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BUSINESS SCHOOL NEWS

OCTOBER 02, 2008

Alumni Entrepreneur Profile of the Month: Alex Tavangar '05 (EMBA)

What is TotalFacility?

TotalFacility is a leading provider of outsourced facility repair and maintenance services throughout the United States and Canada. We have a strong entrepreneurial corporate culture that has helped us adapt and change quickly enough to survive several economic and market shifts.

Who are your customers?

TotalFacility's customers are national and international retail chains, banks, and corporations with multi-location operations spread over a large geographic area.

How did the business concept come to you?

The firm was launched in 1990. At the time it was an environmental engineering and project management company for large national and international firms in need of support to direct their projects spread across the nation. This was the seed for the development for our current TotalFacility model: outsourced facilities management through a pre-qualified network of local providers.

What prompted our transition from environmental engineering was the shift in the environmental compliance market in the mid-1990s. We looked at the various operational needs of our clients that were aligned with our expertise and identified an opportunity in outsourced facilities management services.

TotalFacility currently operates with 30 employees. We also manage several thousand technicians and service partners across our network everyday.

What lessons have you learned from launching a business?

It is critical to verify the market need and the associated opportunity. What one may think is a great idea may not be a dependable foundation for starting a new business.

Another important principle is flexibility and innovation. It is best to be the first to present a new or improved product or service in the market rather than the competition.

What MBA classes were helpful to you as an entrepreneur?

As someone with an engineering background and practically no prior finance and accounting exposure, I gained a lot of experience from accounting and finance courses at the Columbia Business School. As our small company grew, this knowledge became invaluable in order to increase productivity and efficiency.

I have also incorporated many of the critical decision making and cooperative processes from Professor Biggadike's Top Management Processes class into the day-to-day operation of TotalFacility.

Other helpful courses I took in school were:

- Advance Corporate Finance with Professor Donna Hitscherich
- Managing Service Operations with Professor Medini Singh
- Economics of Strategic Behavior with Professor Bruce Greenwald
- Entrepreneurial Management with Professor Jack Kaplan

I found accounting, corporate finance, management and negotiation courses very helpful to have in my "toolbox".

What advice would you give to an incoming Columbia student entrepreneur?

I see a good deal of similarity between being an entrepreneur and riding my Harley Davidson motorcycle; the experience is exhilarating and fulfilling, but it also requires focus and being in tune with the road and the ever-changing conditions.

Staying in touch with your classmates and the Columbia alumni network can be the difference between success and failure. I have stayed connected with the alumni groups in my areas of interest such as real estate, entrepreneurship, private equity and venture capital through Columbia's email lists and clubs. I use these groups as sounding boards, expert advice, or just a place to get recommendations for experts or consultants that I may need to engage for a project.

What's driving you to succeed?

Innovation and entrepreneurship are both challenging and fun! I'm also committed to TotalFacility's employees who are raising families and developing fulfilling careers.

My own family of course must be included in this as well. My dear wife, Homa, and three wonderful girls provide me with plenty of motivation to succeed every day.

What's next for TotalFacility?

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I'd like to introduce even more innovative processes using technology. Currently there are several initiatives in the works that will increase our efficiency, productivity and scalability. Strategic partnership, such as energy management and carbon footprint assessment are always on the agenda.

To learn more about TotalFacility, log onto www.totalfacility.com.