

TAMPA BAY Business Journal

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James Nichols: Happy family and staff means success

Tips of the trade

How do you manage the information flow? I try to have as much correspondence as possible go directly to the end person that needs to receive it instead of acting as a conduit. Our office went paperless last year so that all information can be accessed via our company intranet.

How do you keep yourself current in your field? Reading a lot and attending seminars. Perhaps 90 percent of what you hear is worthless or old information, but the 10 percent that is new, I believe, can make a big difference in your success.

What's a valuable lesson a mentor taught you related to your profession? Don't hesitate

to pay someone else to do something if it can free you up to do your core job.

How do you measure your own success? I look at bottom line profit, but if my family and my staff are happy, growing personally and professionally and also having fun, then I consider myself successful.

How do you recharge your batteries? Going to my summer home in Maine and spending time with my wife and family.

Background check

What was your first paid job? At age 14 working for my father who had a business washing and repairing Venetian blinds. We did pick up and delivery so I was able to see hundreds of different businesses of all sizes and learn a lot about business from my father.

What did you want to be when you grew up? As a child I wanted to be an astronaut, and then once I got to high school I knew I wanted to be a business owner.

What's the most personal item in your office and why is it there? It is a letter from my younger brother in which he told me that he thought my dad, who died in 1993, would be proud of my children and my business accomplishments. My brother doesn't B.S., and his opinion means a lot to me.

If you weren't in your current career, what would you be doing? What I do is my first choice, but if I retired from this industry tomorrow I would work in ministry with the Catholic Church.

What is your favorite activity with your family? I love sitting around the dinner table discussing business, politics, books, family, and the general state of the world. I consider myself well informed but am often amazed at the insight my wife and children are able to give me.

If you could have dinner with one person you've never met,

who would it be and why? I would like to meet George Bush. I am amazed by people like him who can handle the weight of the world on their shoulders while simultaneously appearing very relaxed and building great personal lives. I think he would be able to tell some amazing behind-the-scenes stories.

Who are your heroes in the business world and why? The one business hero I have is my dad. He never went to college because his father was very sick, and his mom died when he was in high school. He supported his brothers and sisters and started several successful businesses with no startup capital, no mentors and no training. I see what he was able to do starting with nothing, and I try to remember that my business roadblocks are minor compared with what he had to overcome.

EXECUTIVE PROFILE

WHO AM I?

NAME: James Nichols

TITLE AND COMPANY: President, Nichols Insurance Inc.

YEARS WITH THE COMPANY: Five

YEARS IN TAMPA BAY AREA: 17

NATURE OF BUSINESS: Health insurance and employee benefits

EDUCATION: Bachelor's in computer science with a minor in near east studies, University of Massachusetts 1980, MBA in International Finance, New York University, 1982

WHERE YOU GREW UP AND WHAT IT WAS LIKE: I grew up in Longmeadow, Mass., a suburb of Springfield. It was a very nice town of 16,000 people with tree-lined streets. I had great parents, three sisters and a brother.

