

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

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Looking Back and Moving Ahead

*James Lednicky (left) and his successor
as General Manager, Jason Smith*




RainbowSM
COMMUNICATIONS

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BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

Ever noticed that the word "succession" contains "success"?

That makes total sense, given how important succession planning is to the successful continuation of a company when key leaders step down.

Rainbow Communications recently experienced a leadership transition, which prompted our theme of succession planning for this issue of *Business Connections*. On July 1, 2016, Jason Smith succeeded James Lednický as General Manager. You can learn more about the careers of these talented men in **Next Chapters in Two Success Stories** on pages 4 and 5.

If succession planning is something your company hasn't yet considered or needs to reassess, check out page 3's **Succession Planning Prepares Tomorrow's Leaders**. This article explains why succession planning is so important and offers key steps to include in the process.

Success in marketing and customer service requires us to keep looking down the road at new technologies. On page 6, we invite you to **Get Directions for Navigating the Customer Journey**. Twice in October, Rainbow Communications is hosting a business seminar titled "The Customer Journey: Understanding and Improving the Digital Experience," and we encourage you to take advantage of this educational opportunity.

What's ahead for your company? In addition to succession planning, remember to do some technology planning as well. For help with the latter, give us a call.

Sincerely,
Rainbow Communications
Sales Department



L to R: Julie Bergman, Sales Representative; Amiee DeFore, Technology Solutions Clerk; Angie Kreider, Sales Account Manager, and Jerad Enneking, Sales Representative

Succession Planning Prepares Tomorrow's Leaders

What your company needs to consider when doing this vital planning



It's common for people to devote incredible amounts of hard work into building a successful business today, yet devote relatively little attention to planning what will happen to that business tomorrow. To keep your success going over time, succession planning is essential.

What is succession planning?

Succession planning is a process for identifying and developing internal people with the potential to fill key business leadership positions in a company. In other words, it's preparing for the day when the business owners and/or executives decide to retire or need to step down for other reasons. Through the succession planning process, you recruit superior employees, develop their knowledge and skills, and prepare them for advancement or promotion into ever more challenging roles in your company.

Why is succession planning important?

Succession planning ensures you have employees ready to fill new leadership roles as they become available and provides for a smoother transition for your company. Think of it this way—the Baby Boomer generation is in the process of retiring, and they will take with them several decades worth of knowledge, experience, and working relationships. You want to capture that valuable information before it walks out your door, in order to pass it on to the next leader. All organizations, no matter their size, need succession planning.

What are key steps in the process?

While succession planning will be different for a company with 300 employees compared to one with 10, there are fundamental steps to be included:

- **Be proactive.** It can take time to find and prepare a promising candidate for a leadership role. Even if you don't think you'll need a replacement in the near future, prepping someone to assume an important role creates an invaluable safety net.
- **Keep an open mind.** While the obvious successor may be the second in command, don't disregard other promising employees.
- **Provide training to peak performers.** As you identify your top performers, offer training and mentoring to help them develop new skills and refine existing ones.
- **Do a trial run.** A vacation is a great time to have a potential successor step in to assume some responsibilities. The employee will gain experience while you learn how prepared the person is to take on a bigger role.
- **Use your succession plan to develop a hiring strategy.** Once you've identified internal employees as successors for key roles in your organization, take note of any talent gaps. In this way, a succession plan can help you identify where to focus your recruiting efforts.

By developing a succession plan and identifying potential future leaders, you'll help employees feel valued and eager to realize their potential.

You can find more resources related to succession planning at www.shrm.org, the website for the Society for Human Resource Management.

Next Chapters in Two Success Stories

James Lednický and Jason Smith share their experiences at Rainbow Communications



On March 31, 2017, our long-time friend and General Manager, James Lednický, will retire from Rainbow Communications. On July 1, 2016, Jason Smith succeeded Lednický as General Manager. In the interim months, Lednický is advising Smith in his new role and helping with the leadership transition. We asked Lednický and Smith questions about where they've been, where they're going, and a few of their favorite highlights along the way.

How did you get started at Rainbow Communications?

Lednický: I began work at Rainbow in 1988. I got hired because the General Manager, Gilbert Crouse, was looking for a staff assistant. Before I started working in that role, though, I did practically every job at the company. On my first day, I took out the trash and mowed the grass. And during my first year, I worked as an outside plant technician and in the central office. I never became as expert at any of these jobs, but doing them helped me understand the company better. Plus, I had a great mentor in Gilbert Crouse.

Smith: I started in 1998 as Marketing Manager. We had dial-up internet, the only cell phones were big bag phones, and our main service was dialtone. When I started, the dial-up internet speed was 33 Kbps. It was a big deal when we raised it to 56 Kbps. I went on to serve as Director of Marketing from 2006 to 2009 and as Assistant General Manager from 2008 to 2016.

Upgrading from copper to fiber to the home in the cooperative exchanges was a significant change for Rainbow Communications in recent years. What was involved in this process?

Lednický: Making the transition from copper to fiber took time and involved many steps. I was observing what other companies were doing and keeping up with Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandates. It was clear that fiber was where we were headed. I spent years investigating regulatory issues and financing related to fiber networks in order to chart a path for us.

I learned that if you wait until you have all the answers, it's too late to make the move. I worked with our board of directors and they were open and receptive. We put a plan in place that included financial, engineering, legal, and consulting advice.

We pushed to get fiber expanded to our area's anchor institutions such as schools, hospitals, etc. in Hiawatha, Sabetha, and Seneca as well. After all, we're only as strong of a company as the communities we serve. Fiber fosters economic growth for all of us, and helps to level the playing field of technology between small rural communities and large cities.

What are your proudest career accomplishments?

Lednický: I'd say one of the most gratifying parts of being a manager is developing people. I believe in giving people the power to make decisions and then support them in their growth as leaders.

Smith: I'm most proud to have been involved with setting the strategic plan and goals for the company since 2003. But I'm just one person on the team. So many people were involved in our many accomplishments as a company. I'm also proud of developing the people on our staff. That's the fun part of my job—watching the staff flourish.

How has Rainbow's succession planning helped you, Jason, prepare to be General Manager?

Smith: The succession plan we've had in place has helped me prepare for my new role by allowing me to participate as a leader at the company and in the industry. It's also benefited me by identifying skills that needed to be strengthened and allowing me to improve

on them. The biggest value of the succession plan has been the smooth transition of leadership at Rainbow Communications and the continuity of the organization.

James has been influential in my professional career by trusting me to carry out initiatives and supporting the decisions and recommendations I've made. His trust has helped me develop as a professional and gain confidence in my abilities. James has also taught me about leadership and being open to new ideas.

What are you looking forward to in the time ahead?

Lednický: Retirement is not a word I like. I prefer to think of it as my "next chapter" or "second career." I'm not quitting work. I'm just going to work at other things. I'm now taking classes to become certified in logistics for emergency preparedness. The fire department needs people on call for emergencies such as wildfires who are trained to support the forward camp with food, tents, etc.

Smith: I'm honored to now be General Manager and grateful to James and others for helping to prepare me for the role. It's exciting to see the opportunities presented by the broadband world—endless opportunities that didn't exist before.

Even with this transition, our customers should know that our mission remains the same, and that's to enhance our rural communities by providing exceptional broadband services.



Caption

Get Directions for Navigating the Customer Journey

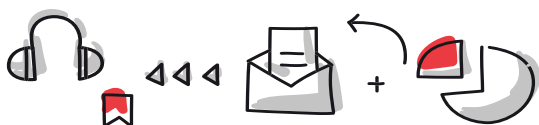
This business seminar will help you improve your marketing and customer service



At Rainbow Communications, one of our goals is help educate our commercial customers about free or inexpensive ways for them to market their businesses. We want to demonstrate the power of broadband and show how to effectively and efficiently reach your customers in ways they prefer. That's why we're hosting a business seminar titled, "The Customer Journey: Understanding and Improving the Digital Experience."

The seminar will be held on October 19 in Seneca and again on October 20 in Hiawatha. It begins at 8:30am and closes at 12:30pm, with breakfast and lunch included for the fee of just \$30.

The featured speaker at "The Customer Journey" will be Elizabeth Collins, Principal at Webcom Resources. This digital marketing agency is based in Atchison, KS, and serves billion-dollar companies and hometown businesses with the same earnest spirit. Collins provides digital project management and consulting with a focus on marketing strategy, digital media, technology, and analytics.



By attending this seminar, you'll learn about:

- **Mapping your customer's journey.** This process can help you make sure your customers have the best possible experience with your business.
- **Understanding the digital customer experience.** Find out what today's customers expect from digital assets and communication channels during their journey.
- **Leveraging platforms to improve the journey.** Cloud-based tools are designed to help businesses improve the customer journey in an affordable yet effective manner.

You'll also walk away with handouts and worksheets to reinforce the topics covered and make it easier to implement the new ideas at your business.

Who should attend? Anyone who wants to learn more about social media marketing and the customer's experience online—from the business owner who "does it all" to administrative assistants or marketing department members.

Registration is required. Space is limited to 30 people for each location, and spots will fill up quickly. To register, you can go to www.rainbowtel.net/business-seminar, call Stacy Simmer at 800-892-0163, or contact a Rainbow Communications Sales Representative.



Kathy Ruoff

Returning to **Your Roots**

Rainbow Communications welcomes a Horton native to our team

Each quarter, we highlight one or more people in our community whose career path brought them back to their roots. For this issue, we recognize Kathy Ruoff, who became Controller for Rainbow Communications on July 1, 2016.

Kathy Ruoff was born and raised in Horton, where her Norwegian great grandparents settled. She says, “I have many wonderful memories of growing up around family and friends. If you needed help with anything, there was always someone willing to lend a hand. I remember watching the fireworks on the Fourth of July out at Mission Lake, and spending my summers at the swimming pool and/or at the baseball field. It’s exciting to see the positive changes occurring in Horton in the last few years courtesy of the Reinvent Horton movement.”

Ruoff attended the University of Kansas in Lawrence, earning a BS in accounting and business administration in 1987. “My husband and I met in college. We moved from Lawrence to Kansas City in 1998. I worked at Sprint for several years, but have spent most of my career doing accounting for small rural local telephone companies as a CPA at Van Hoet & Company and other CPA firms. Rainbow Communications has been one of my clients for 20 years,” Ruoff explains.

She adds, “As Controller for Rainbow Communications, my responsibilities include overseeing the accounting functions, regulatory requirements, and financial activities of the company. I also work

with management on business decisions including new products and technologies.”

How does it feel to be on the staff of a company from her hometown area? Ruoff replies, “When I worked as a CPA with clients like Rainbow Communications, I thought it would be fun to work for one of them. I actually got my wish! It’s been busy and rewarding so far with something new always happening. I’m proud to work for a company so involved in the communities it serves. Our communications services are vitally important for economic development, medical assistance, education, and many other challenges faced by rural communities. Growing up in this area helps me feel more vested in its success.”

Ruoff and her husband, an architect and real estate agent, recently became “empty nesters” when their son went to college this fall. They also have a daughter who graduated from college last year and works at Park University in Missouri. Ruoff notes, “This was a great time to start my new job at Rainbow Communications. I work at our headquarters in Everest four days per week and from home on Fridays. I’m looking forward to spending more time with family and friends back in the Horton area.”

Snapshots from our Smart Rural Tour

Rainbow Communications received the Showcase Award for being a Smart Rural Community. This is the highest honor given by the NTCA, The Rural Broadband Association. To celebrate, we visited the communities we serve on a Smart Rural Tour and recognized the local organizations and businesses using broadband to enhance growth and innovation.



- 1. Willis** L to R: Back Row: Dave Hartley, Lamar Shoemaker (Willis City Mayor) Delbert Jacobson Front Row: Charlene Branch, Stacy Simmer (Rainbow), Bonnie Jacobson
- 2. Whiting** L to R: Larry Eubanks, Loren Lind, Ron Cook, Andy Kaiser, Richard Archer (Whiting City Mayor), Stacy Simmer (Rainbow) **3. Everest** L to R: Alfred Kimmi (Everest City Mayor) and Jackie Petersen (Rainbow) **4. Seneca** L to R: Jackie Petersen (Rainbow), Angie Kreider (Rainbow), Joe Mitchell, Mayor of Seneca, & Stacy Simmer (Rainbow)
- 5. Sabetha** L to R: Maridel Wittmer, Commissioner of Finance, City of Sabetha, Angie Kreider (Rainbow), and Doug Clark, Mayor of Sabetha **6. Robinson** L to R: Willard Enke, Robinson City Mayor, Angie Kreider (Rainbow), and Marsha Ganstrom, Robinson City Council Member **7. Muscotah** L to R: Angie Kreider (Rainbow) and Brian Higley, (City Council Member, Muscotah) **8. Huron** Back Row L to R: Linda Ferris - City Council, Carol Fowler - City Council Front Row L to R: Don Ball - City Council, Jacquetta Peak - Huron City Mayor & Treasurer, and Paula Clem - City Clerk **9. Horton** L to R: Stacy Simmer (Rainbow), Angie Kreider (Rainbow), Tim Lentz, Horton City Mayor, and Jackie Petersen (Rainbow)
- 10. Iowa Tribe** L to R: Julie Bergman (Rainbow), Robbie Craig, Iowa Tribe, and Jerad Enneking (Rainbow) **11. Troy** L to R: Stacy Simmer (Rainbow), Margret Sutherland, Sarah Boeh-Cerra, Robert Jenkins (Troy Mayor), Holbert Clary, Dave Horton, and Jared Enneking (Rainbow) **12. Denton** L to R: Sarah Albers, Sue Winchester, Melvin Massey (Denton Mayor & Rainbow Board Member), and Christine Tharp **13. Highland** L to R: Jarad Enneking (Rainbow), Scott Sisk - Highland Mayor, and Julie Bergman (Rainbow) **14. Hiawatha** Toni Hull, City Commissioner, Jackie Petersen (Rainbow), Angie Kreider (Rainbow), Mayor Steffen Shamburg, Stacy Simmer (Rainbow), and Bill Collins, City Commissioner **15. Wathena** L-R: Jerad Enneking (Rainbow), Ron Meers, Joe Barger, Craig Grable, Stacy Simmer (Rainbow), Geary Engemann, and Phyllis McCrory