

Interviewed by John Nank

FLOYD A. SCHLOSSBERG PRESIDENT, THE ALDEN NETWORK

Although he has built the company he created from scratch to annual revenue of \$225 million, Floyd A. Schlossberg has never had a problem maintaining his modesty. Schlossberg — or Floyd, as he insists he be known to each of his 4,000 employees — founded The ALDEN Network in 1971 when he was unable to find a suitable assisted living facility for his wife's grandfather. The Chicago-based health care organization has since expanded to 35 sites, including six residential communities, while remaining focused on providing seniors a full range of care services. *Smart Business* spoke with Schlossberg, the company's president, about the importance of staying humble, caring for employees and planning for the future.

Get involved. In leadership, one of the most important things is to learn humility. You have to be a part of this world in which humility becomes a part of your life.

You have to recognize that everything wasn't given to you but the facts are, you have to work your hardest to secure success in the things that you're working with. You have to deal with other people, and you can't be so haughty that you put yourself above everybody else.

You have to get down with those people and you have to be on their level and think on their level. You have to try to deal with that and not become so arrogant that you think you're the best that there ever was, because once you do that, you stop striving to be the very best.

I find myself personally involved with as many people within the company as I possibly can. It's like developing what one could call a commune of some nature. It's where one takes care of the other no matter what happens, and in doing so, what I can guarantee and what I try to develop within the leadership of our company is the fact that these people are very important to us, and it's important that we take care of their needs as well as taking care of our own needs.

When they need assistance, it becomes a part of our responsibility to try to help them out, because when you have happy employees and they know there's a place for them to turn to get advice or a place they can get help, they know for a fact they can go to work and they can perform their work without any other distractions on their mind, and they can do the very best that they can.

Develop future leaders. What happens as you grow the company is volume increases. And with volume increasing, it becomes an ever-so-important thing that you create people behind you that are capable of doing the same things that you are doing with the same basic core values of philosophy and where the company should be going.

I find the biggest thing in growing the company is creating the people who are going to be the future leaders of the company, as well as future leaders of depart-



ments within the company. We look for people that have the same basic philosophy and core values that the company has, and they're people that do not have to be tightly managed.

We sometimes find people who talk a good game and tell us how good they can do, but when push comes to shove and we really need them to deliver, they don't deliver. You need to be able to try to develop that within people and you need to recognize when it's not happening.

They also need to deliver on their commitments to what they're doing without blaming other people for the inadequacies of what they have achieved and take that responsibility upon themselves. Those are basic values that we look for in people, and we try to take those values and equate them to all the people we're interviewing and putting in place. And we try to grow those people in their various divisions so that they can become leaders of the company in the future.

Visualize the future. As long as one can think creatively, it's infinitesimal what you can create as long as you have a vision for it, and you just have to keep thinking of things that are going to be beneficial.

Here in Illinois, some guy wants to create a tower that looks like a spiral, and you

know something, he might actually create that, and it might be one of the tallest buildings in the United States. That's his vision for what he sees. The only thing that stops you from creating these things and from doing all these things is the inability to have a vision to move forward.

One thing leaders have to deal with all the time is what the future looks like, and without having an understanding of the past, it's very difficult to understand where the future's going to go or even create something that's going to be futuristic. When we started out in the health care profession, we started out with one nursing home with the idea that maybe someday we would grow the one nursing home.

Quite frankly, if I took a look at the old days when we started out back in 1971, we're a whole different company now. But if I didn't know what was happening in the period of time that we were originally starting that one building and seeing the problems and seeing what families wanted and seeing how people needed to be taken care of, I would never be able to lead the company in the direction it's going.

Without sounding like a bragger in any shape or form, which I don't want to do, I just find as I drive along a street, as I walk, as I work out every morning, I have these feelings of how we can be better than we are today. I keep thinking that way.

In my mind I create visions which some people would think are just pie-in-the-sky kinds of things. Yet, because of what my background is and because of the things that I have available to me, and because of what we have created within the leaders of our company, I think we can create things that are far superior and different than most other people can do.

HOW TO REACH: The Alden Network, (773) 286-3883 or www.thealdennetwork.com

