2015 Food Service Consultant Management Excellence Award

Management Excellence
Consultant

REITANO DESIGN GROUP

No. of Employees: 5
Portfolio Highlights: Ivy Tech Community College, Indianapolis; Indiana University, Bloomington, Ind.; Lancaster City Schools, Lancaster, Ohio; Shawnee Mission Medical Center, Shawnee Mission, Kan.
Design Segments: Schools, Colleges, B&I, Healthcare
Company Motto: "We take care of people."

Ten years ago, Scott Reitano, sr. assoc. FCSI, made a leap of faith. In 2004, Reitano found out his wife was unexpectantly pregnant. He knew he wanted to be around to watch his little girl grow up. So, after nearly two decades as an equipment manufacturers' rep, Reitano walked away from a leadership role and into his own foodservice design firm, now called Reitano Design Group, Indianapolis.

With no previous experience or drafting skills, Reitano decided he could offer something not every foodservice consultancy had: outstanding client service.

"I don't draw lines on paper," he says, "but as a rep I was in a lot of kitchens, and I did a lot of listening."

Reitano wanted to build his business on two principles: being Christ-centered and client-focused. "We strive to work with passion and compassion and to serve our clients in all we do. Our goal is to treat others well and do what is in the best interest of the client in all circumstances. It may sound crazy, but our team is 'all in.' We desire to play at a

high level and to evolve our organization, but always with our guiding principles as the cornerstone."

Reitano's principles initially helped him win business in the school market, a segment in which the group quickly built a strong reputation.

"Scott and Reitano Design Group are the only ones doing what they do the way they're doing it," says Lindsey Hill, director of school nutrition services, South Madison Community School Corp., Pendleton, Ind. "They listen to clients, and most importantly, they are very transparent in the recommendations that they make. Sure, certain brands

are suggested, but they're based on knowledge and experience, not on relationships or financial advantage to them. And RDG is not afraid to think outside of traditional methods if it means the best experience for their clients."

When the Great Recession hit a few years after Reitano started the company, school projects in Indiana slowed considerably. But his ability to listen helped Reitano and his team expand into other foodservice segments, including healthcare foodservice, corporate dining and higher education. With this, the company's reputation for client service grew.

Martha Rardin, director of nutrition and dietetics, Hendricks Regional Health, Danville, Ind., hired RDG to design a brand new kitchen. "I knew Scott when he was an equipment rep," she says. "I often feel like consultants don't give us enough time, but Scott's company makes me feel like I'm their only client.

"We sketched out on paper a first-in, first-out system of how we wanted food to flow in the new kitchen. Scott listened, talked to staff and observed employees and how our old kitchen worked or didn't work. Then he offered lots of possible solutions, so we could pick what worked best for us. He also went to bat for us in construction meetings regarding both the design and equipment decisions we made. His heart is in the right place, and when it's the right thing to do he's willing to fight."

RDG's entire staff exhibits the same attentiveness and level of service. Everyone on the small staff has a role to play, and they all complement one another. In addition to Reitano, the staff includes Design Principal Jeremy Welu (he recently left the industry), who participated in concept development; Project Manager Jim Kessenich, who puts the project puzzle pieces together; and Julie Sullivan, the firm's project coordinator who leads the budgeting and internal quality-control process. Katie Rogers, a 17-year school

foodservice veteran, is the subject-matter expert.

"Nobody owns the job," Reitano says. "Everybody wears a lot of hats, and we're very collaborative, including our clients. We tell clients they're part of the design team, too. We try to involve them at every level."

RDG has partnered with the architectural firm Schmidt Associates, Indianapolis, on several designs. Kevin Shelley, a principal with the firm, echoes what a lot of Reitano's clients have to say.

"What makes Scott and his team unique," he says, "is their leadership attitude toward projects. Service always comes first, and they listen beyond the requirements of the project to serve the needs of the client. We've worked with several consultants, but he's at another level, service-wise."

For example, if he calls RDG and Reitano is out of the office, "the next thing I know, he'll show up on our doorstep and ask, 'How can I help?'"

Reitano's helpful attitude, which grows out of his guiding principles, goes beyond his business relationships. He's also active in local charities, including Second Helpings, a program that rescues prepared and perishable food from wholesalers, retailers and restaurants to create thousands of meals that are distributed to social-service agencies that feed people in need throughout central Indiana.

"Our biggest challenge is keeping the pipeline filled while we give a high level of service to current clients and work on projects we have in house," Reitano says. "The other piece is what we want to be when we grow up. We need to keep an eye on our vision."

As other types of firms, such as equipment distributors and architectural firms, consolidate, grow and offer similar services, foodservice consultants increasingly are becoming niche players, Reitano says. For him, that trend simply emphasizes the need for firms like his that have ethics, high standards and add value. ***fer***

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> *—Scott Reitano, Sr. Assoc. FSCI, Principal, Reitano Design Group*