

Mojo Maker - Doing It Right By Making It Better.

By Lori Snider

When making a hiring decision, Terry Shadwick, President and founder of BluSKY Restoration asks his team a crucial question, “Can we picture this individual interacting and relating well with our clients?” If the answer is no, the candidate is not hired. Because with BluSKY, customers and company culture intertwine, and have resulted in an environment that fosters growth and delivers success.

Five years ago, BluSKY was founded in Denver, with the principles of breaking typical stereotypes in the restoration industry. Plagued by a lack of overall professionalism, as it pertained to ethics and workmanship, Shadwick saw a unique opportunity to do it differently.

The numbers are impressive. In five years, the company has grown from 2 employees and one location to 70 employees in 6 offices, with revenue projected to grow another 30% in 2009 despite the poor economic outlook.

How does a relatively new organization successfully compete with larger companies, a flat real estate market and a rotten economy? To Terry, the answer is simple, but certainly not easy. It takes a real commitment that every member of the team must execute daily.

First and foremost, the company has executed on the commitment to “do what’s right.” “A great number of companies give lip service to ethics,” says Dan Flanagan, Senior Vice President of Business Development. “The thing I love about this company is that we really do give back, and there is an ongoing commitment to customer service that keeps the focus on making it right every time. That commitment starts at the top. Every week,” says Flanagan, “Terry reviews all customer surveys and hands out \$5 bills for every perfect review returned. His focus is on delivering exceptional service, and to make sure we are always seeking a positive outcome for our clients and suppliers.” The strategy has paid off. 95.8% clients surveyed in 2008 indicated they would hire BluSKY Restoration again.

At BluSKY, collaboration is crucial to success. Smart initiatives have enabled a venerable “human triangle” of commitment at the company between employees, customers and vendors. Each of these groups is conceivably hard hit by the recession, and the commitment to success through collaboration is paying off. From an employee standpoint, that commitment is delivered in the form of trust.

“I couldn’t ask for anything better in a company,” says Wade Justice, an in-house painter. “I have no boss looking over my shoulder – they give me my work and trust me to get it done. Truly, it seems like it is my business. I have a company vehicle and phone and the autonomy that allows me to be accountable.”

The BluSKY motto, “We make it better”, is a tagline not only appropriate to core business services but also to the firm’s high ethical standards. Company team members actively participate in numerous charities, including The United Way, Children’s Hospital, various churches, and as mentors with Douglas County Partners. In a time when many companies are cutting back and taking a protective posture, BluSKY has expanded charitable



initiatives. They believe that giving back is a way to generate goodwill and cement employee satisfaction – the expectation to give is ingrained in the company culture and a principle the employees are very loyal to.

The company has always organized client and employee events around charitable initiatives, and this year is launching its first ever ‘Clays for Kids Clay Shoot’ September 18th to benefit The Tennyson Center for Children. The company’s goal is to raise \$10,000 for the charity, and they expect to meet and exceed their initiative. “We host the clay shoot each year,” says Shadwick, “but this year, it just felt right to do something bigger as a way to help others. We host a great event for a good cause, and in the process we are able to build relationships. Everybody wins.”

The restoration business is a difficult one in terms of coordination. The myriad of companies and individuals involved in executing one project is staggering from an organizational/quality control perspective. Terry sees respect and integrity as key to successful collaboration. “We expect a great deal from our suppliers and vendors and we hold them to a high standard of delivery. In return, they receive our respect and repeat business. We’re all in this economy together and our subcontractors have been hit hard. Our growth initiatives have provided work in an industry where layoffs and closing are everyday occurrences. Our suppliers understand that, and in return, are very proud of the product they deliver to us. The respect becomes mutual. We all benefit.”

Merlin Sorenson, of M and E Construction, agrees. As a subcontractor, he has worked with nearly every project manager and salesperson in the company. “In a business like this, there are going to be issues. You’re working with insurance companies, subcontractors and upset displaced people and they manage to take care of everybody. They won’t cut corners and they deliver quality. As a sub, that’s really important.” Merlin adds, “They are the only company I have ever worked with that hosts bi-yearly subcontractor barbeques. They show appreciation for their subs and treat them like extended family.”

To succeed, despite what appears to be insurmountable odds, the company executes on four basic principles:

Hire Right

Rather than asking, “Will this candidate work for us? Can we mold them to fit the culture?” Terry and his team ask, “Is this the right person for our bus? How will they work with our customers? Would we enjoy spending time with this person?”

Hire people that are “people” people, particularly if your marketing strategy is primarily in-person and event driven. Provide them autonomy, and a healthy balance. Encourage and promote inter-company friendship associations.

“We have a saying here that we take very seriously,” says Flanagan, “A happy employee=a happy customer. There is seldom a week here where 6, 7 or 10 people from the company aren’t getting together outside of work to go camping, biking or just hanging out. They all sincerely like each other. That makes a difference.” Helping team members understand and integrate into the culture is so important that all new management hires must work in the main Denver office for a



period of time, regardless of where their branch is located. This strategy alleviates the “stepsister” mentality prevalent in satellite offices, assists the new employee in understanding the culture and what makes it work, and encourages them to develop that culture in their office.

The result? For two years in a row, BluSKY’s employees have voted BluSKY one of the ‘Best Companies to Work for in Colorado’ as published in Colorado Biz magazine. The company regularly promotes from within, and maintains a competitive edge with low turnover.

Develop a marketing strategy

Take what you have and use it to your advantage. BluSKY believes marketing is not mass advertising. “Our marketing strategy is event driven and focused toward relationship building. Our people get involved with events and love the customer interface. Mix that with execution, and people trust you. They know us. We keep it simple and we aren’t afraid to try something new. Sometimes the best ideas are generated off the hip,” states Flanagan. From shotgun shoots to pig roasts, BluSKY works to intertwine their customers with the company through association sponsorships and private events. They have continued to spend marketing dollars, at a time when most companies have pulled back.

A commitment to quality delivery is fundamental to the company’s marketing initiative. “Your best marketing is doing good work,” says Shadwick. Deliver quality, and you’ll generate referrals.” “

Keep Your MoJo.

At BluSKY, listed in the Denver Business Journal as “one of the fastest growing companies in Colorado, there is an understanding of the threat success can breed. There is an inherent understanding that synergistic success today, if not nurtured and massaged can lead to destruction tomorrow. “As we get bigger, we need to keep our focus on our core values,” says Shadwick. “We need to be aware that we have been very fortunate and work hard to preserve the things that endear us to this organization.”

Encourage and promote team interaction and friendships. A 2004 Gallup survey of 1003 employees nationwide revealed that 51% of employees who strongly agreed their organization encouraged close friendships at work, were extremely satisfied with their place of employment, compared to just 19% of employees who disagreed with the statement. It pays to have people working together who sincerely like and respect each other. Provide opportunities for your team to socialize and develop friendships. Employee engagement is key to delivering extraordinary service levels.



The employees take the MoJo seriously, and have coined the term, “Keep it Blu”, as a reminder to consider the culture when making decisions or executing strategy.

Treat People Right.

At BluSKY, there is an ever-present commitment to employees, customers and suppliers. The company treats its suppliers as “extended family”, that is, they understand, respect and acknowledge the impact subcontractors have on their success. As a result, they become a preferred client whom the subs work hard to deliver to. Take the time to say “thank you” and integrate suppliers into your culture. Treat them like extended family and help them understand the high standards your company employs. You will win loyalty and a commitment to quality delivery. After all, they’re family.

Most important, the BluSKY team understands the significance of building relationships. “The goal for some companies is to perform services by the job,” says Shadwick. “We don’t think that way. Relationships are built on trust, communication and heart. Smart execution in an ethical fashion has resulted in our success. In the process, we have made it right for a lot of people. It doesn’t get any better than that.”

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