

Introducing Alkiviadis Fotiou: dental technician, building cleaner and facility manager

Poly-Rapid AG, Facility & Clean Services, in Zurich, has been providing specialised cleaning services since 1972. With branches all over Switzerland and more than 500 employees from over 30 countries, Poly-Rapid is one of the most successful service providers in its field. The company is headed by President of the Governing Board Alkiviadis Fotiou, aged 48. Allow us to introduce him to you.



Lothar Mayer

The excellent reputation of Poly-Rapid and its professionally executed services is, to no small extent, the product of the corporate culture cultivated by this owner-managed business. «Our philosophy embraces long-term planning and nurturing a relationship of trust with our workforce, customers and suppliers», says Fotiou. But first things first.

From the beginnings...

«I joined my father's company in 1992 after training as a dental technician and spending quite some time abroad.» Poly-Rapid was founded in Zurich in 1972 by Athanasios Fotiou and initially provided glass, maintenance and building cleaning services. «Thanks to my parents' huge commitment and hard work, the company grew year after year and more and more big-name companies signed up for services provided by Poly-Rapid», Fotiou recalls. The first big boost to company sales was experienced in the mid-nineties, when the scope of services offered was expanded and tailored to the needs of the market. The new range covered site and building cleaning services – performed either by own company personnel or by subcontractors – as well as industry and specialised cleaning services. «We



were also able to convince several larger customers to use our personnel for their in-company janitorial jobs.» In 1994, following an in-depth introduction to the business and a series of basic and advanced training courses (federal diploma as a building cleaner), Fotiou was placed in overall charge of the company's maintenance cleaning services. This was also the time when the company established a facade cleaning department. «We now provide not only basic cleaning services for all types of facades, for example metal/aluminium and stone facades, we have become highly competent partners for facade preservation and impregnation as well as graffiti removal jobs.» Fotiou took over as CEO at the Poly-Rapid headquarters in Zurich in 1997.

... to quality assurance...

The Bern, Zurich and Horgen branches offer the entire range of facility management ser-

vices. Fotiou outlines one of the medium-term company objectives: «We apply the expertise acquired over the past 46 years, combined with innovation, flexibility and personal commitment, to all aspects of maintenance cleaning. Over the past years, our facade cleaning and maintenance department has also gained an excellent reputation beyond the usual industry boundaries. And we intend to uphold and enhance this status.» Although the entire company is ISO certified, this business segment is separately and additionally certified to ISO 9001 (quality management) and 14001 (environmental management) standards. «For this purpose, we detached the quality assurance department from our operational activities in 2010. As a result, we now have a more effective control system and systematically implemented training programmes. And adjustments can be effected more rapidly and efficiently.»

... to Fotiou's withdrawal from operational functions

Fotiou served as CEO of Poly-Rapid until the end of 2015. Then, in January 2016, he retired from the operations side of the company. Why? Quite simply because he realised that his daughters needed their father, that he wanted to spend more time with Danai Maria (4½) and Melina (3). An emotional decision, as the proud father explains: «I decided to spend more time with my children, to be there for them during those early years. You can't turn back time and I want to see my children grow up, to be as deeply involved in their development as possible. This has been the best decision I made in my life so far!» Since then, he has obtained a bachelor's degree in facility management and is serving the company in an advisory capacity. And there is more. At the end of 2017, he founded the IKOS Immobilien Management company. The rationale behind this decision: «Buying and selling proper-





ties in Switzerland and abroad, issuing and overseeing invitations to tender, providing advisory services in the facility management business – these are the company's core activities. People with the requisite expertise and practical experience are few and far between in this field, which is why this is such a promising venture.»

A work schedule with time off for the children

Mondays are workdays with a full agenda: management meetings, strategy decisions, project discussions, providing support and advice for major undertakings, cultivating contacts and developing the new real estate company. «This is when I organise my working week, so Mondays are extremely important for me. Sometimes I start at 6:30 in the morning and leave at 8 in the evening.» But one principle is carved in stone: «I've stopped taking work home with me.» So Fotiou now has much more time for the girls. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, he and his wife take turns to drop them off at the day care centre. «I make sure I get home in good time on the other days of the week, and I take Wednesdays off in order to devote the whole day to the children.» He has never regretted taking this step, all the more so since it is a win-win situation for all involved.

Horology and sports

«I never used to have time to pursue my passion for timepieces.» Now he has, and is thus able to immerse himself in his hobby. «I've always been fascinated by watches and Poly-Rapid has long been a sponsor of the independent watch and clock industry, the AH-Cl.» This organisation – the Académie Horlogère des Créateurs Indépendants – supports the art of watchmaking by promoting the unique character of handcrafted timepieces, attracts creative watchmakers and helps them establish independent watchmaking businesses through its Young Talents Competition. These craftspeople create unique pieces by applying the time-honoured watchmaking processes, from the rough sketches to the finished, exquisite timepieces. «I trained as a dental technician, so I certainly have huge appreciation for the watchmaking profession. Seeing how a fine timepiece is created is simply a wonderful experience.» If and when Fotiou has some time to spare, he invests it in another passion – sports. He played football in Switzerland's first division as an attacker or a central midfielder for close to ten years. Following a spell in FC Zurich's junior team, he played for Red Star in Kilchberg as well as YF Juventus in Wiedikon and Horgen. His highlight as a footballer: reaching the round of

the last 16 in the Swiss cup with Horgen in 2000 (Horgen 1-2 Lucerne). After completing a football coaching course in Magglingen, where he obtained his A diploma, he was a player-manager with Megas Alexandros, Horgen and Schwamendingen, followed by a final assignment as head coach of the YF Juventus U-19 team. Schedule permitting, Fotiou now enjoys an occasional match with the SV Höngg senior squad. «I still love playing football. We have a great team, I should really find more time to play. It would also help me stay fit», he says with a smile. Poly-Rapid is also facing new challenges. «Digitalisation, recruiting for executive roles, making sure that the company is in a position to meet the challenges of the future. Together with the stakeholders, we, the Governing Board, have to develop forward-looking solutions.» Decisions must be unanimously approved by both the Governing Board and the extended management committee. In the words of Oliver Bierhoff, the highly respected German sports manager: «Success can only be achieved if we all bring our individual resources to bear on our shared goal.» ■

www.poly-rapid.ch