

Time management is key in printing franchise success: Talk with the boss

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Greg Muzzillo is co-chief executive of Proforma, a 31-year-old graphic-communications and promotional-products company. He started a printing and promotional-products distributorship with a friend and turned it into a franchise operation with 700 locations and more than \$350 million in sales. These are excerpts of a chat between Muzzillo and Plain Dealer reporter Marcia Pledger.

What common traits do the most successful franchise owners have? We tried to figure that out and we can't find a common denominator. Some of them are actually introverts. How people manage their time will ultimately determine how successful they're going to be.

What do you believe sets your company apart in terms of supporting owners? We try to offer opportunities to work with one of our success coaches at our headquarters here in Independence, because I realized that not everybody is self-directed and motivated as others. About half take advantage of it. Everything we accomplish in business - any business - involves four secret ingredients: knowledge, skills, motivation and resources. Some owners need a little more motivation and some need more resources.

Did you start the million-dollar club as a motivation tool? No. It started from the beginning when we started getting people whose success started mirroring ours. We have some owners chasing \$20 million. About 30 members have sales of at least \$2 million

What do you think is the main reason people join your company? We care about the people. We built this company with one great person at a time. If you take care of the people, the people will take care of your growth. They start saying good things to other prospects and refer them to us.

What's the difference between leadership and management? How do you get a string from one end of the table to the next? Leadership is like being in front of a string pulling it, and management is like being behind a string pushing it, and that's just an ugly picture. It's a mess. I don't think you can push people. Like a string, it will bunch up and not go anywhere neatly.

Do you think it's important to have mentors? It's hugely important. But I also think it's OK to outgrow them and be open to more people who can help take you to the next level.

Does your company have a culture? If so, how would you describe it? Every company has one

whether they choose it or not. Just ask the people who work there. I think our culture is all about empowering franchise owners to be as successful as they choose and empowering support staff to continue to pursue the vision of Proforma. It's like a bowl of cherries. We encourage people to put their hand in, grab opportunities and run with it. People who grab and see the vision do well. People who don't put their hands in and keep coming back to grab some more, usually leave. It's not our style to push.

What made you turn your business into franchises? We were ready to expand after being in business for several years, and we found a great candidate in Columbus to run what we thought would be our first location outside of Cleveland. But after our third meeting with him he told us that our story inspired him to start his own business instead. We realized that other people might want to run their own business, too. In the mid 1980s there were about 20,000 independent distributors, who all had to deal with marketing, purchasing and office issues. We decided to try to be more efficient and find a better model.

Even with the support that a franchise operation offers, there's no guarantee a business will succeed. What type of support do you offer? We hate using the "F" word, meaning franchise. When most people think about franchising, they think about rules and regulations. We're more about empowering our distribution members with tools and resources to help them be more profitable. The key to our growth is good people.