



By: Greg Akesson



TLA: Military Precision Meets Housing Development **in Edmonton and Salt Spring Island, B.C.**

The History

Tired of the “buyer/seller dance” so often encountered in the corporate world? So too are Chris Bradley and Troy Grant, Managing Partners of TLA Developments, and this is the reason their “no bullshit” approach to doing business resonates so well in the construction industry. As Veterans both with over 20 years of service in the Canadian military, Chris and Troy take pride in TLA, which started only two and a half years ago and already has a portfolio of 10+ projects under their belts: an impressive accomplishment for a company with 13 employees, four of whom are military Veterans. As Chris explains: “When you come out of the army, everyone expects you to be something like Gunnery Sergeant Hartman from Full Metal Jacket, always yelling and screaming at people, but the truth is, the army is a very collaborative place, built on mutual trust and respect...you are honest, forthright, and frank with each other because you need to be.”

After retiring from the army as a Major, Chris began his civilian working life as a defense contractor for Allied Container Systems. As Chris jokes, “Though Allied Container systems sounds like the name of a trucking company,” it really offered support to “the Canadian Army, American Army, British Army and US Marine Corps.” This project was unique: “we built fake villages, and then we populated fake villages, and we brought movie-level practical and special effects to Army collective training.” This is to say that they constructed villages to train military personnel in simulated real-world environments; live explosions were commonplace on the jobsite, which had the feel of an action movie! But more importantly, working at Allied allowed for Chris to maintain work in the military field but from a civilian role. It also gave him the opportunity to learn about modular building, which was commonly used in the construction of these “fake villages.”



Chris Bradley & Troy Grant

With a growing interest in modular building, Chris went from Allied to join “probably the largest volumetric modular building companies in western North America: Guerdon Modular Buildings in Boise, Idaho.” Though he was more on the sales side, he learned what is involved in building hotels and apartments at Guerdon. Chris’s journey continued to Horizon North (now NRB Modular) as Director of Sales, then on to Octaform in Vancouver, and finally to TLA Developments.

Like Chris, Troy joined the Army as a young man in the 1980s, rose to the rank of Captain, and retired in 2010. He set up a leadership and organizational design company, which was a successful endeavour with many clients from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and even down to California. He was then invited by Sturgeon County, near Edmonton, Alberta to be their General Manager of Public Services. His portfolio included land use development, land use bylaws, land use planning, as well as economic development. Though he enjoyed his time there and it was extremely important to his development, both personally and professionally, he felt he did not fit as a bureaucrat.



It was by luck that Troy was invited by a large land development company in the capital region of Alberta to be their president, and discovered he loved it even more in the private sector. He set up a land development company and undertook a project north of Edmonton. This incentivized him to better understand the financial, marketing and sales side of things. He moved into working as an owner’s rep for some larger projects in B.C. and some in Alberta. Then, two and a half years ago, he began TLA, purchased some land, and invited Chris to partner with him, and the rest is history.

Military Skills Transferable to the Construction Industry

In keeping with their “no bullshit” philosophy, TLA’s hiring policy is quite simple: hire for fit, train for trade. As Troy says Veteran hires are top of the list, followed by family, friends of employees, and finally pe: “no matter which TLA team member you speak to, you will always get the unfettered truth” Just like the army of today, TLA’s workforce is extremely diverse. Staff come from a variety of cultural backgrounds; more than half of the directors are female, and several of the team members are Indigenous. Worthy of note are two very special employees, Dexter and Mando (their dogs), whose presence helps to keep the staff at TLA grounded and free from stress. It makes sense, considering TLA is a supporter of SCARS (Second Chance Animal Rescue Society), a not-for-profit organization.

As a Veteran-owned-and-operated company, both Troy and Chris agree that there are major advantages to hiring military Veterans. Troy says: “coming out of the Army, there’s a damn fine chance that you’re a hard worker and a good team player. What company doesn’t want that and doesn’t need that?” The skills learned in the military are directly applicable to TLA and what they do. Veterans show up and give everything they have to be successful; they look for leadership opportunities, they look for opportunities to make the people around them better, they look for opportunities to challenge themselves, they look for opportunities to work smarter and not harder. As Chris so aptly puts it: “the construction world lives by discipline, lives by scheduling, and you need to be able to rely on your people. Well, that’s the Army, right? Instead of grabbing your rifle, you’re grabbing your tools and applying the skills sets and training you have just to a different environment.”



And although Troy and Chris never worked with Helmets to Hardhats during their transitions out of the military, they like what the organization offers. Chris states: “I think it’s fantastic that you have groups and initiatives like Helmets to Hardhats, helping Army guys to make that transition because, unfortunately, some of the Army guys do get institutionalized into the organization. Then, they don’t realize how transferable their skills are into the civilian market, and construction in particular. So, it’s great to have an organization (like Helmets to Hardhats) to make that move.”



THE FUTURE OF TLA DEVELOPMENTS

“TLA builds primarily in the B.C. and Alberta capital regions. They use traditional build-styles and introduce sustainability factors where they can, based on regional requirements. In British Columbia, the company has handled projects as big as a 50 unit, six-storey family condo and as small as a 12-unit custom subdivision on Salt Spring Island, B.C. In Alberta, they typically handle rental projects. The biggest project they have in Alberta will be the construction of 360 rental units in St. Albert, Alberta in partnership with the St. Albert Housing Society, a not-for-profit that helps families find safe and affordable housing.

For achieving such resounding success in only two and a half years, Troy and Chris remain humble and do not boast any awards or accolades but prefer to fly under the radar and be honest and “less polished.” What lies ahead for TLA? They will continue to provide a soft-landing place for Veterans and family members. As Troy puts it: “it’s very important that guys like us, in our position, help those coming out of the Army to make the transition to companies like ours. In fact, I feel we are obligated to do so.” They will continue to take on three to five new projects per year and build great homes for Canadians, as well as continue to provide a great place to work.

For more information, visit TLA's website at <https://www.tladev.ca/>



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