

Sometimes, Son And Daughter May Know Better

By **Mark Skaer** / Editor-in-Chief. E-mail him at markskaer@achrnews.com.

Fathers may know best, but sometimes sons and daughters have great ideas, too.

Just ask Bob Keingstein.

Having been an HVAC contractor for 32 years in the New York City area, Keingstein thought he was destined to be a contractor until the day he retired. Keingstein, the 1999-2000 chairman of the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA), wasn't looking to change his career, but his 28-year-old son Keith and 26-year-old daughter Kerri made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

It was Keith's idea to start BOSS Facility Services Inc., which provides full-service facility maintenance and service for its national customers. Keith thought it was best to supply the national accounts arena with one-stop shopping.

"It was rough," admitted Keith, referring to the company's start three years ago. "I had no track record. Here I was, 26 years old, and they wanted to know 'What does this kid want?' But, I was persistent and kept telling them when I promise something, I deliver."

To Bob, his son was fortunate that he had one major retailer that decided to give him a shot. The problem was, the person who signed the contract soon after left the company, leaving an anxious Keith.

Instead of worrying, Keith eventually brought in his sister, Kerri. She had worked for a high-tech lighting/security company right out college, having earned a degree in business administration. Keith thought she would be a good addition to handle the lighting and electrical side of the business. Bob said it may have been his son's best decision.

"She is the driving force," Bob said. "She may have her area of expertise, but she is all over him, all over me, all over everyone at the company because she will not let the standards go down at all."

Keith contacting his father was a smart move, too. When Keith asked him to join ranks, Bob knew that he could help his son with his HVAC experience.

"And, at that point, the growth of the company was happening so fast that they needed the expertise I had. I immediately stepped in to handle the HVAC area, which was at the time the main business part of the company. That was, and still is, our backbone," stated Bob.

Bob's son Kevin, age 21, handles plumbing and special projects.

Contractor Connections

With his industry connections, Bob said it was easy for him to get the contractor network rolling.

"I was able to pick up the phone and get a contractor on the line that could get there [the customer's location] in 15 minutes, almost every time," he said. "And it wasn't any contractor. It was a good contractor. They knew who I was. They knew what I was trying to do. That was the start of building a network of over 500 HVAC contractors today that I deal with."

"All we have done over the past two years is build a personal relationship with our customers and, just as importantly, our contractors, because they are an integral part of what we do," said Bob. "We couldn't do what we do if I did not have a good relationship with our contractors and paid them in a timely fashion."

BOSS Facility Services typically gets service calls from its nine retail clients via fax or e-mail.

"Nine customers may not sound like much, but a customer might have 600 locations," said Bob. "I believe we service or handle over 5,000 locations right now."

Its list of clients includes Cingular Wireless, American Express Travel Services, Finish Line, Charlotte Russe, and Hot Topic.

Once the service call is made to BOSS, the dispatcher makes sure to acknowledge receipt of the call. The chain of command is then to contact the designated contractor for that store, get an estimated time of arrival, and then inform the store manager when the contractor should be at the location. This immediately takes the pressure off the home office, as the store manager no longer keeps calling to check on the status of the service call, explained Bob.

After the contractor completes the service, he informs BOSS Facility Services. The dispatcher, in turn, will then call the store back, to make sure the service was handled properly and satisfactorily. If all is OK, the dispatcher will then e-mail the corporate office "to close the call."

"All of this happens the same day," said Bob.

Because BOSS Facilities Services is a national company, the staff is in the office from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern time, if not later. The 12-hour day (or longer) is necessary with national accounts. While the East Coast may be winding down, clients from the West Coast are still open. The after-hour and weekend calls are routed through the company's phone system to the department on-call person.

Give It A Try

In its third year of operation, BOSS has grown from three employees to 12 and has jumped from \$350,000 in sales to \$5.5 million last year.

"Where we are now, we may be approaching \$10 million this year," said Bob.



Bob Keingstein (sitting) points out a concern on his computer screen to (standing, from left) daughter Kerri, son Kevin, and son Keith at the headquarters of BOSS Facility Services.

And, the way Keith explains it, it's all about customer service.

"In the world we live in now, with all the technology and everything else, everyone has lost focus on customer satisfaction and making the customer happy. We've just gone back to the grass roots," stated Keith.

Looking at the big picture, Bob isn't sure why more HVAC contractors don't do what he does. He believes local contractors already have the clients.

"Don't take on more customers," he said. "Expand your products and services and I think you'll increase sales. If you told them, 'Did you know we do electrical?' I think your customer would be interested. You don't have to do it yourself. An HVAC service technician can change a light bulb or change a ballast."

Where do the Keingsteins see themselves in a few years? Well, it all depends on whom you ask. With five offices, Bob projects the business could eventually do \$40 million to \$50 million in sales.

"He is a little conservative, in my estimation," said Keith. "I think we can be a \$150 million company. We're just scratching the surface, in my eyes. There's a lot more to come. We're going to come out pretty strong."

If you care to talk to any of the Keingsteins about their business, or would like to become a preferred service partner, they can be reached at 866-BOSS-4ME (866-267-7463).

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