



Founder Tom Keathley (bottom row, second from left) on his company's creativity: "It's based on unique people."

Computer-generated photo provided by Keathley Advertising

Sir Walter Scott once said, "Success or failure in business is caused more by the mental attitude than by mental capacities." The importance of attitude in the workplace can very much change the way a business is run. To value differences, to respect them, to build on strengths, and to compensate for weaknesses are often the make-or-break factors in determining many businesses' success.

At Keathley Advertising in downtown Akron, approaching every colleague, client, and project with a positive attitude is just one of the ultimate goals of its founder, Tom Keathley. "I'm a positive person," he says, "and I've always wanted to surround myself with others as such. There's no negative energy in my workplace; we all are here to help each other grow."

Upon founding Keathley Advertising from his basement in 1995, Tom knew he eventually wanted a space where the creative process would flow. He found a large loft in the heart of downtown Akron. "I found this space about five years ago. It was a loft that someone had previously inhabited, and I thought it was a great atmosphere for my business." With such a large creative space for the employees of Keathley, it's no wonder they've dominated the Addy awards and earned the business of Fortune 500 companies worldwide.

Having a creative space is just part of making Keathley Advertising a success. The dynamic relationships its employees share helps to generate world-class creativity. "Not everyone is capable of producing that type of culture," Keathley says. "It's based on unique people."

## AMITY 'ADS' UP IN AKRON

### Keathley Advertising calls on camaraderie to foster creativity

BY HOLLYANNE WETZEL

**“If my staff isn't happy, then the clients won't be. We're a fun group, and we care about our clients needs, no matter how small.”**

The strong connection among Keathley's 20 colleagues comes from their many team-building activities, including roller-skate parties, ice skating, white-water rafting, and four-wheeling, including pro-bono work for local charities and cancer victims' families. Keathley believes that strategy goes nowhere without creativity, and team building is rooted in that philosophy. "Team building will inspire creativity," he says.

According to Keathley, having a happy staff is having happy clients. "If my staff isn't happy, then the clients won't be. We're a fun group, and we care about our clients' needs, no matter how small. I believe that each person in this office looks forward to coming to work, and not many people can say that."

What's to love about working for Keathley Advertising? "What's not?" Ralph Davila, public relations director for the agency, says. "We all help each other out. If one of us is overloaded, we step in. We identify the weakness and fix it. Tom wants us to excel to our highest potential, to be better at what we do."

With every employee educated on his co-workers' roles, there is no division. "With a lot of companies, there is that separation between the creative side and the account side. It's the opposite here. We're all here to support one another; it's more than just coming to work and doing your job," Keathley says.

With the advertising field so fast-paced, Keathley knows how hard his employees work. "The advertising world never slows down, but my employees here manage their workload so well, and they know what it takes. They rely on each other,

creating a camaraderie that fosters the creativity I need."

So, what's the secret behind Keathley's success? "Hire people that are smarter than you," Keathley says. "I hire on character first. It's so important. We don't recycle old ideas, and we try to take a unique, non-traditional approach in everything we do. The creativity here is no different than New York or the West Coast. The Midwest work ethic is why our clients are ultimately pleased with the product we produce. I treat their money like it's my own. I'm a big believer in karma. I take that approach with all of my colleagues and clients."

Keathley has been lucky enough to handpick his clients, ranging from some of the top lighting companies, international healthcare systems, plastic surgeons, and the entertainment industry.

And while the business may be a success, Keathley knows it's not a one-man show. He credits all of his success to his employees. "I'm in this for my staff. We really are a family here. They all have a story; I'm here to continue them on their paths to success." ■

For more information: [www.keathleyad.com](http://www.keathleyad.com)

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