



PULLING TOGETHER

PHOTOS: HELEN ORR.



Successful businessman Luke Myall never uses the words “staff” or “employees”.

He prefers “team members”.
 “We’re all in this together - pulling in the same direction, working hard to do an excellent job. There’s no them and us here.”
 He has another simple philosophy: he never asks any of his team members to do a job that he hasn’t done himself.
 Luke owns HiQA, a geotechnical sampling and test company working mainly on construction, civil engineering, mining and defence contracts.
 The firm has offices in Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine.
 HiQA team members are still buzzing after winning the much-coveted Northern Territory Telstra Business of Year award.
 “We’re very proud to have won,” Luke says. “Everyone worked so hard to make it possible.

“But winning the award isn’t the end of it. We’re not going to sit back and say, ‘Right, we’re the best - nothing more to be done’.
 “We’ve now set a new standard and must continue to live up to that. We want to get even better.”
 HiQA tests the strength and integrity of construction materials, such as concrete, bitumen and aggregate.
 It has world-class accreditation.
 The company has worked on a string of major projects, including Inpex, Darwin’s new prison, the Shell supply and maintenance base, the Palmerston Regional Hospital and the Zuccoli housing development.
 It has also won contracts on many of the road and bridge-building projects in the NT.
 HiQA has come a long way from very humble beginnings over the past nine years.
 Luke had a good brain but didn’t apply himself in year 12.

“I got bored and didn’t pass year 12,” he says. “I’ve found that growing a business is never boring.”
 His first “real job” after leaving school was using a roller and shovel for a construction company in Katherine.
 He later got a traineeship with a construction metals testing company - and has never forgotten how he was given a chance.
 Luke soon began managing the company’s laboratory.
 He was working late one night in 2008 when a fax arrived in the office announcing that a one-man geotechnical company in Katherine was up for sale.
 Luke borrowed \$100,000 from his dad and bought it.
 The company was based in a “glorified garden shed” with broken air-conditioning.
 Luke moved into the Beagle Motel and began making a success of the little firm. His fiancée Kerrylee moved down from Darwin a year later.



HiQA opened an office in Alice Springs in 2009 and set up a laboratory in Darwin two years later. Headquarters were still in Katherine until the firm moved to Darwin in 2014.
 The company now has 43 full-time equivalent staff and a sparkling new premises in Tivendale - with good aircon.
 There are plans to expand to Western Australia and possibly East Timor.
 Kerrylee has given up teaching and is now in charge of administration and finance.
 “I’d always wanted to have a family company,” Luke says. “I’m the big picture person and Kerrylee has got a great eye for detail. We work well together ... and never have to go home at night and explain what happened at work that day.”
 Not surprisingly, Luke and his team are willing to give fellow Territorians who show the right attitude a go.

“I’VE FOUND THAT GROWING A BUSINESS IS NEVER BORING.”

They conduct exhaustive interviews with job applicants - concentrating as much on looking for a “value match” for the company as aptitude.
 “The applicants must have year 11 and a college education is obviously an advantage.
 “But we’ve found that you can take someone off the street and train them if they’ve got the right attitude - if they want to work and want to learn.” **TQ**

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