



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TORKLIFT

Torklift President Jack Kay (left) and Vice President Joel Crawford are pictured in front of Torklift's original location in Kent, Wash. Crawford started at Torklift at the age of 18 as a general laborer and worked his way through the ranks to rise to an executive position. Torklift is a big believer in giving employees opportunities to grow with the business.

# Torklift 'Builds People'

*For years, the Washington-based RV supplier has prioritized investing in its employees, which has paid off with record company growth in 2017.*

*By David MacNeal*

**SUMNER, Wash.** – On a recent winter day, worker stations at Torklift's 52,000-square-foot facility buzzed with activity, a cacophonous symphony of laser-cut metal, metal, and the abrasive sanding of vehicle parts to ensure a final polish.

It was the sweet sound of success for Torklift, a manufacturer of tie-downs, turnbuckles, towing products and suspension products for the RV industry, which has experienced significant growth in recent years, including a 25 percent increase in year-over-year growth last year.

Still, it's not the equipment itself that accounts for the company's success – it's the employees operating that machinery, according to Candice Kay, senior vice president of sales and marketing for the company. Torklift, based in Sumner, Wash., a city of about 10,000 people located about 45 minutes south of Seattle, has managed to attract a diverse workforce and to invest in those employees, cultivating its next generation of company leadership in-house, she adds.





**Torklift's Spencer Grant grinds down the edges of a piece of metal that will be welded to an attachment plate to create the main portion of the company's All Terrain Landing Gear.**

“We don't build parts – we build people,” says Jack Kay, president of Torklift and son to company founder Jon Kay.

In terms of workplace community, Jack Kay has what he calls the “raindrop theory.” Simply put, the idea is that, alone, a drop of water is not much.

“But if you could get thousands,” he says, “you can unite it, and put it in a streambed, move it to a river ... move it to cities, and you can power things. You can have tremendous energy and tremendous force. It's the power of unity.”

This is largely due to Candice Kay (Jack's wife), who oversees new hires.

When eyeing a potential employee, she says she looks for one key element: Fire.

“When I first started out with Torklift, I didn't have all the necessary tools or formal training,” she says, laughing. She jokes about people pulling their hair out as her skills were developed.

People she interviews, she says, may not have a necessary skillset, “but they really want to try. They're really ambitious. They have a fire – those are the ones that just surprise you.”

Before joining Torklift as marketing director, Candice Kay was a journalist, covering the crime and accident beat at a central Washington newspaper for five years.

“I got to see an interesting side of people,” she says, adding that it opened her eyes to how diverse people are, and also not to pre-judge them.

That lesson paid big dividends for Torklift when it comes to some of the hires she has made. For example, she saw a



**Torklift's Wes Love operates a machine that punches holes into metal pieces that will be turned into the All Terrain Landing Gear feet. Each piece is meticulously punched to make sure quality is the same on all pieces.**





Torklift's Arturo Macdenado (above) welds the final pieces of a receiver onto a hitch before attaching it to the crossbar. Torklift's Austin Bryan (right) welds together two parts before bending them into Torklift Derringer Handles for turnbuckles.

spark in 19-year-old Hannah Orr, Torklift's graphic designer (or "wizard", according to her email signature). Despite a non-traditional resume, Candice Kay knew Orr would be a happy addition to the Torklift family.

"I was kind of between homes, in a little bit of a tough spot, and I knew someone that worked here," Orr says about the time before she met Candice Kay. Her resume, which only showed volunteer work, was sent in, and she soon joined Torklift as an intern. She was made part-time after nine days.

"She saw some character in me, something she could work with. ... I guess I was very charismatic," Orr says, laughing.

Candice Kay says she sees that in others.

One welder, Jesse Ramirez, has faded tattoos running along the curves of his face. When Candice Kay sat down with him, she knew he was "going to make a positive impact on others." In December, he told her about a hat and glove drive he'd like to do for homeless children in Seattle.

"He said it reminded him of when he was younger, and he wanted to step into their lives and do something to help them," she says. Ramirez's fundraiser was a success, and he was able to disperse hiking kits in addition. "The side effect of investing in people is that they go out to invest in others."



### Required Reading

As a proactive measure in this investment in building people, Torklift executives challenge their employees to make them the best version of themselves.

For example, National Sales Manager Kyle Bonita started at Torklift in the manufacturing unit, working on the metal puncher. The story goes that Bonita told Jack Kay he wanted his job one day ... and that Jack Kay responded, "OK."

With a mentoring mentality, Jack Kay laid out the groundwork of how he covered every post in his father's company from sweeping the floors to working on the manufacturing side. Bonita soon moved to customer service, more job training, and to his current role.

As another example, in 2000, Joel Crawford started with the company at age 18 in the shop as a general laborer, sweeping floors. Today, Crawford is vice president of the company.

In 2007, before the Great Recession, Torklift experienced



# TORKLIFT INTERNATIONAL SIMPLIFY 2017



PHOTO BY DAVID MACNEAL



Torklift founder Jon Kay and his wife, Peggy, founded the business in 1976. Torklift produced tie-downs and turnbuckles in its early days before branching out to manufacture a variety of RV products, including steps and handrails, towing products and the Stableload vehicle suspension system.

Torklift's theme for 2017 was "Simplify", as emblazoned in this large steel sign placed in the shop. The company's goal was to concentrate on in-house efficiencies, machinery acquisition and adding to its growing workforce.

its biggest year. Crawford worked 16 to 18 hour days to keep up, he says. Then, Torklift's manufacturing facility moved to Sumner from Kent, Wash., around 2010.

Like Bonita, he asked to be trained up from plasma cutting to a managerial role running an internal division of Torklift's production unit, and later in sales as the EcoHitch came into fruition in 2011.

"I'm a person who likes to have their hands on everything," Crawford says. "I do well with challenge – that's one of my gifts."

After overseeing shipping and production for five years, and raising up another manager, Jack Kay approached Crawford and offered him the job of vice president.

That kind of investment in employees continues today.

Torklift executives bring classes taught at the SEMA Show to employees. It's part of the thousands of hours teaching marketing and leadership to employees.

As a requirement, new employees read, or at least listen to the audiobook

of Earl Nightingale's *Lead the Field*. No, there's no book report. Torklift does, however, ask employees to take a written test afterward to ensure they did read it.

"We want to look at people's gifts and talents, and where they have the opportunity for growth," Crawford says. "We have a long list of curriculums that targets human relations."

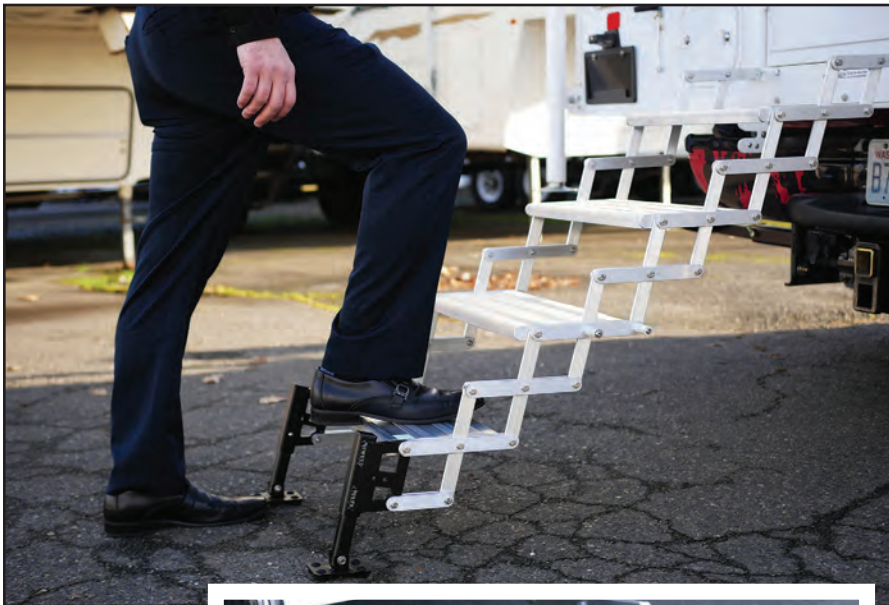
Outside of SEMA classes, employees are shown ways to better communicate to one another and influence people positively. Each employee is prescribed a custom curriculum that Torklift believes will harness their strengths and exploit new potential.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time our goals that we give people have nothing to do with physical, mechanical work aspect," Crawford says. "It is all personal growth."

All of that ceaseless encouragement has a very direct, underlying message: Take my job.

"You can read a book and you can take a test and you can pass it," Craw-





Torklift's GlowStep Stow N' Go truck camper steps are specifically designed to be easily stowed and locked during transit. They are equipped with the All Terrain Landing Gear (pictured at right) that features adjustable feet to ensure solid placement on any type of terrain.



ford says. "But *actual* implementation into your life, both personally and professionally, is key."

It proves that the most important investment a company can make is in people – fulfilled people ambitious to be better at work, and become leaders, hence, why new employees are also given a copy of leadership guru John Maxwell's book *Encouragement Changes Everything*.

### 2017: The Year of 'Simplify'

Torklift began as a one-bay shop by founder Jon Kay in 1976. Originally headquartered in Kent, Wash., Jon Kay saw an opportunity to deliver on what the outdoors promised without bogging RVers down with the technical difficulties of travel. Tiny innovations have an impact on the overall experience; and, overall, the product lines out of Torklift carry an overwhelming sense of safety.

The supplier started with tie-downs and turnbuckles in the early days, and has subsequently expanded to produce

the GlowStep Revolution RV steps and the StableLoad suspension stabilizer. The more recent Stow N' Go enables exterior step storage, keeping the inside of truck campers clean. Altering landing gear at the foot of the steps allows for side-to-side evenness on unlevelled terrain.

Success with customers can be seen in the letters the company has received from happy customers over the years. For example, the FastGun turnbuckle – which takes the hand-cranking out of tightening a truck camper with a lever action – was a life-changer for one person.

About 15 years ago, an elderly woman had quit truck camping due to her arthritic pain from using a traditional turnbuckle. When she swapped that out for the FastGun, she continued camping for several more years.

"We get to do this for people we don't even meet," says Candice Kay. "Just knowing that we're able to help is awesome. It keeps us innovative and inspired."

Jack Kay explains how his visionary father

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At left, Jack Kay is pictured at a base camp pitched midway up Mount Rainier, which he and Torklift Marketing Director Sheryl Bushaw climbed in September 2015. The two are pictured above holding a Torklift sign at the mountain's summit. For Kay, the climb was symbolic: A figurative act of taking the entire Torklift team to the top of Washington state's highest mountain.

always thought outside the box when it came to approaching design for products and the machinery to develop them.

Walking through the Retail Product Development Center (RPDC) in Kent, one can see hydraulic machines designed 41 years ago that are still used today.

The latest mechanical addition to the Sumner facility is the 4-kilowatt laser cutter called the OptiPlex 4020 Fiber ii by Mazak Optonics. Hanging overhead near the entrance bay is a 6-foot wide, laser-cut steel sign that reads, "Simplify 2017."

Every year, a word is selected to emphasize the operational approach Torklift will focus on. Last year was focused on internal cost reduction. Rather than channeling all energy into new products, Torklift paid special heed to concentrating on efficiencies, machinery acquisition, engineering, dealership displays, robotic welders to add to its steadily growing workforce, and allowing employees to pursue larger opportunities within the company.

"We need people everywhere," says Crawford.

The benefits of "Simplify" became obvious to the company. Last year, Torklift set a record. Aside from the year-over-year growth of 25 percent, the supplier paid out 1,500 hours less in overtime than in 2016.

Before the move 14 miles south to Sumner, parts were manufactured next door to its RPDC.

Again, Torklift has stepped over its capacity.

A tent add-on was attached to the facility in 2016 for extra storage. Finished goods are kept at a separate warehouse. And as if the seam-busting wasn't enough, the company is backordered through August.

The supplier is currently looking toward its next relocation, which will only be miles away from the facility in Sumner and has not yet been decided.

The success is not lost on the company's retailers.

Torklift implemented a resale pricing policy in 2015 for the brick-and-mortar dealers that has helped those retailers retain margins on the company's many

products. Since implementing RPP, dealer's profitability from selling the Torklift line of products has increased, for some, from 25 to 200 percent, according to Candice Kay.

"Without them, we are nothing, because they take the time to get trained up on our products and educate the retail customer," she says. "We're supporting our dealer network, but, ultimately, we're supporting those families."

### Climbing Mountains

Torklift, with more than 100 employees and a worldwide dealer network of more than 3,000, celebrated its 40th anniversary two years ago. And that notable achievement was met with another.

In September 2015, Jack Kay and Marketing Director Sheryl Bushaw ascended 14,411 feet up Mount Rainier, blogging their entire experience online at Torklift.com.

When they reached Base Camp Two at an elevation of 11,500 feet, Jack Kay reflected on the climb in a blog post, saying that he was "carrying the hearts,

souls and dreams of (his) team” at Torklift. After two days of trekking, tied together by rope, ice climbing, combating altitude sickness, and crossing crevasses at night over ladders, Jack Kay texted a message via satellite to his employees: “Go outside and wave!! I’m on top.”

For Jack Kay, the climb was symbolic: An act of perseverance and commitment to outline the next 40 years of Torklift growth.

“It was so much more,” he says. “It was taking our team to the top of the mountain.”

At one of the mountain trail entrances, Jack Kay was greeted by his mom and dad.

Jon Kay passed away February 2017 with his son by his side. However, Jack Kay was imbued with the philosophical framework to move Torklift forward.

“It’s all a mountain range,” he says. “It’s the mountain ranges we are going to face as an organization and it’s going

from one peak, to the next peak, to the next peak, and taking the whole team on that journey ... not just to the next

peak but how to go down from (it) and get back up.”

And ascend again.

PRO



# SUN OUT

## RV VENT SHADE

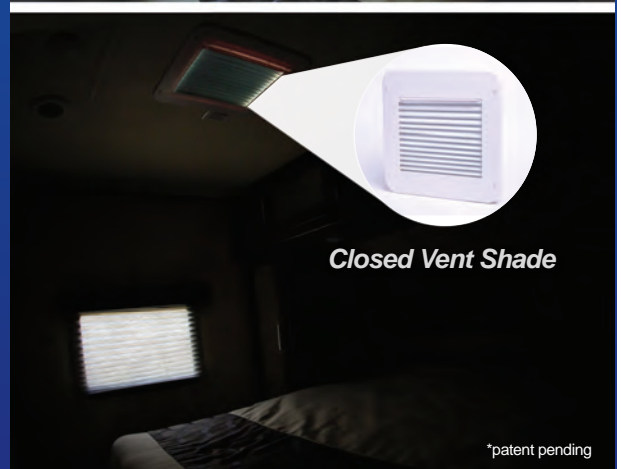
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