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## Low-key management style proves to be successful strategy for CEO

By Shawn Green

Mitch Garner, the president and CEO of Symetrics Industries doesn't feel as if he has spent half his life at the company, but he has.

Garner worked his way up to the big corner office at the top of the building from an entry-level manager's position he secured in 1986 at the tender age of 22. Fresh out of UCF and armed with a bachelor's degree in Chemistry, Garner first thought of his employment with the Melbourne-based company as a mere stepping stone on his way to a career in Chemistry.

Symetrics, established in 1962, manufactures aircrew protection systems for the Department of Defense, NASA, and other contractors.

"I took it with all the intentions of working there while I found a job in my field," he said.

However, once he settled into the job he was hired to do, Garner said he developed a taste for netting government contracts.

The growth of Garner from a young adult into a successful family man can almost be measured along side the company's own growth. When he was hired on 20 years ago, the company had an employee base of about 30 people and was located in a small building on US1. Now, the employee count tops 130 and business is conducted from a 42,000 square-foot building located on Nasa Blvd. In the mid-1990s when Garner was "growing" his own family by marrying his wife of 12 years, Tonya, and raising two children, now 9 and 11, the company was also growing in leaps and bounds. During the years of 1993 to 1997 Symetrics boomed from a formidable \$5 million a year to a whopping \$20 million after procuring a sizeable contract. As of 2005 the company reached a value of 30 million.

Garner was promoted from senior vice president of operations to president in 2001. His father, Dudley Garner, who was once the company's CEO, has given him plenty of advice and support.

"He and I are low key (in management styles). I like to learn as much as I can about an issue to figure out the best course of action," he said.

Dudley Garner retired from the company in 1998, but Mitch Garner has not given a great deal of thought to his own retirement plans. He said he is happy to keep the company growing.

"I want to keep the train going," he said. "If we doubled it (value) in five years there is no reason we couldn't double again in another five."

Garner gives a great deal of credit of his own success as a CEO to his management team. He said he is lucky to have a key group of people to

"brainstorm" with.

" I am really fortunate to have a great staff," he said.

As part of Garner's low-key management style, he said he like to give a lot of latitude to his co-workers. If an employee earns his trust by using good judgment, he will give them plenty of room. Micro-management is not his forte. " I don't really have time to do it," he said.

Although, time may be of the essence at Symetrics, the busy schedule is one of Garner's favorite parts of the company's working environment.

" It's very fast paced and there is always something going on," he said. "The days seem to go by quickly."

As part of his job description, Garner has traveled globally to provide customer support and visit company representatives located internationally. While Garner enjoys getting a first-hand look at business opportunities abroad he feels traveling has its pros and cons.

" It's a trade off because it takes away from work and home," he said.

He makes about three major trips a year, visiting countries such as Japan, Korea, Turkey, and The Netherlands. One of the major setbacks of traveling abroad, joked Garner, is paying for every single soda while dining out. The company motto of traveling employees is "America, the land of the free refills," he said.

As much as Garner is clearly devoted to his work he is equally devoted to his family. He said he revels in the time he spends with his family at their West Melbourne home. He said he enjoys hanging out with "the boys" on weekends. The boy's he is talking about are neither old college buddies nor are they alumni from Palm Bay High School, his alma mater. They are his two young children. Garner coaches both of his children's soccer teams at different times of the year. He also enjoys playing golf as well as softball for his church's team.

Symetrics was established in 1962 and is a privately owned company. It is located at 1615 W. NASA Blvd. Melbourne. For more information, call 254-1500 or visit [www.symetrics.com](http://www.symetrics.com)

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