



Success Set in Stone

Adirondack Precision Cut Stone

Kris Johnston, Alex Johnston

ADIRONDACK PRECISION CUT STONE
We finish what nature started...

Success Magazine: Kris, you started this company about fifteen years ago. What did you do prior to this?

Kris Johnston: I was parasailing in Florida and Lake George. A friend of my mother's was a tile setter, and I had the opportunity to work for him on occasion and learn the industry. Alex and I were also very active in the commercial boating business—we both hold captain's licenses.

Alex Johnston: I was a student at the University of Buffalo, and worked parasailing in the summer.

SM: When did you discover your passion for the industry?

Kris: I had always wanted my own business and saw the potential in the area of tile. I knew I could be part of that market.

SM: What motivated you to go out on your own?

Kris: I started my own business at age twelve, in Lake George, taking pictures on the parasail raft for Shoreline Cruises. I was very successful—so much so that the boat company kept the concept going. My mother was very supportive about owning our own business while growing up. Our father, who passed away when we were just seven and two, was an educator who always felt he could reach only certain levels of

success designed by others and not himself. My mother's motto when we first started was "just keep pumping the well. Someday, you will have all the water you want!"

SM: Did you feel you were taking a risk?

Kris: Yes, but I was able to see the possibilities and knew I was ready.

SM: At the time did you feel prepared for success as an entrepreneur?

Kris: Yes, as much as I could perceive it at the time. Life and business teaches you as you move ahead. I have always lived by the rule that "failure is not an option."

SM: Alex, when did you become involved in Adirondack Precision Cut Stone?

Alex: In the end of my third year of college. I started coming home on the weekends, and as we got busier I began working full-time.

SM: How does your family dynamic translate into your working relationship with Kris?

Alex: It is difficult at times. Kris and I have different personalities and we sometimes clash. I am a full steam ahead kind of guy, while Kris is a thinker. In spite of all this, we are supportive of one another, and appreciate our family. Our mother, who runs the office, sets us straight at times—reminding us what is truly important.

SM: What are some of the challenges of being a family business?

Alex: Sometimes, being in business is a challenge in itself. Having my family involved, I believe, is a huge advantage because I am always confident that when big decisions have to be made, they are made with the best intentions of my entire family. We are all working toward a common goal.

SM: What sets APCS apart in the industry?

Alex: Our motto is "Absolute perfection, every time, no exceptions." That is what we strive for. We take great pride in our work.

SM: What advice would you give to a client considering granite?

Kris: Selling granite is easy for me. When you upgrade a countertop, no matter what color granite you choose, it is going to be beautiful. I tell everyone to pick what you like, not what everyone else likes. Often my customers don't have much design experience and are intimidated by our 500 color selection. My job is to direct them to what they like and make sure they choose something that will perform as good as it looks!

SM: Why is granite such a solid investment?

Kris: In the last ten years, our business has taken off because granite is the best way to update

your kitchen. It will give your home the "WOW" factor. Often times it will help sell a house that would otherwise be a difficult sale. Granite countertops will outlast your kitchen cabinets. They will look the same in ten to twenty years, showing no signs of wear. There are two kinds of people— those who have granite and those who want granite.

SM: What are the uses and benefits of tile?

Kris: Tile is a bullet proof floor or wall when installed correctly. The selection of tile has improved leaps and bounds in the last ten years. Porcelain has really taken over the tile market. It can be made to look like stone and provides an extremely durable floor in high traffic areas. Tumbled tiles are usually marble or travertine. They make beautiful backsplashes and showers. Most of our tile business comes in the form of high-end custom showers with full-body jets and complementary granite accents. The endless inventory of granite remnants gives us an advantage, which sets us apart from other companies. Shower curbs, corner shelves, and seats can be made to match the décor of the bath or kitchen providing our customers with a carefully thought out design!

SM: What services do you provide Alex?

Alex: I am the operations manager. I run the shop, send trucks in the morning, check on jobs throughout the day, and handle any other demands of the day. I also manage the tile aspect of our business.

SM: Do you do installations in both residential and commercial markets?

Kris and Alex: Yes. Granite has become so popular recently that it seems we are working everywhere— not just in the ritzy sections of town. Granite has become more reasonably priced, so many people are springing for it residentially now. Commercial work is a whole different beast. It is very competitive and often requires travel. We travel all over the U.S doing large condo projects, shopping malls, and large chain restaurants. You have to be willing to go with the flow to make it work. Stay the course! These projects have been good to us and are very satisfying. It is really something when you pull up to a job and see skids of tile stretching from one end of the building to the other, totaling 150,000 square feet plus, and you finish within your deadline. It makes you feel very accomplished.

SM: Your list of commercial clients is quite impressive. To what do you attribute your success in securing such work?

“ Absolute perfection, every time no exceptions. ”

Kris: We started in the residential market and slowly started doing commercial work. Early on, the project managers we were working for saw that we installed tile on commercial jobs with the same attention to detail as we do on residential. That made it very easy for them to hire us again and again! We have always taken the approach that we have one common goal and will do what it takes to finish on time, absolutely perfect, every time, no exceptions.

SM: How far does your client base stretch?

Kris: Normally, north to the Canadian border and south to New Jersey, however, we have done extensive travel to other parts of the country as well.

SM: What inspires you on a daily basis?

Kris: Securing a future for my employees and the people with the name "Johnston."

SM: What is the most rewarding aspect of what you do?

Kris and Alex: Leaving a customer in awe with the experience they had with APCS. Knowing they could spend their money elsewhere but didn't, knowing a customer saved for three years to hire us and watching their reaction to what we just did to enhance their home. The best compliment is a referral from clients with the highest regard. This is what we strive for.

