

CompTIA®



Spotlight on Success

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Dave Dyson



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Instilling a Blue Collar Work Ethic in Telecom Service and Support

Those who grew up in South Buffalo understand what it means to get their hands dirty, what an honor it is to give your all each and every day. For Dave Dyson, the CEO of Eclipse Telecom, that philosophy still holds. He emphasizes quality and attention to detail, and does whatever it takes to help enterprise customers achieve their goals. From the streets of Western New York to the offices of the Fortune 500, Dave’s story is this month’s CompTIA Spotlight on Success.

CompTIA: Did you ever envision yourself in a technology career?

Dave: Honestly, I would have hoped to be retired from the NHL by now. That was my unrealistic goal as a child growing up in a blue collar neighborhood in Buffalo. After high school, I drifted around a little bit and ended up changing colleges a couple of times, finally graduating from West Virginia University with a degree in advertising.

Like a lot of people who didn’t have a great plan coming out of school, I had to look for a job quickly and found myself drawn to sales and was hired as a manufacturers rep for Corel software. They sold WordPerfect, CorelDRAW and other business applications, so as my first experience in the world of tech, it was pretty cool.

CompTIA: What did your first foray into the IT industry teach you?

Dave: I learned that the outcomes and processes often outweigh the technological bells and whistles. In that role, I often presented to large groups of product users (from 200 to 500 or more) who had a depth of knowledge I could never hope to attain. But I still needed to be able to communicate the value of the latest releases and new features, so developing and presenting clear and concise value propositions was something I had to learn early on.

I gained a deep understanding of business processes during my time at Corel and learned enough about technology to be dangerous. In my role, it was more important to connect a client’s business methods and desired outcomes with technologies that could meet their needs. Bits and bytes discussions were best left to the techs. For the past 20 years, I’ve been telling clients “if you ever catch me in your server room, we’re all in trouble.” That’s not who I am. I’m the guy who understands the outcomes you want to achieve and identifies the technologies and fosters strong partnerships to meet those goals.

CompTIA: What did you do after Corel?

Dave: After a few months working in the Upstate NY area, they transferred me to Minneapolis, which was a more robust and bigger target territory. A couple months later, I ended up leaving Corel for Techices.com, an online recruiting company startup similar to



Dice and Monster, which were both taking off at that time. Our VC-funded organization was very stereotypical of the era, with ping pong tables and Mountain Dew on tap and a very work hard/play hard attitude.

By the time the dot com bubble burst, I had already made the decision to leave and had landed a job with SBC. The company just bought Ameritech and was being forced to open in 30 new markets to get the FCC's approval. SBC never really intended to compete on a SELEC basis in Minneapolis, but they had to make appearances look good, so they hired between 25 and 30 people and put us all through an eight-week deep-dive training course. After that, they basically allowed us to do whatever we wanted and, since I really can't sit still for long, I started selling their PBX, a very early VoIP system and other telecom equipment.

After folding the office eight months later and firing everyone else, they made me a global account guy and turned me loose on 4-5 of the really large companies. My role was to drive revenue and develop relationships with companies such as 3M, Target, Northwest Airlines, US Bank and General Mills.

So I started to build relationships with these big enterprise companies, from the CIO on down. It was "baptism by fire," working with huge large organizations with massive budgets. I was not selling them bits and bytes, but learning more about their business problems and how to solve them. After a couple years, I asked for and received a transfer to Chicago and it was shortly after that that the company, through more mergers, became AT&T.

I had a seven-year run in that organization, with four or five different roles managing people and covering global enterprise accounts. The SBC/AT&T era put me on a great career path and the time I spent there really taught me a lot about the enterprise communications business.

CompTIA: Why did you walk away from that role?

Dave: In 2007, when I left AT&T, my customer service and support layers were being cut on a continual basis. And while I loved the company and my role, it was hard to keep the customer from feeling that pain. Back office resources were being released and they were putting call centers in foreign countries with people who didn't understand the business. The impact on services was noticeable and growing, and I remember telling the VP in my exit interview, "I don't want to be a professional apologist anymore."

My next stop was with a small telecom agency. They had been selling to small businesses but wanted me to help move into the enterprise. That was 2007, when the indirect telecom channel was a small business channel, but those like me with experience selling to big companies started focusing on that space. So I spent the next couple of years learning the indirect channel, which I found to be a very freeing experience. My tool box became extremely large as I no longer had to sell clients a certain product set from a particular carrier. We would say "you seem to have some challenges and I know just the guys who can fix it well, right now." That was an enlightening experience.

CompTIA: When did you decide to become your own boss?

Dave: It was in September of '09. A good friend of mine (Todd Hext) and I decided to work out of the indirect channel and build a model that addressed one big pain point for enterprise customers: the lack of quality service and support. We wanted to reintroduce it to that





market in a way that would make our clients feel like they were getting the love, so to speak, at all turns. Our goal was to take the time consuming tasks and processes away from our customers and put them on our team.

IT staffs were also shrinking at that time. Companies were being asked to do more with fewer resources and their carriers were strapped too. So we wanted to build this layer to reconnect those end points and make service and support stronger. As telecom people we wanted to be really well regarded in our own industry, from the carriers who could use our support to our enterprise clients that would rely on what we delivered. We couldn't do that by bashing vendors, escalating issues and calling executives all the time. What we wanted to do was to build really deep, strong meaningful relationships that fostered success on both sides. And that's what we've managed to do over seven years.

CompTIA: How do you compete in such a price conscious business environment?

Dave: The reality is this: communications, the cloud and everything else is getting more confusing. Every company wants its clients to be self-serve and to figure it out on their own. Cost and the pace of change with technology and customer service are all out of alignment with what enterprise clients need, want and desire from their technology providers.

We have not lost a client in 7 years in business. And we're working with those who are much larger than us as an organization, but they see our value every day. So we want to create value, not by selling them technology, but by really, truly transforming their business. Is it security, cloud or mobility? We've had that in our DNA since day one. We weren't going to be selling just networks and circuits. We created a managed service and developed and strengthened it over time.

We have five full-time employees and an outsource team of ten, as well as a 24/7 NOC partner covering repairs, maintenance and management for our clients anywhere in the world. Our target revenue is close to \$2 million this year and we've grown an average of around 40% per year since inception.

CompTIA: What's been the key to your success in telecom?

Dave: I don't differentiate between success in my personal or professional life. I work really hard to listen and truly seek to understand, but don't believe it's important that I be understood. From a business perspective, we are accountable all the time and own the outcome, good or bad. Clients trust you when don't try to sweep the bad news under the rug. And, with technology being extremely disruptive, there's bound to be bad news along the way. We focus on getting it right all the time, but when we don't we acknowledge the issues and say "let us tell you why we didn't get it right." That ownership of outcomes is critical.

I continually work on my leadership skills. Not only as a guy who owns a small business, but as the coach for a high school hockey program in Chicago. Now that I'm older I'm still on the ice, but I get to be a mentor to young people and help build their skills and teamwork. Coaching brings me great joy and it's fun to work on the leadership lessons that can be applied to hockey as well as business. I sort of trade ideas between the two.





CompTIA: Who was your biggest mentor?

Dave: I would have to say my dad. He was a mailman in Buffalo for 43 years, working long hours, getting up early every day and dealing with all sorts of inclement weather. I can't remember him ever calling in sick and never heard him complain once in my entire life. So many of those blue-collar lessons he taught me still affect me, including accountability, doing what you promise you're going to do. People will trust you if you do that. Witnessing the value of hard work is something I've never forgotten and tried hard to instill in my business as well as my hockey team.

