

Cleaning up the Timeshare Industry

Once a timeshare sales rep, this entrepreneur now targets deceptive industry sales practices



Chuck McDowell had an “aha” moment when trying to make amends to his timeshare sales clients in 2009. He called his previous customers, telling them he didn’t realize that his sales tactics used to sell them timeshares were deceptive and gave them advice on how to cancel their purchases. One customer told another, and soon timeshare purchasers were begging McDowell to help them too. “That’s when I knew I had a business,” he says.

Since McDowell founded Wesley Financial Group, LLC in 2011, the CEO and his company successfully helped reverse more than 15,000 timeshare purchases. The firm doesn’t accept clients who just want out of their purchase. Instead, they focus on people who feel they were misled during the sales process. Employees screen and vet prospective customers’ stories. “We know what each location says to sell their product,” and Wesley Financial Group employees track what the sales reps say, looking for patterns, he says.

A HAPPY ACCIDENT

Early in his career, McDowell owned an insurance and mortgage business. After a two-year hiatus from work following the unexpected death of his wife, he began a career selling timeshares to support himself and his two young sons. Less than a year in, though, he was disillusioned with the sales practices, resigning without having another job lined up. What began as McDowell calling former customers to give advice on getting out of their timeshares,

turned into his next business. His former employer sued him, alleging that he had shared trade secrets. The lawsuit was resolved in his favor, and his business continued.

Wesley Financial Group takes its name and philosophy from Methodist founder and minister John Wesley, who urged followers to do all the good they can. “When our clients have gone through our process at Wesley Financial Group and we’ve cancelled their timeshare, if that client says they got great customer service, then our business can’t fail,” he says. One client was so happy with her results that she asked to work for the company, spreading their message and supporting clients who feel embarrassed about their timeshare situation.

There’s no shortage of potential customers. With an estimated nearly 10 million timeshare owners in the U.S., McDowell believes that roughly 8 percent have been sold timeshares with inaccurate information. Building off advice from marketing expert Jay Abraham, Wesley Financial Group tripled their Facebook ad spend, and ran TV and radio advertisements. “He convinced me to build a brand, not simply market a service,” McDowell says.

BUCKING THE PANDEMIC TRENDS

During the pandemic, companies in the travel realm are getting pummeled, but Wesley Financial Group is growing, increasing staff this year from 330 to 383. “On March 10, I told employees in our Tennessee office, ‘you’ll see companies cut marketing expenses and start laying people off.’” Wesley Financial Group did the opposite. They added \$100,000 a week to their marketing budget and began a hiring spree.

While this was not what McDowell envisioned as a career, it’s rewarding. “I would prefer to not be in the timeshare cancellation business. It’s not fun. I’m at war with massive multi-billion-dollar companies,” he says. “But I’m a businessman who also has the need to help people.”

WESLEYFINANCIALGROUP.COM



One Company's Approach to Liberating Greatness

A strengths-based approach to leadership and strategy consulting helps people and teams excel



the telos institute
co-founders
Rick and Amy
Simmons

When many coaching and consulting firms evaluate a company or project, they start with a gap analysis. They look for what's broken or what needs fixing, and identify the gap. The telos institute takes a different approach. "We appreciate what's working and use that as a springboard for forward progress," says CEO Rick Simmons.

People learn and grow the most during times of trial and tribulation—what cofounders Rick and Amy Simmons refer to as liminal spaces. They use these periods to help clients course correct. "We want to help people leverage liminal spaces—periods of discontinuity that create an openness to change," Rick says. Sometimes they encourage clients to trigger these periods for their own benefit, not simply waiting for them to naturally occur.

Clients might hire the telos institute to ensure a new C-suite executive's success, or they might work with a multi-national organization on larger scale initiatives.

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

Husband-and-wife team Rick and Amy Simmons founded the telos institute in 2006. Before this, Rick was "the deal guy," helping individuals buy or divest businesses. "I saw a gap in the ability to meaningfully merge elements of strategy, leadership, and change, and doing it in a way that liberates greatness," he says. Amy's background in training and development led her to a strengths-based approach to transitions. "Rick and I are very different people. Early on, we were able to embrace our differences as strengths," says Amy, chief experience officer. They encourage the

same of team members and clients.

The use of lower case in the telos institute name is deliberate. "For us it is a tangible expression that when we walk in the room with our client, all the creativity, work ethic, and genius required for them to get where they want to go; it's on that side of the table. Our job is to be a liberating component," Rick says. The use of "institute" is deliberate as well. While the word can reference creation of a body of knowledge, it's also a verb. Seeing the insight put to work is the ultimate goal.

DO GOOD WORK

The telos institute's marketing approach is basic: "Do good work," Rick says. "It may not sound groundbreaking, but doing good work never goes out of style." The team uses a project to program to partnership approach, often starting with one project. After the organization or leader trusts the telos institute, they often ask them to create programs, ultimately leading to a retainer relationship and true partnership. "About 85 percent of our clients who have been with us more than five years have a partnership-level relationship," Rick says.

Even if clients have a quarterly focus, "we adopt the long view, and clients appreciate that," Amy says.

Every engagement is tailored for the client. While the telos institute has core philosophies and frameworks to address issues, the solutions align with the client's uniqueness. "We're not selling off-the-shelf programs," Rick says.

THETELOSINSTITUTE.COM

telos.



\$2.9
million
2019 Revenue



20
Employees

From Zero to \$4 Million in One Year

This roofing entrepreneur believes that, if you can sell, you can run a business

Tyler Melton was selling a million dollars of roofing jobs each year door-to-door before his employer went out of business in 2015. He took a few weeks off and decided to open his own company, starting from scratch. “I didn’t get a business book. I didn’t buy customers,” says Melton, Proclaim Roofing president and CEO.

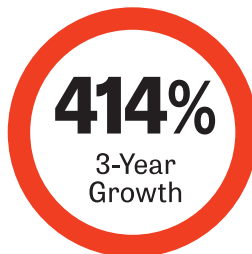
“I know how to do the hard part—selling and getting the jobs. I figured the rest out,” he says. In early 2016, Melton hit the streets, first in Garland, Texas, which was recovering from a tornado, and then in Plano, where a hail storm caused major roofing damage. In four months, he sold \$2.5 million in residential roofing by knocking on doors. “That allowed me to kickstart the company,” he says, and he borrowed \$20,000 from his father for initial supplies and labor costs. He hired a few salesmen, closing \$4 million in business his first year.

In 2017, the company brought in \$15 million, matching or increasing that figure every year since, opening offices throughout Texas and Oklahoma, and adding commercial roofing to the mix. He learned that commercial projects are quite different from residential, in that they can take several years before starting, the financial draws must be regular and scheduled, and expectations should be set for the scope of work and insurance claims process.

LEARNING LESSONS

Proclaim Roofing continues to grow, thanks to marketing and branding. Melton finds success showing photos of completed Proclaim Roofing projects and sharing testimonials on social media and in advertisements. “That’s allowed me to scale and get roofing crews coming to me,” he says.

Even with steady growth and millions in sales each year, Proclaim Roofing’s path hasn’t been smooth. The first year Melton says he had to scramble due to a shortage of roofing crews, and “a lot of jobs went on longer than



they should have.” There were leftover nails and clean-up issues, and Melton had to babysit every job. “I was wearing seven hats in the company, including production manager, quality control manager, sales manager, and accountant,” he says.

Some employees stole money from him, and others peeled off to start competing roofing companies. While frustrating, “I focus on the end goal: to be the best I can be,” he says. To push through the difficulties, he credits his competitive sports background as a high school football player and college track athlete. “The athletic part is what really separated me, being able to break through obstacles,” he says.

A CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

For clients, Melton stresses high standards, work quality, and exceeding customer expectations. “The customer service experience means everything.” For his staff, Melton focuses on a positive growth culture with everyone helping each other and continual training opportunities. “It’s not just about roofing but also having a big family you can work with and chase your dreams with,” he says. “I give everyone a clear path to figure out what kind of person they are and to hit their goals.”

PROCLAIMROOF.COM



Steel Building Company Stabilizes Turnover, Increases Sales

Employees who love their work are more productive and make great recruiters



\$14
million
2019 Revenue



61
Employees



When Jeff Snell and Gordon Harton were looking for a business to buy, it had to meet two criteria: it had to manufacture its own products and have room for improvement. After three years searching, they found Worldwide Steel Buildings. The company started locally in 1983, changing hands several times and pivoting to national sales by the time Snell and Harton bought it in 2016. Though it was running at 100 percent capacity, the facility was run down and had high employee turnover.

So, they asked employees what they needed to improve the product and productivity. The employees weren't shy, citing concerns like turnover, a leaky roof, bad lighting, and no break room. "They wanted a better place to work," says Snell, president.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE, BETTER MORALE

The company closed its doors for a week just to clean and remove trash. Then they began checking items off the employees' list. They added new LED lighting and repaired the roof, and the crew designed, built, and furnished a 1,500-square-foot break room, used for lunch, breaks, and socializing. Later they expanded by 17,000-square-feet in additional manufacturing space stocked with new equipment. "We made it a shop that employees now take pride in," Snell says.

The biggest improvement was eliminating the high turnover, Snell says. "You cannot have a well-run company when you have a revolving door of employees." When they bought the company, they had a permanent "help wanted" sign hanging. Now, new employees come from referrals, and the voluntary turnover rate is zero. "People want to work here, and we hold them to a high standard," Snell says. Employees have a vested interest in holding their referrals accountable as good co-workers, he adds.

"Once you create that culture, my job as a

business leader is pretty simple," Snell says. The company also empowers employees to make decisions without second-guessing them, as long as they were made with customer satisfaction in mind. The company also offers zero-interest loans to employees for emergency expenses. "All these little things create the culture that's made us successful," he says.

BUILD A BETTER WEBSITE AND THE CUSTOMERS WILL COME

As an e-commerce business, the company's website upgrade made a big difference. They created a 3D design tool, which allows customers to envision what they want. Almost 60 percent of leads now come from that tool, and customer referrals are also a big lead source. Worldwide Steel Buildings doubled its staff to handle sales and manufacturing growth, opening sales offices in Colorado and Kansas.

They directly sell the customized steel buildings to the end users, providing everything but the interior finish. About 90 percent of sales are to individuals, for personal or business use, including homes, "barndominiums," airplane hangars, garages, and equipment storage. Commercial sales focus on the middle market of light industrial buildings, not large-scale warehouses. "Literally anything the customer can envision, we can design and manufacture," Snell says.

WORLDWIDESTEELBUILDINGS.COM



Jeff Snell (right) and his partner Gordon Harton

Mistakes and Reinvention: How One Company Rose from the Ashes

With a top hat and truck, this chimney sweeper went from one-man business to \$8.2 million

Few grow up wanting to be a chimney sweep. But in a 1985 college class, Mark Stoner developed a marketing plan for a chimney-sweeping business after reading that they make \$55 an hour. “I thought, ‘I can do that.’” And so, he did. With an old truck and a new chimney-sweeping kit and top hat, he started knocking on doors. He ran his business for 17 years, until he fell off a roof and couldn’t walk for several months. Stoner decided to sell his company, figuring a good reputation and long customer list was worth something. “But no one wanted to buy a one-person chimney-sweeping company,” he says.

MISTAKES LEAD TO BUSINESS GROWTH

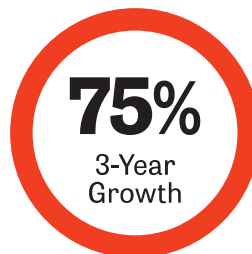
Stoner read about a successful company with 10 trucks in the same line of business, inspiring him in 2003 to think big. Within a few years, he had 17 employees and \$1.1 million in annual revenue. The business crashed in 2008, and he had to lay everyone off. The problem? He ran the business based on his checking account balance. “I like doing blue-collar work and getting dirty. I don’t want to sit in front of a profit-and-loss statement,” he says.

After that, he learned the importance of culture, leadership, and knowing his numbers. The learning process included books on leadership and finance, mentors, and taking accountability. “I had to look in the mirror and say ‘you built the crappiest chimney company in the country, and it’s your fault,’” he says.

He’s now founder and CEO of Ashbusters Chimney Service, with 60 employees and \$8.2 million in annual revenue. He hires experts to quantify direct labor costs and every job’s profitability. “When you hire the right people, they don’t cost you money; they make you money,” he says.

OLD CONCEPT, NEW MARKETING

Most people don’t know chimney-sweeping services exist, he says. To spread the word, Stoner



ran 15-second commercials during the evening news in Nashville. Problem: houses catch on fire. Solution: chimney cleaning. It worked. A second campaign expanded Ashbusters’ market from two seasons to four. Problem: Rain leaking through the chimney. Solution: Call Ashbusters, not the roofer. “With that marketing twist, we now have a year-round business,” he says.

Stoner credits much of the company’s growth over the past couple of years to company COO Kent Wessley. “Kent has run companies that were much larger than mine, so he could point to and fix areas that I wasn’t even looking at,” he says.

Ashbusters changed its employment ads as well. Repositioning job openings to “paid apprenticeships,” not mentioning chimneys, and highlighting awards like “fourth-best place to work in Nashville,” worked. The apprenticeship pays higher wages and rotates new hires through chimney sweeping; heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC), and gas; masonry; metal fabrication; and installation.

Each morning starts with a team meeting and informal social time. On Motivational Mondays, employees call out others who did something helpful that week, winning prizes and cementing the culture of being a good person to work with. “I’m passionate about being of service, and it’s fun to be an expert in something very few people are expert in,” he says.



ASHBUSTERS.COM