

ENGINEERING STAR



## Gordon Meldrum: Engineering and Beyond

[By Akbar Ali]

Gordon Meldrum is president of Engineering Labs Inc. (ELI), a business consulting and specialized staffing company located in Sterling Heights, Michigan. As a high-profile engineer, Meldrum has branched out beyond the purely technical aspect of engineering to help develop his family business into a regional industry leader. And lest you think engineers don't have rhythm, this one can play both jazz and rock 'n' roll.

Meldrum chose to pursue the field of engineering because it seemed like the most natural fit for him at the time. Because his father was an engineer and since Meldrum proved to be quite adept at math and science, engineering was the obvious choice. He has also sustained an avid interest in building objects that require an understanding of mechanics and electricity, especially automobiles. Because of this pervasive view of engineering, he affirms that it is best understood as both a profession and a hobby. It isn't something left in the office or on a blueprint; it is everywhere.

Meldrum attended Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, Michigan, where he worked towards a bachelor's degree in science and engineering. He recalled that since he was working while he was studying engineering, he had little time for anything aside from work and school: "Going to engineering school and working at the same time makes for a really busy schedule!"

Upon graduation, Meldrum found work with Scales & Associates, a consulting engineering firm located in Detroit. Because it was a small minority firm where he simply had to learn quickly and "get the job done," the experience was both daunting and demanding, ultimately proving to be a positive first stepping stone and giving him the confidence and know-how to succeed as an engineer.

Meldrum remarked, "The owner taught me a lot. You learn more than engineering at your first job; you learn to present yourself at meetings, how to be confident in your decisions." He added that as an engineer, he is the go-to guy for the fundamental challenges facing the client and that in addition to possessing technical skill, an engineer must convey confidence in his or her own ability to clients and colleagues throughout the duration of the project.

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

**A.** I play jazz and rockabilly.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

**A.** The Rolling Stones' *Let It Bleed*. It was their reply to the Beatles album *Let It Be*. I love their tough, irreverent stand.

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

**A.** Actually, it was *Hot Rod* magazine. They had an article about horsepower improvements for the new GTO-one of which I own. Being a mechanical engineer from Detroit, I can't help myself when it comes to concepts like torque and net horsepower, especially with a stock 400-hp V8.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

**A.** *The American Experience*. It's an amazing show that never fails to draw me in.

**Q. Who is your role model?**

**A.** I'll have to get back to you with that one.

After Meldrum left engineering consulting, he began working as a freelancer in any engineering discipline that would take him on. He bought a computer and some software and put together a makeshift office in his apartment. Among his first projects was the architectural design of a giant Greek Orthodox church. Even though he was not an architect by trade, Meldrum resolved not to let this stop him and dove headfirst into the challenge.

"I remember staying up late into the night, going through textbooks, and studying similar churches for ideas," he said.

Ultimately, the church was built and was deemed a success. Unfortunately, it was not a total victory for Meldrum, who learned an important business lesson: "If your invoices don't get paid, halt the workflow." He was not compensated for much of the work he did on the church and, for the most part, walked away with nothing but experience in his pocket.

Other experiences have been memorable for the right reasons. For a time, Meldrum was employed by the National Science Foundation and was stationed in Antarctica. Yes, *Antarctica*. His primary job was to help with the development of the control system that maintains power, heat, and water—in short, what is commonly referred to as "life support."



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“Antarctica is a beautiful continent, and I wanted to see it before it starts to melt,” Meldrum said.

Given his considerable work experience, Meldrum has learned a lot over the years, though he considers a personal lesson his best: “The best lesson I learned was from my father. His kindness was overwhelming, especially to people who didn’t necessarily deserve it. He treated everyone with respect no matter who they were. It’s a wonderful trait, and a goal I’m slowly moving towards.”

Aside from his father, Meldrum also counts his music teacher as one of his greatest mentors: “He taught me not only to play the upright bass (a huge task in itself) but that good players don’t have talent; they have

dedication and perseverance. It’s something I’d never have learned without his insight and encouragement. Dedication is something you can apply to everything in your life; it’s more of the process than an end in itself.”

Clearly, the success of Meldrum’s musical abilities has “played” a part in the success of his business, where he has met the challenge by persevering. The key to success in his own words: “Be yourself and do it with conviction; it’s all you are.”

When ELI was founded, it was largely an engineering firm offering only customized engineering solutions. Now, in part because of Meldrum’s extensive training and his understanding of the needs and demands of engineering and its related fields, the

company has gradually moved into the more specialized niche of technical staffing.

“Although I am an engineer by training, I have embraced technical staffing and placements of engineers not only for myself but for my company as well. I enjoy the relatively satisfying aspects of finding employment for others, as well as having a flexible company that changes with the times,” Meldrum said.

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