

Spotlight On:

Kory Wood | Founder and President
Kikinaw Energy Services, Est. 2013

Life Story

Kory Wood was born and raised in Chetwynd, B.C. and is a member of the Saulteau First Nations. He credits the Saulteau First Nations and the Tansi Friendship Centre with providing him the support and resources necessary to be active in team sports at a young age. Participating in sports helped him develop the social and leadership skills that he uses in his business everyday.

Kory further developed his leadership skills as a youth coordinator with Blueberry River First Nations. After receiving his Red Seal Electrician Certification, Kory knew that he wanted to give back to the communities and social programs that had made such a big impact on him.

Kory founded the company that would become Kikinaw Energy Services, a Saulteau First Nations member-owned electrical and wind energy operation, maintenance and construction company.

What was the motivation behind starting your own business?

I was looking for freedom, personal development, growth, and a challenge. At the end of the day, I was trying to create a better life for myself.

Who is your mentor?

There are times in business when you feel like it's you against the world, so you always need good people on your team. Our Finance and Administration Manager, Debbie Stewart, has helped me so much along the way. She taught me how to manage payroll, source deductions, workers compensation, vendors and cashflow. I also have some business partners that have mentored me and taught me how to cope with the ups and downs of running a business.

How has your business grown and evolved over the years?

In 2014, Kikinaw corporate headquarters consisted of a desk in a spare room with a computer and a printer, and our revenue was just under \$1 million in that first year. Now, we have a 3000 sq. ft building with operations across Canada. Our annual revenue is \$4 – \$5 million a year and we're making a real impact, investing almost \$10,000 a year into local communities.

What do you see as your greatest accomplishment to date?

I'm proud of the fact that in our tough economy we have not only survived, but we have grown over the last four years. It's been a real team effort.

On a personal note, I'm halfway through an MBA program at Athabasca University. Since I don't have any prior university education, to be accepted into the program I had to make a case for myself and explain how I learned to run a business from the ground up. This is a big accomplishment for me because I didn't grow up in a home that had post-secondary education. The education and skills I'm gaining will allow me to continue to pursue unlimited opportunities.

What challenges did you encounter while growing your business? How did you overcome these?

Everything was challenging at the beginning, from understanding payroll, to managing conflict in the workplace. I did my research and looked to my mentors. It's about using whatever resources that you have at your disposal to find solutions.

What specific challenges do Indigenous entrepreneurs face when starting or growing their small business?

Indigenous joint ventures between Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses should ideally be mutually beneficial for both parties and lead to economic and social development opportunities for the Indigenous community. However, I have often seen that profits aren't invested into the local community and the community retains little influence in the partnership. In these cases, there is room for a more balanced relationship between partners.

What advice would you give to other aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs from your experience?

Don't walk alone – surround yourself with good people who genuinely want what's best for you. Business is challenging and there are going to be times when you will be working all day without an income, so you need a vision and purpose that will motivate you and give you direction. Business isn't just about profits – it's about relationships, change, and purpose.

What has been your greatest reward as a small business in your industry?

One of the greatest rewards is developing relationships with people from across the country – from different communities and cultures – and coming together as a team.

Tell us a little-known fact about your company.

We operate in eight provinces, from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia.

Where is your favourite B.C. destination?

I love Salmon Arm and the Shuswap, and I got married this summer at Quaaout Lodge on the Little Shuswap Indian Band. There are so many activities to do there year-round, from hiking and swimming in the summer, to skiing in the winter.

The Bottom Line:

- Kikinaw Energy Services employs between 30 and 40 employees.
- Winners of the BC Aboriginal Business Awards Outstanding Business Achievers 2018.
- They have plans to open an office in Alberta, as well as in Washington State to enter the U.S. wind energy market.