

Fast Lane

Bill Schrom, Geotrace Technologies Inc.

Seeking balance

How Bill Schrom uses his resources to keep Geotrace Technologies Inc. growing **By Mark Scott**

Bill Schrom refers to his job as trying to “stay in touch with my insanity.”

“You’ve got to like what you’re doing,” says Schrom, CEO of Geotrace Technologies Inc., a provider of subsurface imaging solutions. “If you don’t really enjoy it or if you’re not willing to live it and give up sleep for it, you’re probably not going to be successful. I spend a lot of time on the business. It intrudes into my personal life, but I try to keep a balance.”

By tapping into the talents of others and soliciting feedback from customers and vendors, Schrom has found that balance to lead Geotrace through a global expansion, growing 2006 revenue to \$41 million, with anticipated 2007 revenue of \$54 million.

Smart Business spoke with Schrom about how patience and a love of coffee can be valuable traits in global business success.

Q: What are some keys to successful global expansion?

You have to have people who are willing to travel and adapt to other cultures. There is not a lot of glamour in business travel. I remember having this one young lady towing along behind me on a rainy evening in Oslo, Norway, giving me a death stare. If you’re high-strung and believe the whole world revolves around Texas, you’re probably not going to be able to do it.

You need someone who is willing to learn about how another culture works. What you find is you go into the Middle East, you’re going to go have coffee with somebody 15 times before you’re going to talk business with them. You have to understand if you’re pushy, you’re not going to make it.

Q: How do you assess whether you have people who are able to adapt?

I will go, or one of the other guys who has traveled a lot will go, with somebody the first couple of trips just to see how they do.

Sometimes people think it will be fun or a great time, and they find out it’s a lot of work. Your body is jet-lagged and your sleeping habits go all haywire, and they just can’t take it.

You can gauge it and think this person can do it, but until you go on the road for a couple of trips, you really can’t say for sure. That represents a cost to the company, but it’s a good investment. If you’re going to rely on this person, you really have to feel



comfortable that they can work in the new area.

We always touch base with clients and find out what they are thinking and what they have to say about the operation. Get a third-party perspective on what the operation is doing and what it looks like.

Q: What is the CEO’s role in successful growth?

Get out and talk to your people. Listen to them, and if you tell somebody you are going to do something, deliver on it.

Get out and see your clients. At times, you can get locked in being in the forest and forget what your clients think about you and believe about you. Stay in touch with

your vendors because your vendors can help you with new ideas and different approaches.

There is a whole group of people looking at your business from a different perspective, and they tend to think outside the box that you have established for yourself.

Q: How do you get yourself out of that box?

It’s really getting out and not hiding in an office. It’s getting out and visiting with people and pushing it down so the people that report to me do the same thing and the people that report to them do the same thing.

I have an open-door policy, so anybody can walk in. It causes interruptions and changes the things I can get accomplished sometimes, but it’s very valuable. I go out and walk around and look over their shoulders and ask what they are doing.

Q: How do you define success?

We can have 500 different metrics to run the beast, but if it’s not making money, we have nothing. (Employees) know that’s what we’re all about. Either through generating revenue or cutting cost or looking at ways to do things more efficiently, the people are pretty well set that we have to be making money.

It works because people want to be part of an organization that is making money. People want to make money. If we’re working in a place where they are not interested in the company making money or in them making money, we’ve got a big problem.

That is the goal. We have to make money. By understanding that, they kind of watch our back. They make sure expenses don’t run over, and they treat it as their money.

HOW TO REACH: Geotrace Technologies Inc., (281) 497-8440 or www.geotrace.com



Geotrace