Young Guns: Sandstorm CEO Nolan Watson’s Simple Philosophy: Outwork Everyone

By Bob Ciallella Thursday, May 19, 2011

Editor’s Note: Kitco News joins young Donna Edwards, Allied Silvertrust and David Shen as these young leaders in the precious metals industry. Kitco News will also be profiling a special feature from April 11, focused on some of the mining industry’s youngest presidents and chief executive officers, taking a in-depth look at where they started their path of toughness in their tough and mining companies.

Kitco News—If you take a look at Sandstorm Gold Ltd’s (TSX:SSD-N) (OTCQX:SSTMF) president and chief executive officer Nolan Watson’s academic and professional achievements, it’s an impressive resume.

However, the 30-year-old Watson won’t let you feel a special gift, or any tricks to success, in order to achieve what he has at a young age.

People see this one side of me and a lot of accomplishments, but they don’t know the $15,000 kid in school, who was below average and worked his way up here,” Watson told Kitco News during a phone interview.

Watson grew up in Surrey, British Columbia where he attended elementary and high school. By his account, he was not the most gifted student at a young age.

“I didn’t do well in elementary school and I wasn’t until grade 9 that I started understanding well, so in grade 9 I could just outperform those people,” he said. “In grade 10, I went with the award that I could pass a quiz on my own. I’m not the most improved student award; I went from being the dumber in the class to moderately above average. I would excel in high school, with his “outwork everyone” philosophy, which earned him the right to achieve, as he once mentioned on a webinar.

After high school, Watson attended the University of British Columbia, where he studied agricultural science at university and graduated with a Bachelor of Commerce with honors.

Later he enrolled in the Institute of Chartered Accountants, where he was awarded the BC Gold Medal for scoring highest mark in western Canada in the final exam. He became a credentialed Chartered Accountant. Shortly after, he also earned his Chartered Financial Analyst designation, drawing praise from DFA magazine.

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During this time, he was working at Deicide and Touloue, with a focus on mining and metals, something he didn’t think he would be involved in further down the line.

“Canada, what’s always thought was I end up doing work in the private industry, just starting my own companies and running smaller enterprises that were mines.” Watson said. “I never saw myself in the public company world as a public company CEO, or in the mining industry.

But, a job offer from Whitemoss River at the end of 2004 saw him join the firm and work on a concept he believed would eventually create one of his own companies, metals streamling.

”Ian Teller was CEO of Whitemoss River at the time,” Watson said. “He had just got a job offer from Whitemoss River from Andrew Hemming, the Whitemoss River thing that they were speaking at the time. They hadn’t really fully created it when I got the phone call, it was no brainer for me to go work with people of that caliber.”

Outstandingly, he would acquire Whitemoss River in March 2006, but Watson stayed on with Whitemoss, quickly expanding the financial officer of the company.

But, as Watson wanted earlier, he worked to build his own companies. Watson left Whitemoss in 2008, and founded Sandstorm, with his business partner David Averm.

“I have the personality that I prefer to build things, and not just maintain them,” Watson said. “That was certainly one of the main features in doing that.”

Having achieved so much, with a work ethic that demands time, Watson says he did his biggest obstacle came from what brought his success.

“The most difficult thing I’ve had to deal with in the whole concept of work-life balance. Historically, for me it wasn’t an issue because I didn’t balance it. I’ve said that I have three daughters, wanting to always outlook people is just too tough to do when you want to be a good dad.

So that’s what I lose and I am on a dairy farm, performing at a decent level while giving my kids not just quality time, but quantity time. Watson said. “My family and kids are always that concern, and while Watson remains moored with his accomplishments, his philanthropy is another level of quality in which he falls to a unique approach.

In 2004 he founded Nature’s Cloth, which provides education for unemployed children in Alberta. “I’ve seen over the years it’s a lot of different wealthy people state that after they were their career, they’re going to start giving back,” Watson said. “They always talk about it as if it’s something they do in the future.”

“Remembering not to know anything I would feel that I had, I didn’t want to do without making a difference, and so not just one, if in my 20’s. He said. “Maybe it’s less impact now but impact is there. We’re a small-scale company and I’ve grown as my company grows.”

When people ask Watson how he accomplished what he has, what’s that special thing that set him apart from the rest?

“What I really respect are people that are passionate, and you have this kind of amazing people that are flat out working of yourself, or you actually are, and understanding some fundamental points that I’m doing anything you can do just to be better, other can do, or do it,” he said. “That old saying of grandparents telling their grandchildren that they trully becoming – they want it to be true, believe it, live it, believe it, but because of one or any other reasons, thus because of one or am any great success of an any other.”

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