Chris Stathakis, CEO of Stathakis, Inc., Talks Marketing and Building a Great Culture

Name: Chris Stathakis  
Title: CEO  
Company: Stathakis, Inc.

Chris Stathakis, CEO of Stathakis, Inc., has been in the BSC industry for more than 30 years. Throughout this time, he has helped his family-owned business grow and thrive — from a small painting and building maintenance business to the largest Michigan-based janitorial and painting services and facility management company. Continue reading to learn why Stathakis thinks BSCs should spend time marketing themselves, as well as the philosophy his company uses to promote a great work culture.

What are some key trends you’ve noticed in the industry throughout the past year?

The biggest trend I have noticed in the industry throughout the past year is that prices continue to be flat. The most successful contractors are the ones who can learn to be creative in engineering accounts to meet the clients’ needs without sacrificing gross margin.

What are some of the challenges you’ve noticed in the BSC industry, and how is Stathakis tackling those challenges?

One of the challenges we all face as contractors is all of the uncertainty that there seems to be surrounding the Affordable Healthcare Act. No two people can agree on what the true impact will be for our industry. No matter which way your political affiliations lean or how you personally feel, the Affordable Healthcare Act presents some serious challenges. And yet, it could also be an opportunity for those companies who embrace the change and figure out how to make it work in their competitive marketplace.
You have a leadership blog on your company website. What prompted you to start this blog, and what tips do you have for other BSC leaders who want to start one?

There seems to be a leadership void in the BSC industry. Because of the low barriers to entry, there are a lot of people who started their businesses as technicians and have never made the jump to become true leaders within their companies. I wanted to make an impact on other company leaders by sharing the lessons I have learned in successfully growing my company. If it helps one person, then it was worth it! On the same note, I wish more managers and leaders would write about the challenges they have faced and what they have learned. A good leader is open to learning new things wherever it comes from. If you have ideas or a point of view, put it out there.

How important is it for BSCs to properly market themselves?

As BSCs, we operate our businesses in a fragmented marketplace where our customers have almost unlimited choices in picking a company to work with. So it becomes imperative for BSCs to separate themselves from the fray by clearly communicating what makes their company unique over all the others. It is our job to make choosing a BSC both easy and enjoyable for our customers.

How do you do this?

Talk to your best customers and ask them why they do business with you versus your competitors. Fully insured, family owned, free estimate and quality service don’t count! Those are all platitudes and simply confuse potential customers. Be genuine to communicate the real differentiators that make you valuable to your existing customers.

How would you describe your management style?

My management style is empowering and supporting the people who work with me. I give my people the training, resources and support they need, then get out of the way so they can get the job done!

What are some tips you have for employee retention?

Explain to every employee what success looks like so they have objectives. On the way to fulfilling those objectives, make sure that they feel appreciated and they are always respected
as individuals. Not every single person is cut out for every single job, but it doesn’t mean we don’t respect people in helping them feel successful, even somewhere else if necessary!

What does Stathakis do to create memorable customer experiences?

We promise to be completely upfront and honest in our business dealings. No empty promises, no bait-and-switch. Everything we do at Stathakis is with complete transparency so customers always know what they are getting.

What do you do to create a great work culture within your business?

We have used “Ubuntu” as the core of our management philosophy here at Stathakis. Ubuntu is an African philosophy about how we as humans work best together. Ubuntu is much centered on each individual’s inherent value as a person and how we all can go further working together rather than going it alone. I try to keep the focus on problem solving over blame placing, collaboration, mutual support and the development and growth of individuals who demonstrate they want to learn more and do more. I am proud of the people who make up Stathakis.

What technologies do you use within your business and personally to make everyday operations more efficient?

Smartphones and the affordability of technology can put the power of information into just about anyone’s hands these days. So we continue to use this technology to solve the many communication challenges facing a dispersed workforce.

What would you say is the most important lesson you’ve learned in the business?

The most important lesson I have learned in business is to not distinguish in the way we treat customers and employees. For without one, I could not have the other.