

STRIKING a balance

CEO, mom enjoys challenges of employee motivation, continuous improvement

Jennifer Hansen didn't attend college with a plan in mind to take over her father's business, which manufactured O-rings, gaskets, seals and kit assemblies for original equipment manufacturers such as Harley-Davidson and GE Healthcare Technologies. But two years ago she bought out her father, Philip Anderson, then reorganized the business into The Anderson Group, which includes two corporate entities, Anderson Seal Inc. and Anderson Resource Management Inc. Along with the responsibility of running a company with 65 employees, she is a wife, and mother of an 18-month-old son.

By **DAVE BACKMANN**
Freeman Staff

FREEMAN: What is your biggest challenge?

HANSEN: I would have to say finding and retaining the best people. I think I have found some phenomenal people and they are here today. I think it is important to keep them here, too, and to keep them challenged. Everyone is motivated differently, whether it is through money, status or having a title. The challenge is finding out what motivates each person so you can retain them.

FREEMAN: What are your strengths as a CEO?

HANSEN: I think I am a positive person. I try and find solutions rather than looking for blame when something goes wrong. And I look at potential problems before they become problems.

FREEMAN: What areas would you like to improve on as a CEO?

HANSEN: I think educating our employees. And not just education, but awareness. I am a firm believer in not just telling them what to do and demanding it, but, together with them, coming up with a better way of having them do their job. It is just easier to sit

Biography

- **CEO:** Jennifer Hansen
- **COMPANY:** The Anderson Group, 16555 W. Lincoln Ave., New Berlin
- **RESIDENCE:** Mequon
- **EDUCATION:** bachelor's degree, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, psychology and Spanish; master of business administration, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- **FAMILY:** husband, Mike; son, Nathan
- **PET:** Tobie, a golden retriever

up here (CEO's office) and say, "It should be done this way." I don't think that works.

That's why I am starting an initiative. I call it, "Let's Get Orange," where I'm meeting with every employee and asking them how they can do their job better and meeting with them to see how they do their job. And I spend a day with them because they do the work every day. They should know best how to do their job. When I am done meeting with them, they get an orange T-shirt. It's like showing them Six Sigma, or lean manufacturing in language that makes sense.

FREEMAN: How do you achieve balance in your life, between being the CEO of a growing company, and taking care of family responsibilities?

HANSEN: I think you need loving and trusted people in all aspects of your life. I have a wonderful husband, and we share parenting responsibilities. And you have to have the support system at work, too. My son had an ear infection and a 104-degree temperature, and at that moment, that is the most important thing. That is life. I have people here who will cover for me so I could go and get him and take care of him.

FREEMAN: What do you enjoy most about being a CEO?



With nearly half of the employees of The Anderson Group of Hispanic background, Jennifer Hansen, company CEO, says her undergraduate degree in Spanish is paying off.

HANSEN: The ability to make changes when I see something isn't working and to make those changes immediately. And to respond to customer feedback, immediately. It would drive me crazy to work for a company that doesn't do that. And, also, to see employees grow in their job.

FREEMAN: As a CEO, what do you need more than anything else?

HANSEN: Time. Isn't that what everyone wants?

FREEMAN: We have talked about you and your role as a CEO. Now, about the company, what are some of your short-term and long-term goals for the company?

HANSEN: We've continued to grow for many years. The goal is to have good controls in place to allow the growth to continue, and that applies to both long-term and short-term goals. So you need an ongoing evaluation of procedures and people. You have to be looking for better processes.

Long term, I guess I would compare us to a basketball team. We have a good starting team and a good bench, but we need to continue to develop all the employees so they can play better. So they

can be more effective. As they say, you are only as good as your bench.

FREEMAN: You have gotten quite a bit of media attention. Has that helped you, or the company, in any way?

HANSEN: I think it gives our customers confidence in our business, that we are doing a good job and are getting that kind of attention. And I have gotten some résumés from people who say, "I would like to work for a company like yours." So I think it has helped that way, because you're always looking for good people.

FREEMAN: Finally, the question we ask everyone. How do you relax? What do you do to unwind?

HANSEN: I love to play golf, and I can't wait for the weather to get warm. Also, we have a golden retriever, and I love to take long walks at the end of the day with my husband and son and the retriever. Also, I believe you have to plan to get away. You have to recharge yourself.

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