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5 questions-Building Professionalism

SGI brings its college for contractors to Sarasota.

Interview by Tamera Nielson

Terry Nicholson is group president of Success Group International (SGI), which recently relocated to Sarasota from St. Louis, Mo., to join parent company Clockwork Home Services, America's fastest-growing operator of home services franchises and affinity group memberships. Clockwork employs 1,100 and reports revenues in excess of \$180 million. SGI is a "college for contractors" that teaches business practices to independent contractor-owners in the home services industry.

Why did you relocate here? Jim Abrams, the CEO and founder of Clockwork Home Services, has owned property in the Sarasota area since the mid-'80s. He loves the area and all it has to offer, particularly the terrific talent pool. After careful consideration, we decided to relocate the entire company and nine employees from our St. Louis headquarters and call Sarasota home for our entire operation.

What type of service does SGI offer? We see hundreds of contractors every year who know how to change out a water heater or put a new roof on, but they struggle because they don't know the fundamentals of how to run a business. We teach them how to find, recruit, train and retain good employees; how to acquire and retain satisfied customers; read a financial statement; execute research and development; and employ innovative strategies that will propel their long-term success.

When a person thinks of grabbing a cup of coffee, they generally think of a well-known, reliable brand name. The same is true for an individual requiring late-night copying and binding. But when it comes to a home repair issue, the average homeowner does not know who to call.

We are building the "McDonalds" of the home service industry for plumbing, electrical and HVAC so that when a plumbing issue arises, the first name that will come to mind is Ben Franklin, the Punctual Plumber. When a cooling and heating issue comes up, the homeowner will call One Hour Air Conditioning & Heating. If something goes haywire with the electrical system, they will know to call Mister Sparky.

What advice would you like to share with contractors in this economy? Our philosophy is simple: We choose not to participate in the recession. Some of our members have reported their best revenues over the past year. We believe in being proactive. We have additional ongoing Webinars and immersion training programs to help contractors continue succeeding. We serve a client base of approximately 1,500 contractors throughout the U.S. and Canada, and we hope to help the Sarasota area rebound in the very near future.

How will you impact the region? We host 10 weeklong training sessions per year in our offices for our clients from all over

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the U.S. and Canada. Each training session brings in approximately 80 people, all of whom support local area restaurants, shops and lodging facilities. Notably, we are in a hiring mode and are actively implementing our plans for more than 30 new positions in 2010. We pay a higher-than-typical wage and offer benefits. Also we are active in local civic, charity and school organizations.



How do you spend your free time? I dedicate my free time to my wife and three children. We are a sports-oriented family with a deep love of hockey. My father-in-law, Dan Kelly, the longtime announcer for the St. Louis Blues, is in the Hockey Hall of Fame, so it's in our blood. We are also partaking in new activities, such as boating. ■

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