

Executive Spotlight

Ethan Adams

CEO

We are celebrating 40 years of personalized service and improving animal health. Having grown up along with VMRD, Ethan has a unique point-of-view of how VMRD has evolved. He was kind enough to share this perspective with us.

What was your vision for the company when you took over?

Culture came first in my vision. Above all, I wanted VMRD to live up to its values and be a great place to work that delivered great products and services to customers. I also wanted VMRD to be innovative, not an imitative company. And I wanted each business unit to be profitable and grow in profitability.

Did you always know you would run the business one day?

I always wanted to be involved in business. From a very young age I was constantly concocting business ventures, some of which were even mildly successful. I did not know if I had what it took to be entrusted with the family business that provides the livelihood of so many people.

What does it mean to you personally to carry on the legacy of VMRD?

It is a weighty responsibility, but also a privilege. I have been blessed to have many great mentors and excellent preparation for leading this business. I have a lot to live up to.

How has the company changed in the last 40 years?

One palpable change is from a scrounging mindset to a return-on-investment mindset. When I first became cognizant of the company, we had very little capital so we made do with the materials at hand. My dad made a centrifuge out of a washing machine motor and a roller bottle apparatus out of a defunct clothes dryer. I helped paint a fabricated sheet metal incubator that was heated with a light bulb and built a dialysis apparatus out of a garbage can, ABS pipe, and a shaft-driven mixer. Nowadays we do an ROI analysis, purchase equipment intended for the purpose, and perform IQ, OQ, and PQ before we can use it. It is no longer cost effective to scrounge surplus sales and auction sites for equipment that will need repairing prior to use, and the CEO is no longer viewed as the primary equipment repair resource.

How has it stayed the same?

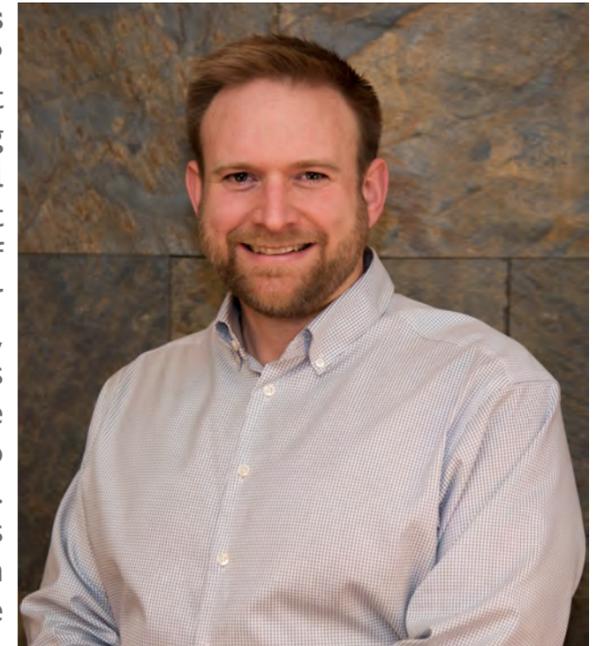
Our goal remains the same—bringing maximum value to the customer. And we are still in pursuit of ever higher quality. Rarely, when the circumstances dictate, I still occasionally build things, but only because I dream up things that don't yet seem to exist.

Where would you like to see the company in the next 40?

I think VMRD has a bright future. Forty years is a very distant horizon for most specificity, but I hope that in 40 years VMRD is a great working environment that is bringing high quality and innovative products to the veterinary field while maintaining healthy margins that allow us to serve more customers and provide livelihoods for more employees. I don't believe in a static business. I believe that a business is, like a tree, either growing or dying.

What were the biggest challenges the company has faced?

People tend to be the biggest challenge in business. Working together with others to achieve a goal is perhaps both the most difficult and most rewarding aspect of business. Regulations are another challenge. Of course we need them, but so much great innovation is hampered by regulations that were not even intended to be applied to the innovations they are preventing. Balancing growth against risk is another great challenge. Too much emphasis on growth and you are probably taking too much risk. Too much emphasis on risk management and you are probably not growing. There is a happy medium, but it is different for any group of people and set of circumstances.



What are some of your earliest memories of VMRD?

I don't have a memory of this, but I'm told the first thing I ever did for VMRD was answer the phone. Unfortunately, I had not yet learned to talk so my parents had some explaining to do. Later, as a kind of a nerdy kid in the single digit ages, I liked to listen in on meetings. I was particularly intrigued by brainstorming sessions among the founders. Usually, they were oriented around product ideas. One of these meetings took place in the second building VMRD occupied, which we moved out of around 1985. I think it was on a Saturday morning because most of the people involved had other full-time employment during the week. Obviously, early exposure to that sort of environment has been helpful in my career. I also distinctly recall riding my tricycle in the hall of the ex-high school building that was VMRD's third home. It was again a Saturday, and my dad was in the lab working on VMRD's first USDA-licensed product. I was probably 5 or 6 years old.

What has been the most rewarding part of building & growing VMRD?

I believe God put us on earth to serve Him. One of the main ways we do that is by serving other humans, so two things I find particularly rewarding are the accolades of satisfied customers and the wellbeing of employees. Customers really love VMRD products and services. We work hard to make them lovable, so it is very satisfying when customers have great experiences with us. We also strive to make VMRD a harmonious and rewarding work environment. I love seeing people working happily together—hopefully laughing, joking and enjoying their workday. And I love to partake in their progression in life: paying off student loans, buying their first house, upgrading vehicles, educating their children, having great vacation experiences, paying off their house, giving generously to causes they're passionate about, and retiring securely.