CompTIA

Spotlight on Success

November 2016

Chad Paalman

Executive Conversations and Strong Relationship Focus Drive Big Wins

Some say growing up with family members in the IT or telecom space can be a detriment when building a tech business. All those discussions about speeds and feeds and a strong comfort-level with the inner-workings of the infrastructure may impede their ability to have real conversations with customers about their organizational needs. But for Chad Paalman, co-founder and managing partner of NuWave Technology Partners, that familiarity allowed him to explore and expand his interests. In fact, after working his way through college and establishing a successful networking career, he made a decision that has had a long-lasting effect on his family and his customers. The rest of Chad's story is this month's CompTIA Spotlight on Success.

CompTIA: How did you end up in the tech field?

Chad: My Dad was a telephone system technician right out of high school. Later, he owned his own business in that field and eventually went on to be vice president of a national telephone system company. I watched and helped him as far back as I can remember. In fact, I knew how to do some technical things before learning my ABCs just going out on calls with him. While I love tech, I always said I was going to do something different, so I went to Michigan State to pursue a law degree. Of course, I needed a job while in school, so I applied to their IT and telecom department.

When the director told me they hadn't and would never hire students, I started rattling off the things I knew as fast as possible. I ended up being the first student to ever work in the telecom department at Michigan State. After a year, I decided that the student hours they set were too restricting and went to the company my dad was working. The condition of my employment was I had to find my own tech work. He told me to start going through the Yellow Pages and look for people who needed support. So I did. As a sophomore in college, I learned the art of selling and got my first career break.

At that time, the business only sold and supported phone systems. So I ended up building a network support group, which grew rather quickly. But all along, the owner really wanted to keep the company focused on phone systems. So, in 2004, I talked my Dad, who was managing their operations at the time, and my brother into leaving and starting our own business. NuWave Technology Partners opened its doors in March of 2005.

CompTIA: How did you acquire the skills needed to run a successful IT services business?

Chad: It started with my previous company, just me making phone calls out of my dorm room, then in an office and we kept growing. That was First Integrated Technologies, the separate

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entity I started, which was solely owned by the phone system company. My group focused entirely on network support and services. Our pitch to prospective customers was "we can take care of everything." That included low-voltage cabling, firewalls, routers, servers, desktops and, through our other company, phone systems. That may not be much of a novelty today, but it was unheard of back then. Our First Integrated Technologies group handled the network and First Telecommunications took care of the phone systems.

In 2002, the owner shared with me that he just wanted to focus on phone systems. I truly believed the industry's future was not in PBXs, but in the network, and expressed that my interest was on the network side of the business. Our group was well-established and very profitable, so when he decided to pull the plug, I decided to take the model and proven processes and start my own company.

CompTIA: Was the family involved at that stage?

Chad: We focused on two things. One, from the very beginning, we knew the best way to differentiate ourselves was to hire great people. We focused on finding the best talent available. Second, we decided to take a holistic approach with our customers, [looking] at their entire environment and finding ways to support everything they need.

NuWave has had a sales team since we opened the doors, which is a little unusual for a startup in the IT industry, but their role was to get the management team and our business consultants in front of prospective clients. That allows us to have executive conversations around the challenges they face with technology. We focus a lot on what they are doing to grow and improve their businesses, and then find ways technology can enable those goals. Developing long-term relationships has been key. From our small business clients to a global parts manufacturer that's been with us since inception. We've grown with them.

CompTIA: How difficult is it to support international clients?

Chad: The company I mentioned has its own tier one help desk and uses our ticketing system as well as our remote monitoring and management tools. They take care of all the day-to-day desktop and basic user issues, and escalate the more complicated concerns like firewall issues and advanced wireless or unified communications problems.

For companies with less than 200 employees, we take care of the entire IT environment. With larger businesses or those that have either a presence outside our support area, [such as] Mexico or other countries, we typically work closely with an internal IT department. We call this our co-managed program.

CompTIA: What other types of support do you provide enterprise clients?

Chad: We built out the WAN for our largest client and every time they construct a new facility, they bring us in to develop the technology architectural plan. In fact, one of our teams just returned from Tennessee. We designed and stood up, from a technical standpoint, the entire facility including the cabling, wireless, security and switching infrastructure. The only thing we didn't handle was their cloud-based ERP software.

CompTIA: Do you have a guiding philosophy and, if so, how has it influenced your business?

Chad: I do, and every NuWave employee carries a coin in their pocket with our three core values stamped on it – trust, knowledge and relationships. Without any of them, we fail. People have to trust and like you, and they also have to have confidence that you know what you're talking about.

Those core values can be used in almost every circumstance to help us make a decision. I'm not perfect by any means, but I really strive every day to be the guy people know they can trust and want to be around.

CompTIA: What's ahead for you and NuWave?

Chad: I am really excited about IoT. Globally, we've only touched about five percent of that new opportunity and our team is perfectly positioned with relevant knowledge, technical skills and industry relationships. We expect to do things over the next year or two that we never would have dreamt of ten years ago. The future looks exciting!