

VP of Operations Josh Clifford, Talks About the Rebranded QT Environmental, Focused on Oil Spill Cleanup and Prevention Products and Services and Environmental Issues



Josh Clifford
VP of Operations

QT Environmental, Inc.
<https://qtenv.com/>

Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Clifford, would you tell us a little bit about you and what lead you to the environmental space?*

Mr. Clifford: In college, I had been pursuing a business major with an emphasis in finance and economics. I fumbled along in college not knowing if that was exactly what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. I went to the U of M in Minnesota. In the midst of that, I took some time off and moved to Breckenridge in Summit County, Colorado to try the ski bum life. As I was doing that, I had been involved in a handful of small startup businesses that took off.

In 2010, a large environmental response as a result to a well blowout in the Gulf of Mexico had caught my attention. The founder of QT Environmental, Mark Ploen was very involved in providing support as a Subject Matter Expert and managing that incident. Being a Minnesota guy myself, the oil and gas industry was somewhat foreign to me unlike someone living in Houston for example. I found myself asking a lot of questions at the right place and right time and told them that if I wanted to help, they could use it. I took advantage of the opportunity and jumped in, baptized by the fire, I suppose. It was like living a real-life episode of the television show called, "How It's Made." I kind of took it as a chance to live that as I evaluated whether or not there was an opportunity for a career.

The joke amongst us at QT Environmental is that I've been squatting since. 2010. In seriousness, I took a liking to the mission and the challenge. I stuck with it. I got into a very interesting career by a complete accident or fluke. I sometimes say I got into it by bad luck, but that sounds negative because I love what I do.

CEOCFO: *QualiTech has rebranded to QT Environmental. Please tell us what led to the decision to do this and why was this the right time?*

Mr. Clifford: QualiTech was founded in 1967 as a family business and was built upon family values. That led to success and multiple divisions and business units. In June of 2023, we sold a handful of the business units which fell outside of my management and wheelhouse. The family closed the book on those divisions, which allowed them to focus on my business unit, Environmental. We looked at the opportunity to rebrand after the sale and thought we had to do

something. We felt the opportunity came at the right moment to evaluate the business in its entirety, our values, the clientele, the plans today and looking ahead into the future. With us opening new offices and planting our flag globally as well as new alliances and strengthening our reach, the time was now to make a change, so we took advantage of that.

QualiTech Inc., still exists of course. They are under new ownership with a great team. They are focused on the three divisions or business units; Food Ingredients, Plant/Agronomy, and the founding division which is Animal Nutrition. QT Environmental is now exclusively on environmental issues with our strongest focus being oil spill response products and services.

CEOCFO: *How long have you been with QT and what lead to your role as VP of Operations for QT Environmental?*

Mr. Clifford: I have been with them since 2010. My “educational hiatus” led me into the company but not the position. I began all the way at the bottom of the food chain. In our industry this is called a technician, which is essentially the beginner position for anyone getting into this field. I am fortunate that I started there as it offered a high respect for the position.

The technicians are the people who are doing the heavy lifting in the field, the people pulling or setting oil containment boom for example, which is a piece of equipment used to contain oil spills in an oil on water scenario, for example. These are the people doing the hard, hands-on work which is the ‘cleanup’, which is a physically demanding job with long hours for long durations. These are the people that I value and respect the most. Without the technicians or field personnel, nothing gets done. You can have all the management in the world. However, without strong personnel and experience in the field, nothing will get done.

“We certainly do not shy away from a challenge; we just take a different approach or view it from a different angle. When someone says something is impossible, hasn’t been done, can’t be done, I drop what I am doing and come running. Our history and experience speaks volumes of our capabilities, which sets us apart from the others.” Josh Clifford

I began with QualiTech as a technician, and kind of identified some gaps or opportunities in the business. I jumped on the train, tried to learn as much as I could and climbed my way up. Now, with this new change in the business and the focus, I found myself moving into the new position of Vice President of Operations.

CEOCFO: *What are some of your responsibilities as VP of Operations? I understand you lead the company’s overall spill response program for both domestic and international clients.*

Mr. Clifford: We have such an excellent team. We tend to all have a day job and self-start or manage our own workload. When the bell goes off, it is all hands-on deck. My job in that situation is to manage the emergency, bring order to the chaos and help our customers. Typically, on their worst day, we minimize the impacts to the environment and their business. This includes maintaining the safety of the communities we are impacting and working within as well as the responder health and safety. My goal in all of these incidents is to put myself out of a job by cleaning up the pollution and restoring the environment.

As we have expanded globally with offices and a larger team, my job is to manage the entirety of our global operations. There are of course challenges with cultural differences and language. Fortunately, having a great team makes my job a bit easier and way more enjoyable. Education is also a big piece of my position. Whether it be educating my own team, passing industry knowledge that was passed to me, or educating clients and or stakeholders in a response; the communities, agencies, regulatory, etc. on best practices or the best way to handle things. Ideally, we eliminate oil spills. In the unfortunate event they do happen, we work very hard around the clock to minimize the impacts.

CEOCFO: *Are you doing anything to protect the environment and be an advocate for change in the industry?*

Mr. Clifford: Always. We have recently joined forces amongst industry and corporate sponsors to form the CONFLUENCE COALITION. We are using our collective strength to take on some very large issues in the environmental sector. This includes a very large initiative to not only operationally clean up pollution but adding a big educational and community

aspect. This work is very rewarding and really helps everyone. One of our big initiatives is plastic pollution and marine debris, both of which are not new issues. Globally, they have grown in a big way, and we are now realizing the detrimental effect. I believe that we as a country have not achieved our full potential to eliminate these issues. As a result, we teamed up with other Oil Spill Removal Organizations (OSRO's) Salvage and Marine Fire Fighting (SMFF) and scientific support organizations to take the issues head on. Being as we have a very intimate understanding of not only responding in an emergency, we also understand the waterways of the US and with our transport partners like barge lines and others that are utilizing the waterways of the US on a daily basis for commerce, we can really make some change. We are also engaging with oil and gas companies, shipping companies, and some other Fortune 100 entities. I am very excited to announce more on this initiative in the coming weeks. Keep your ears open as I think you will certainly be hearing more about The CONFLUENCE COALITION.

CEOFCO: *Would you tell us about some of the accomplishments and some of the projects that you have worked on?*

Mr. Clifford: We have been in the business since 1967. We have been involved in some of the largest disasters around the world both domestically and globally. Lately, we were involved in the largest wreck removal in US history. This exceeded the wreck removal of the Exxon Valdez, which ran aground in 1989. We were there.

This led to legislation that we advised on, The Oil Pollution Act of 1990 (OPA 90). From this, the OSRO program was implemented and the cooperative response model was established. We were there in testing and bringing new technologies, which have been adopted around the world. This includes Alyeska Pipeline Service Company and its Ship Escort Response Vessel System (SERVS) that maintains safe operations in Prince William Sound, as well as the Marine Spill Response Corporation (MSRC), which is an industry funded cooperation that maintains the largest spill response program in the US. We have outfitted all of them with equipment, and we continue to advise with technical knowledge, technologies and equipment.

CEOFCO: *Would you tell us about some of the products and services QT Environmental offers today and if there will be any changes, either addition or subtraction as you move forward?*

Mr. Clifford: We have always focused our attention on Best Available or Achievable Technologies (BAT). This is something that we are proud of. Being as we are on the front lines seeing what works and in many instances, what doesn't, we strive to ensure that the industry worldwide is aware. Anyone can test their equipment to achieve favorable results in a test tank. I feel that it is our responsibility to bring real, viable solutions to the market. When we are combating an oil spill or any pollution event, we need to ensure that the resources work. There are many in the industry that are simply marketing companies that sell products in the real world, and they simply don't work. It's a frustrating reality.

We have partnered worldwide with global companies that have that same attitude and mindset as us. Some of which could be identified as the pioneers and innovators of our industry. In Norway we have great partners in ALLMARITIM and NOFI who have developed probably the best high-speed system on the market known as the Current Buster. FOILEX Pumps and Skimmers in Sweden, FASTANK and AYLES FERNIE in the UK. We have a new partnership with MARKLEEN by way of their new partnership with ALLMARITIM. Additionally, we have just announced our agreement with MARITIME ROBOTICS which marries well with the service agreement we have with LOCKHEED MARTIN to bring aerial surveillance and support to market. We of course have our own product line which includes the major offshore response industries, US Navy and US Coast Guard heavy duty inflatable oil boom of choice, SEA SENTRY BOOM.

CEOFCO: *What is the market for your products and services? What is the market size, how much of that have you captured already?*

Mr. Clifford: We operate in a very niche space. Our industry is rather small and fortunately, the need for spill response is less and less with industry creating a better and safer way of operating. With that said, everything is bigger, faster and stronger leading to much more complex responses. We do not simply sell out of a catalog. We provide solutions and we have built a reputation as the guys you call when you want to get the job done the right way.

CEOFCO: *Do provided products and services for large oil spills, as well as smaller ones that occur from everyday cars, trains and recreational boats?*

Mr. Clifford: Yes, we have a very robust offering. We have responded to everything from a truck rollover, to the largest ecological disasters around the world. This includes train derailments, well blowouts, complex ship casualties, and industrial fires. We were a part of the team that wrote the book on Group V oils which are a sinking oil. As you can imagine, a response where the material is sunken creates challenges that may be entirely different than if it were floating on water.

CEO CFO: *Can you respond almost anywhere?*

Mr. Clifford: Yes. We have and we most certainly do. We have provided boots on the ground to six of seven continents, (consulting to all seven, still waiting for an opportunity to visit Antarctica). We live life "on-call." We must be prepared to depart in a moment's notice to depart to far away and often isolated regions of the world. A lot of our work is planned consulting work where we help identify gaps in response plans and implement better systems to ensure better response. Think of the question, "if we have an incident, how do we minimize the impact?" We love those calls, and we value those forward-thinking customers that want to get better before something occurs. When the "S.O.S." call goes out and our customers need our expertise immediately, we mobilize.

CEO CFO: *If you go somewhere geographically that you don't have your own equipment, do you have alliances in place do the job?*

Mr. Clifford: Yes, we have strategic alliances and bases around the world. This is to ensure faster responses for our customers. We also have institutional knowledge of the global caches of spill response equipment and the availability. If for example you have a collision of two vessels at sea, you need to mobilize equipment quickly to stabilize the vessels and the pollution. There are two operations working simultaneously. We have a strategic partnership with T&T Salvage to ensure we maintain a response ready state worldwide.

CEO CFO: *Where will growth come from and how fast can we expect this?*

Mr. Clifford: Growth in my mind comes through partnership and creating community with all stakeholders. This in some instances makes perfect sense and happens quickly. In other instances, adding regulation and forward thinking change takes time. We will roll with the tide and continue to build upon our past and look forward to the future.

CEO CFO: *How do you reach the market? Is it through distributors, partners, or your own sales and marketing team, and advertising?*

Mr. Clifford: All of the above and then some. I have always said, we sell products and services that nobody really wants! It is usually a bad day when we get a call. Our knowledge and expertise deployed and in action speaks for itself. In that aspect, it is generally word of mouth which is always the best marketing. We proactively participate in training with regulatory bodies, and industry. We also work hard to bring stakeholders like indigenous leaders into the mix. This ensures partnership, education and proper advocacy. No one wants to call us. Because we do operate a rather niche business, people just know us and say if you want to get the job done and get it done right, call QT.

CEO CFO: *Are you carrying the same team from QualiTech or building a new team with the rebrand to QT Environmental?*

Mr. Clifford: Yes, we are absolutely taking the same team with us. We have grown a bit and have a few additions and of course a larger footprint.

We are looking ahead to the future and will continue to expand and build upon the solid foundation that we have built under the QualiTech name.

CEO CFO: *In closing, what sets QT Environmental apart from the competition? Why are you a greatly needed company today?*

Mr. Clifford: What makes us unique is that we do not simply sell catalog items. We are a solution-based company, taking on some very interesting challenges. These circumstances tend to be a one-off with some challenges that are identified as "impossible," and we show up and then do the impossible. That solution-based focus makes us unique. We certainly do not shy away from a challenge; we just take a different approach or view it from a different angle. When someone says something is impossible, hasn't been done, can't be done, I drop what I am doing and come running. Our history and experience speaks volumes of our capabilities, which sets us apart from the others.

The part of the question of why we are needed as a company is because of pollution risks. We may be weaning off of the high consumption of oil and using a little bit less each day, but it is still here. There is still a potential risk, and that is just the oil component. As a nation and globally, we have become dependent on convenience or "on the go", which causes a lot of plastic pollution, so the need is not going away anytime soon. There are also risks such as lithium-ion batteries and so on. The changing landscape will keep us employed for a while and I welcome the day that we can say, our job is done. We are excited to help whenever and wherever needed.

Mr. Josh Clifford
Vice President - QT Environmental, Inc.

Mr. Clifford is a highly accomplished environmental professional specializing in emergency response and a key member of the QT Environmental, Inc. team. With an impressive track record and extensive expertise in the field, Mr. Clifford brings a wealth of knowledge and leadership to his role as Vice President at QTE. Throughout his career, Mr. Clifford has demonstrated a deep passion for environmental stewardship and a relentless commitment to finding sustainable solutions to hundreds of complex environmental challenges. Throughout his tenure, Mr. Clifford has been involved in responses around the world bringing both expertise and resources together in record time. His comprehensive understanding of environmental regulations, industry best practices, and emerging trends allows him to effectively navigate the ever-changing landscape of oil and high hazard response. Mr. Clifford has honed his skills and expertise over 12 years of hands-on experience in the industry. He has successfully led and managed numerous high-profile emergency responses and projects including, including the Texas City Y Incident, Tioga to Black Slough Remediation, ITC Second 80's Fire, MV Golden Ray Response and Wreck removal which includes Project Manager of the Environmental Protection Barrier.

Under his supervision, Mr. Clifford has provided strategic guidance and innovative solutions to clients across diverse sectors. Mr. Clifford's expertise extends across a wide range of environmental disciplines, including environmental consulting, contingency planning, emergency response, remediation, compliance, and sustainability. His ability to analyze complex environmental issues and develop tailored strategies has earned him a reputation for delivering results and exceeding client expectations. As a strong advocate for both sustainable practices and best available technologies, Mr. Clifford is constantly seeking innovative ways to minimize environmental impact and promote environmental conservation. He has been instrumental in integrating cutting-edge technologies and sustainable methodologies into service, ensuring that clients receive the most advanced and environmentally friendly solutions available. In addition to his technical prowess, Mr. Clifford is highly regarded for his exceptional leadership skills and ability to inspire and motivate teams. He fosters a collaborative work environment, encouraging knowledge sharing and professional growth among team members. His dedication to mentorship and professional development has empowered countless individuals within the organization to excel in their careers. Outside of his professional endeavors, Mr. Clifford is actively involved in environmental advocacy and community outreach programs. He believes in giving back to the community and works tirelessly to raise awareness about environmental issues and inspire positive change. Mr. Josh Clifford's contributions to the environmental services industry and his commitment to sustainable practices make him an invaluable asset to QT Environmental, Inc. His visionary leadership, expertise, and dedication continue to drive the company's success and reinforce its position as a trusted industry leader.

