, kerb and gutter work
- plant hire
- engineer surveying and civil construction consultants.



Sid Rusca

However, it is not just the range and size of their project work that enables *S & J Earthmoving* to stand out in the civil engineering and mining industry. The company has used its industry position to actively recruit and train Indigenous people. Utilising its registration as a National Accreditation in Workplace Training (Category 1)

and Workplace Assessing (Building and Construction) it has opened new employment opportunities for Indigenous people. Many of the Indigenous plant operators throughout the Northern Territory attribute the opportunity to enter and develop in the civil engineering and mining industries to *S & J Earthmoving*.

Sid Rusco's story is one of *'just getting out there and showing you can do it'*. Sid has also encountered his share of racism – *'You should see the blood drain out of the face of a lot of white fella's when I turn up for business . . . I don't let it worry me. In fact, it motivates me it keeps me going'*.

The Impact

S & J Earthmoving has established an enviable professional reputation throughout Northern Australia, based upon their commitment to project excellence. The size and diversity of their operation's portfolio speaks for the respect they have achieved in the industry. Recent examples have included the reconstruction and reseal of the DBS Haul Road (\$2.9

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million), upgrade of the Cox Peninsula Road Upgrade (\$1.2 million), establishment of the Chariots Reef Open Cut Mine (\$1.5 million), upgrade of Granite's Gold Mine Airstrip (\$300,000) and upgrade of the Argyle Diamond Mine Airstrip (\$250,000).

The company is one of the biggest owners of earthmoving equipment in the Northern Territory outside of mining companies.

The quality and quantity of the work is enhanced by their commitment to employ and train Indigenous people in both civil engineering and mining works. Within their 40 to 50 person workforce, 85% are Indigenous. *S & J Earthmoving* is particularly committed to providing traineeships to young Indigenous people – over 50 such trainees have been supported by the company.

Finally, Sid's pioneering work as an Indigenous entrepreneur has been an inspiration to other Indigenous people. People like Raylene and Gina of *Kungas Can Cook* (see chapter above) attest to the importance of Sid's role modelling influence in their business vision and determination.

Success Factors

Sid and the staff of *S & J Earthmoving* agree on six factors that have contributed to the business's unique success.

The Partnership

The combination of Sid and Jenny and their complimentary skills is acknowledged by many as the key success factor. Sid is a legend within the civil engineering and mining industry, and his personal reputation, knowledge and energy is a major factor in achieving major contracts. Joe Martin – Jard, Executive Director, Indigenous Business and Industry Services, summarises the factor of the success of *S & J Earthmoving* as – '*Sid and his years of experience within the industry and the Territory – there is no substitute for experience.*' Jenny is regarded by staff and customers as a very astute and talented business manager

and leader. Sid acknowledges that Jenny is *'the backbone of our company'*. For 40 years, this has been a formidable team, and they have ensured there is a solid succession plan in place involving their sons.

Passion, Determination and Hard Work



Machinery at work

Sid Rusca believes that – *'Passion, determination and hard work are the keys of his success.'* (Stateline, 2004). From their first days in business, Sid and Jenny had a determination to succeed. They contemplated no other outcome. Conditioned by his experiences as a young person,

Sid was determined to achieve by his own efforts and resources. He never expected handouts from others.

Determination is an attitude and behaviour valued greatly by Sid Rusca. He shares a wonderful illustration – *'When I discover a locked door with no handle – I just jump through the window and have a yarn'*.

Commitment to and Achievement of Indigenous Employees

S & J Earthmoving has always had a commitment to a high proportion of Indigenous employees and their continuous skill development. This has resulted in a strong and stable workforce. Indigenous staff feel very comfortable working with and for Sid Rusca. They respond to his practical leadership and his work principle of *'learning from the ground up'*. ABC Journalist Jeremy Geia observed – *'Sid Rusca is a hands-on man who often works alongside his employees. His achievement inspires those around him.'* (Stateline, 2004).

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Sid believes strongly in the principle of *'surrounding yourself with good people'*. He also believes in regular communication with and between staff. The company holds regular staff meetings every fortnight.

S & J Earthmoving management believes their strong commitment to Indigenous employment has also given them many competitive advantages. For example, their Environmental Statement can claim – *'Our high content of Indigenous employees ties us in an intimate relationship with the land and its Indigenous people, flora and fauna. Because of this, we have a strong commitment to environmental responsibility. This ensures we are able to efficiently deal with the environment, preservation of cultural sites, and put in place control mechanisms such as sediment control plans.'* (S & J Earthmoving, 2003, p5).

SUCCESS FACTORS

- The Partnership
- Passion, Determination and Hard work
- Commitment to, and Achievement of the Indigenous Employees
- Company Achievement
- Professional Advice
- Industry Partnerships

Similarly the company can claim *'No other Northern Territory civil engineering company comes close to S & J Earthmoving when it comes to Indigenous community relations. We are Indigenous, this process comes naturally to us.'* (ibid, p6)

Company Achievement

As the old adage states – *'Nothing succeeds like success.'* *S & J Earthmoving* is simply very good at the work they do. As Derek Yates, Operations Manager of *S & J Earthmoving* simply put it – *'We have been encouraged and shown how well to do it.'*

Professional Advice

Sid Rusca has discovered the value of professional and appropriate advice - in particular, the need for good accounting advice and assistance. However, this was not always easy. In Sid's words – *'Most white accountants don't know a black fella from a bar of soap'*.

Industry Partnerships

Entering into joint venture relationships has enabled *S & J Earthmoving* to undertake a number of significant civil engineering and mining projects. Besides creating project opportunities, it has enhanced their reputation as an industry leader and augmented their capacity.

Their partnership with Giant Reef in operating the open cut Chariot Mine has been an excellent model for future initiatives. Through their subsidiary company, Central Desert Enterprises, *S & J Earthmoving* have played a significant brokerage role with Waromungu traditional owners, employed Waromungu employees, and helped facilitate the speedy establishment of the mine. Subsequently, *S & J Earthmoving* has become the first Indigenous business to develop an open cut mine.

Advice to other Indigenous people contemplating the enterprise option

Sid has simple advice – *‘Work hard mate, get out into the bush and just work hard – that’s what it is all about. Be prepared for 14 to 16 hour work days’.*

For Further Information

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