

working WEEK

Padraig Egan is general manager of SWS Forestry. Headquartered in Clonakilty, County Cork, the company has doubled its workforce in the last four years to employ 30 full-time staff and more than 100 subcontractors. SWS Forestry's network of regional offices covers 26 counties and its services include land purchase, development and management, grant procurement for investors, road construction, marketing, valuations and insurance.

What are the main responsibilities of your job?

Managing a nationwide team of foresters, ensuring the smooth day-to-day running of the company and positioning SWS Forestry for further growth in an industry that has huge untapped potential for "Ireland Inc".

What motivates you in your job?

Success. I began in this sector when the Irish forest estate accounted for less than 4 per cent of total land cover. This has grown to 12 per cent, contributing to the sustainability of 15,000 jobs. In our company, we have grown to achieve nationwide coverage, planting some 4,000 acres per annum and harvesting 40,000 tonnes of timber for the processing sector.



Padraig Egan, general manager of SWS Forestry

How would you describe your work style?

I am probably a bit impatient to get things done, but I am lucky to be surrounded by professionals who love and understand forestry, and have a strong work ethic.

What is the most valuable professional lesson you have learned?

To identify my own comfort zone, challenge myself and push beyond it.

In Ireland, whose career do you most admire and why?

Denis Brosnan, former chief executive of Kerry Group. He started the business in a very frugal way and he acknowledged that he himself did not have all the

requisite skills and expertise needed. Instead, he surrounded himself with those who did and began to lay the foundations for what became one of Ireland's most successful international food companies.

Based on your experience, what is the most valuable career advice you can offer others?

Never say no, never give up, keep chipping away, be honest with yourself with a view to constantly improving your own performance.

In terms of doing business in Ireland, what do you think is the biggest challenge we face?

The depth of the recession has engendered short term

thinking born of fear about what's going to happen next.

We need to give people the confidence to invest and spend again, to understand the inter-dependent nature of the economy and that it works in cycles.

Our government needs to spell out to the nation where it is going with its austerity measures.

None of us knows, from one budget to the next, when we are going to be hit with another tax, levy or increased charge.

What is your ultimate professional goal?

To see SWS Forestry embrace all the challenges the private forest estate has in store for us, with the over-riding goal of maximising the return to all stakeholders, while building the critical mass of the company through organic growth and acquisitions.

The forestry industry is still in its infancy and the further development of the harvesting and thinning sector presents a whole new opportunity, while the embryonic biomass sector will be a key player in the years ahead.

The concept of using forest residue to produce heat and power is relatively new in Ireland, but is tried and tested in Europe.

Ireland has some of the best tree growing conditions in Europe, with an annual growth rate of almost three times that of Finland, where the energy use from biomass is 18 per cent compared to Ireland's 1.3 per cent.