

Davis & Shirtliff – Leaders in Water Technology

Davis & Shirtliff started as a small water supply provider after WWII. Today the company is the leading supplier of water and water energy-related equipment in the region.

Commitment and dedication are the two traits that are evidently discernible from Alec Davis' demeanor as he sips coffee in his office from a sparkling white mug inscribed with the words 'Altiora Peto'. The Latin words translate to 'I seek higher things', his old school motto. For Davis, the CEO of Davis & Shirtliff Ltd, this is the philosophy that he lives by in the pursuit of making the company the best in East Africa.

"I am guided by 'Altiora Peto' in encouraging and guiding my team to provide the best products, continually improve, adapt technology and keep forging forward," he says. He adds that in life, he believes in three critical values namely quality, integrity and continuous improvement. In life, one of the most critical lessons that Davis has learnt is that there is not, and will never be, any substitute for hard work. "Even with integrity, the best quality and an unending search for the best, only determined efforts and hard work will lead to success," he notes.

It is because of hard work that Davis & Shirtliff is today a household name in anything water not only in Kenya but in the wider eastern Africa region. The company is indisputably the leading supplier of water and water energy-related equipment, selling and servicing tens of thousands of pumps and other water related products annually. In the process, the company is positively impacting the lives of many.

Davis & Shirtliff was founded in 1946 by two engineers, Eddie Davis and Dick Shirtliff, as a water supply engineering business and in the 1950s it diversified into water treatment and swimming pool construction. Today, the company has achieved tremendous and impressive growth providing pumps of various kinds, solar heating and lighting equipment, swimming pools products and accessories, borehole equipment and generators as well as many other water supply accessories which it either imports directly or manufactures.

Having started in Kenya, the company now has a presence in seven other countries namely Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo, a workforce of 600 employees and 45 branches in the eastern Africa region. All are successful and well established and most are industry leaders.

Davis's vision is to grow the company to become a truly pan-African business with operations across the continent. "We envision remaining in our segments but expanding in size in the next five years in order to take advantage of the full potential in eastern and the rest of Africa," he explains.

The journey to attaining the pan-African status has already begun with the introduction of its own Dayliff brand. The company locally manufactures some of the solutions and products while others are imported. "We are opening branches in different markets to expand our footprint with unique and high quality products and solutions from easily accessible outlets," he notes.

Some of the most recent innovations by Davis & Shirtliff include the ultra-filtration and reverse osmosis water treatment processes, equipment being manufactured at their Nairobi factory. These treatment plants are often used by large institutions such as factories, hotels and refugee camps, recent projects including plants to international standards at multinationals L'Oreal and Wrigleys. The company also works closely with NGO's such as World Vision and Oxfam to advance the humanitarian water agenda and partners with the national and county governments in the provision of water supplies, especially in the arid areas.

According to Davis, the focus of Davis & Shirtliff is to be a technology leading company and has led with many innovations over the years including solar water pumps in the 1980's, automatic booster pumps and remote controlled and monitored pumps. In some of these innovations it has partnered with their overseas suppliers including Grundfos, the world's largest pump manufacturer based in Denmark, Pedrollo of Italy and Davey of Australia. Some of these partnerships have lasted over 50 years, which has provided stability and consistency in the business.

Davis & Shirtliff ensures that it provides the best solutions and service possible as this helps in promoting its profile and reputation in the market and it's no surprise that it is widely respected for quality and excellent

service. It is also always investing, recent projects including a new Coast HQ building in Mombasa and a four storey admin/canteen/office block at its Dundori Rd, Nairobi Head Office.

The company maintains an open culture for employees, customers and partners. It also has a culture of commitment among employees and is active in corporate social responsibility (CSR). In May this year, Davis & Shirtliff will be celebrating its 70th anniversary and CSR shall be one of its focus areas.

Several challenges exist in the market with competition increasing all the time, though this is a natural result of the country's economic growth and spurs 'out of the box' thinking. According to Davis the company ensures that it has sufficient staff capacity, especially technical staff, by absorbing young talented people whom it trains in its own training school. Training is an important priority at the company and a recent innovation has been Group-wide courses streamed through the internet from the Head Office.

Davis was born in Kenya and went to St Mary School for his primary education before attending Warwick School in the UK for secondary. He then joined Loughborough University where he graduated with a Bachelors of Technology degree in Mechanical Engineering. He also holds a Master of Business administration (MBA) from Manchester Business School.

His life passion is to ensure that Davis & Shirtliff succeeds and provide the much needed services and solutions in the water sector in its various markets. Away from the busy office duties, Davis enjoys playing tennis, golf and cards and keeps fit by bike riding and swimming. He is married to Christine and has two grown sons who both work in the business.

"The water sector in the country had been greatly neglected in the past but I'm glad that the devolved structure has increased focus on the provision of water supplies, particularly through the introduction of improved structure and regulation. The sector is now growing rapidly and there is much improved efficiency in the investment in water facilities," he observes. He feels that the re-structuring of the water industry by the creation of the Water Resources Management Authority and Water Services Regulatory Boards and water services providers in different parts of the country is a positive development contributing to improved accessibility to clean water.

That notwithstanding, water remains one of Africa's biggest problems. Davis describes water as the most important primary requirement for any economy. "Availability of water transforms people's lives and boosts economic development and there remains much to be done to achieve the objective of clean water for all," he notes.

"In past administrations, Ministries of Water lacked funding and related capital to develop, tap and conserve water resources. County governments have now provided greater incentives for the water provision agenda with water executives being made more accountable," Davis concludes.

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