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Jacobs Engineering Group

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Introduction

Jacobs Engineering Group, now widely known simply as Jacobs, presents a remarkable case study in American entrepreneurship, strategic vision, and adaptation to the ever-changing currents of global industry. Founded in 1947 by chemical engineer Joseph J. Jacobs, the company emerged from modest beginnings in Pasadena, California, to become one of the world's leading professional services firms. What started as a one-man operation advising on chemical processes has evolved, through relentless innovation and strategic maneuvering, into a multifaceted powerhouse with approximately 45,000 employees and operations in more than 50 countries.

At its core, Jacobs' story is one of growth—both organic and acquired. The company's journey traces the arc of American postwar expansion, reflecting broader trends in engineering, construction, and technological development. Its early focus on process design and projects for the petroleum and minerals industries gave way to a far broader suite of offerings spanning architecture, advanced construction, program management, and complex consulting for governments, corporations, and communities worldwide. Jacobs' rise was fueled by both a keen eye for opportunity and a willingness to acquire complementary capabilities, absorbing more than seventy companies along the path to global prominence.

Throughout its history, Jacobs encountered pivotal turning points—from venturing into construction, to going public in the 1970s, to major strategic acquisitions like CRS Sirrinc and CH2M, and the relocation of its headquarters to Dallas, Texas. With each evolution, Jacobs broadened its reach, adding depth and diversity to its client base and technical expertise. In recent years, the company has made clear its intention to move from traditional engineering towards integrated solutions, digital consulting, and sustainability leadership, positioning itself as a critical partner for clients facing the complex challenges of the twenty-first century.

Jacobs' corporate culture and values have also been instrumental in shaping its legacy. Characterized by an insistence on integrity, a drive to challenge the status quo, a commitment to continuous improvement, and a deep dedication to inclusion, the company has built an inner framework as robust as the physical infrastructure it helps design and deliver. Initiatives like BeyondZero, PlanBeyond, and a range of employee networks underscore how Jacobs sees its employees' wellbeing, diversity, and social equity as inseparable from its commercial goals.

Today, the company's impact is visible in transformative infrastructure, sustainable urban projects, major environmental cleanups, and technological innovation around the globe. With an ambitious sustainability agenda and a strong pipeline of future

projects, Jacobs faces the future determined to remain a leader in its field, responding to the causes and consequences of urbanization, climate change, and technological disruption.

This book chronicles the evolution of Jacobs Engineering Group, not only as a chronicle of company milestones, but as a lens through which to view the changing landscape of American—and global—industry over more than seventy years. In examining Jacobs' past, understanding its present, and contemplating its future, readers will discover the interplay of ambition, resilience, and purposeful action that defines both the company and, in many ways, the spirit of modern American business.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Origins of Jacobs Engineering: Joseph J. Jacobs and an American Dream

The genesis of Jacobs Engineering Group, a titan in the realm of technical professional services, lies with its visionary founder, Joseph J. Jacobs. His story, deeply intertwined with the company's foundational years, is a classic American tale of an immigrant's son leveraging education, tenacity, and an entrepreneurial spirit to build a lasting enterprise. Born in the bustling borough of Brooklyn, New York, in 1916, Joseph Jacobs was the son of a Lebanese immigrant, a heritage that likely instilled in him a strong work ethic and a drive to succeed in a new land.

His intellectual pursuits led him to the field of chemical engineering, a discipline that would become the bedrock of his early career and, subsequently, his nascent company. He embarked on his academic journey at the NYU Tandon School of Engineering, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1937. This was merely the beginning of his scholarly achievements, as he continued his studies, securing a master's degree in 1939 and ultimately a doctorate in chemical engineering in 1942. This rigorous academic background provided him with a deep understanding of industrial processes, a crucial asset for his future endeavors.

Before venturing out on his own, Jacobs honed his skills at Merck & Co., a pharmaceutical giant. His time at Merck was significant, as he was involved in the mass production of two groundbreaking substances of the era: DDT and penicillin. DDT, a powerful insecticide, and penicillin, a revolutionary antibiotic, were at the forefront of scientific and industrial innovation during World War II and the immediate post-war period. This experience exposed him to large-scale industrial operations and the complexities of chemical manufacturing, further solidifying his practical knowledge.

However, the confines of corporate employment could not contain his innate entrepreneurial drive. Joseph Jacobs harbored a strong desire to forge his own path, to build something from the ground up, and to apply his expertise independently. This ambition culminated in 1947 when he made the pivotal decision to establish Jacobs Engineering Company. The choice of Pasadena, California, as the location for his new venture, signaled a move away from his East Coast roots and towards the growing opportunities in the burgeoning post-war economy of the American West.

Initially, Jacobs Engineering Company operated with a dual focus: acting as both a consulting agency and a manufacturers' representative. This hybrid model allowed Jacobs to offer his specialized knowledge to clients while also facilitating the supply of

essential large-scale equipment for the processing industry. His early work was deeply rooted in the design and construction of processing plants, with a particular emphasis on the petroleum, minerals, and environmental waste sectors. These industries, vital to the nation's economic engine, provided fertile ground for a skilled chemical engineer with a keen business sense.

The early years were characterized by the fundamental work of a startup: building a reputation, securing initial contracts, and demonstrating capability. Joseph Jacobs, as the sole proprietor, was at the heart of every operation, leveraging his technical acumen to solve complex engineering challenges for his clients. His consulting advice was based on sound scientific principles and practical industrial experience, which quickly earned him credibility in the niche he had carved out for himself. The manufacturers' representative arm of the business provided a steady revenue stream and invaluable connections within the industrial supply chain.

This foundational period laid the groundwork for everything that was to follow. It was a time of establishing core competencies, understanding market needs, and building the initial client relationships that would sustain the company. Joseph Jacobs' vision was not simply to be a service provider but to be a trusted partner who could deliver tangible, efficient, and innovative solutions for the processing industry. This commitment to problem-solving and client satisfaction became an early hallmark of the Jacobs Engineering Company.

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