



Executive Q&A with Rick Sammons, Director of Technology

You have a very diverse background. Can you tell us a little bit about your experience leading up to Armstrong?

I've always been drawn to technology and electronics. I joined the Army in 1985 and signed up for a position doing component-level repair on electronic equipment. Other Military career paths also interested me, and I soon became a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division.

While in the Military, I traveled to Germany, France, Japan, and Korea. I also spent two years in Hawaii, where I attended Army Air assault school (rappelling from helicopters and cliffs) and grew my interest in rock climbing and rappelling.

After the Military, I enrolled in college and began studying Computer Information Systems. At the time, information technology (IT) was experiencing a transitional period -- going from mainframes to more PC-based languages. The program in which I enrolled wasn't teaching what I thought would be the future of technology, so I withdrew from college and pursued IT independently. Luckily, the IT field was so new that a degree was a "nice-to-have" instead of a requirement.

I landed my first programming position with an insurance company, at which I worked for two years. I then pursued my passion for new technology and found ways to apply it to my role at Armstrong.

Tell us about your role at Armstrong and the team you lead.

My role at Armstrong has evolved over the years, which can be attributed to the company's expansion. I started as one of two developers -- the other being Marc Bodley. Now, our team consists of both front-end and back-end developers. There are plenty of projects that fall outside of "programming," so my role is still fairly versatile.

I take pride in helping our organization create an environment where people enjoy working. I also see a lot of value in hiring people smarter than me and who show an eagerness to learn more about technology.

Your team has expanded a lot over a short time. Can you share some fun or interesting facts about the team?

Yes, I think this is the most critical challenge we face; every person we bring on changes the group's culture slightly. We've tried to be careful about not only finding qualified talent but finding people that are going to fit into the culture and keep Armstrong a great place to work.

Technology demand always seems to outpace development. How does your team keep pace with constant change?

Demand is always a challenge. When we were a two-person team, we could debate new technologies and choose our direction. But as our team grows, we are always looking for ways to balance architecture discussions with opportunities for our team to research and learn new technologies.

One of our culture's components is making sure everyone has a voice, and everyone gets the knowledge and support they need to make strategic decisions. It's become a priority to find resources that help support our team. We are currently reviewing LinkedIn Learning, which provides a library of items – both technical and professional – for career development.

How do you balance work and life? Do you have any hobbies that help you recharge?

I have so many hobbies. I like to know how things work, but I guess you could say I take it next-level. I tend to binge on my interests much like (normal) people binge on Netflix. That ranges from things like building a retaining wall in your backyard (do not get my wife going on that) to Arduino//raspberry pi projects. Lately, I've been woodworking and researching sailing.

What excites you most about technology's role in transportation and logistics?

The logistics industry has historically applied technology to optimizing manual tasks. But the transportation and logistics industry is experiencing a lot of change. Digitally native companies, like Uber Freight, are forcing traditional brokerages to examine the application of technology and how it can improve efficiencies and processes. For example, computer learning is already a significant factor in paperwork processing but is also becoming critical to unlocking capacity. The entire industry seems to be experiencing a kind of 'tech flux,' and I think that will create some interesting problems to solve.

What message do you have for customers and agents who are interested in partnering with Armstrong?

I could say that we are continually improving our technological stance to make agent and employee jobs easier and more productive. But really, I think it is deeper than that. I believe potential agents and customers should be interested in Armstrong because we are continually listening to what they want and developing ways to improve to meet their needs.