

# AboveBoard

Frank Dowd, IV is CEO and Chairman of the Board of Charlotte Pipe and Foundry, the leading maker of cast iron and plastic pipe and fittings for residential and commercial plumbing systems and industrial applications. Mr. Dowd joined Charlotte Pipe and Foundry in 1984 and was named chairman and CEO in September of 1998. Mr. Dowd attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on a Morehead Scholarship and received MBA and JD degrees from the University of Virginia.



## ■ Why did you choose your career?

Charlotte Pipe and Foundry is a fourth generation family-run enterprise, started by my great grandfather in 1901. While it was natural that I enter the business, I felt strongly that I should get my education and gain some life experience outside the company before I came to work at Charlotte Pipe, which I eventually did in 1984.

## ■ Who or what has been the major influence on your career?

Getting a law degree and an MBA taught me how to think and the fundamentals of how to run a business. But, my experience with Outward Bound taught me determination. After three trips and serving on their board for many years, I've taken their motto to heart, "To serve, to strive and not to yield." Those are positive and inspiring words that I try to live by. Also, I would be remiss if I did not mention the tremendous influence the directors of our company have had on me, namely my dad, my uncle and our former president Ned Hardison.

## ■ Do you think managers are born or made?

I think it's a little of both. Someone once said that extraordinary people are simply ordinary people with extraordinary determination. I think anybody can be a manager. But not every manager is a great leader. The trap leaders sometimes fall into is get-

ting too far out in front of whom they're trying to lead. After all, a leader without followers is just a person going for a walk.

## ■ What career advice do you have for those aiming for the top?

Hard work, dedication and integrity are common qualities in successful people – but they're only half the equation. To reach the pinnacle, surround yourself with good, smart, talented people and let them do their job. Create an environment of teamwork and reward success. Strive to minimize company politics. Most importantly, embrace change. Jack Welch said that if the rate of change inside your organization is slower than the rate of change outside your organization, then your organization is near an end. I think that's pretty good career advice.

## ■ From which job did you learn the most, and what did you learn?

I grew up on a farm outside Charlotte, N.C., so I'm no stranger to hard work. In the summers when I was in high school, I worked at the Charlotte Pipe foundry. Just before my freshman year in college, a union had been voted in by the workers at the foundry – an event that caused tremendous turmoil for the company. It was through that experience that I learned how important it is to take care of your employees. After all, you can never get an employee

to treat a customer better than they are treated themselves.

## ■ What are the crucial issues your industry must face in the coming decade?

The greatest threat we face is unfair trade from China. We have many tough, but fair foreign competitors, particularly on the plastics side of the business. But the state-owned Chinese foundries don't have to worry about the high cost of capital or shipping, making it difficult for private domestic foundries to compete. Their environmental and safety regulations can be lax, or in some cases, non-existent. While American manufacturers can compete with anyone in the world on a level playing field, the advantages enjoyed by subsidized Chinese foundries cross the boundary of fairness.

## ■ What has been the key to your success?

This company has been around for a long time. When I look around I can see why. It's not what we make, it's what our employees are made of. The key to our success has been the hard work and dedication of the many generations of employees over the last century. We place a premium on relationships – not only with our customers and our suppliers but with our employees. We're a family-run business and we strive to treat people like family – a practice that goes back to our founder.