



Mary Murrell

meets

Henryk Struzik



Training is the only way forward, says Henryk Struzik of Courtis Contract.

HENRYK Struzik describes himself as being like the man in the electric shaver advert. 'I liked the company so much I bought it.' Courtis had begun trading in 1961 primarily in ceiling and partition work but with some flooring.

Henryk, who was a plasterer, joined it in 1997. When the owners retired in 2006, Henryk and his wife Julie bought the company.

Since then the flooring side of the business has expanded rapidly. 'When we bought Courtis there was only one fitter,' says Henryk. 'Now we have six directly employed floorlayers, all with CSCS certificates and CRB checked.'

Courtis still creates offices out of large empty spaces, but flooring is a major part of its business and a reason why turnover has increased by 50% in three years.

The company supplies and fits carpet, vinyl, lino, rubber, wood and ceramic tiles and can fit raised access flooring. 'In fact I don't think there is any type of flooring that we cannot lay,' says Henryk.

The customer base includes local authorities, schools, women's refuges, health care centres, community centres, hospitals, churches, crematoriums where the flooring must withstand heat and cash'n'carry freezer rooms.

Latest projects include: the Gresham Sports Pavilion for Nottingham City Council which had a very tight schedule for the 1,000sq m Altro D25 with coved walls, exacerbated by the need to install a Laybond DPM after the floor had been left uncovered during torrential rain; and a Powergen empty warehouse which Courtis made into offices including carpet tiles and Altro safety vinyl floorcoverings.

'Our reputation for our skills and good service brings us much work by recommendation. We are one of those rare firms that turn up when we say we will, and carry out the work effectively and efficiently,' says Henryk. 'We enjoy a lot of repeat business, and are often asked to make repairs when other contractors have made mistakes.'

All the fitters are Altro trained installers, so wet rooms are a speciality. 'We are known as the best company to fit level access showers,'

The train gang



Recent installations by Courtis Contract

says Henryk, 'and as a consequence carry out a lot of work under the Decent Homes deals installing the flooring for showers, kitchens, bathrooms in day.'

Henryk Struzik is on the CFA and FITA councils. 'The CFA is a wonderful organisation, as is FITA,' he says. 'Training is the only way forward. We ensure all our people are skilled through in-house and manufacturers' training courses.'

'We have some very experienced people here, and I would match my team against any other. One fitter has been with the company for 41 years and another for nearly 40. When you have chaps like that around, it helps enormously. They can tell what type of floor problem we may get even before a job starts.'

Based in the heart of England, the company mainly services clients in the environs of Derby, Gedling, Mansfield and Nottingham where it is on the favoured contractors list for the local councils. 'For cost effectiveness I prefer to operate close to base, but some builders ask us to work further afield to fit level access wet rooms,' says Henryk.

'I have never understood why people work outside their local area, unless it is for a client with outlets throughout the country, because it costs more to do so. That's why if I get a job in say, London, I pass it over to another CFA member.

'We will work overnight or at



weekends, seven days a week if necessary, but the work needs to be profitable.

'Everyone is pushing hard for lower prices. One flooring contractor was even asked to reduce his price by 15% after the job had been completed, but with the CFA's help he obtained full payment.

'Julie handles all the company's administration, including the accounts. She says people are taking extended credit. Usually slow payers send a cheque on receipt of a letter threatening solicitors. Now we actually have to ask a solicitor to send a letter.

'Many are ignoring the fair payment scheme and builders are taking two months to pay. Nottingham Council is excellent. It pays in 14 days and is hoping to reduce the time taken to seven days.

'I think the recession will carry on at least to the end of the year. Companies like ours with strong cash flow will survive.

'Increasing paperwork isn't helping trade. There is always something new required for H&S. The latest is that everyone on site must have an NVQ qualification, but I suspect many main contractors will not take any notice just as they ignore the rules on checking for CSCS certification.

'Just as the industry settles down and moves forward after one piece of legislation, another comes along and it takes a step back. It needs brightening up with new products to boost trade.

'Other than that, it's the greatest industry to be in!' **CFJ**

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