

Peter: [00:00:00] Welcome to Episode 5. My guests today are Rich Stang and Brad Hoffman, who are partners in the Maryland accounting firm of Deleon and Stang CPAs and advisors. Deleon and Stang is not your average accounting firm. For example, they're very much an anticipatory organization where they go beyond traditional services by providing clients with a future-forward look at the financial situation. Their future-forward approach is seen in their mission statement, core competencies, decisions when opening a new location, and in a rollout of new benefits in 2018. I am almost guaranteed that you will stop, rewind, and have a listen to this whole entire episode as you begin to understand how future-focused they are. Two of my favorite quotes from Sir Richard Branson founder of Virgin Airlines describe this firm, and they are: "train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough so they don't want to" and "clients do not come first – Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients." This is the essence of Deleon and Stang, and I would be remiss if I didn't mention the other three partners in this firm and they are Allenn Deleon, Jeanie Price and Dan Dellon. Now you can visit the website at deleonandstang.com and learn more about this future-forward accounting firm. So without further ado, let's get to the interview with Richard Stang and Brad Hoffman

Peter: [00:01:33] Rich and Brad, welcome to my podcast. I appreciate you taking time. You have a little bit more time now than you did maybe back in March or February to spend some time with me talking about your firm on my podcast. So thank you guys for taking the time and being here this afternoon.

Rich: [00:01:51] Thanks for having us.

Brad: [00:01:53] Thank you.

Peter: [00:01:54] Let's just start the conversation. Just kind of give the audience a little bit about your background. Let's start with you Brad. And then we'll get to Rich.

Brad: [00:02:02] I started in public accounting in I guess 2001 and spent 12 years in a pretty typical accounting firm. It was a very very structured organization, a very good organization. But I realized that I didn't fit in really, as far as the culture went. And when

I came over to D&S, It was kind of a breath of fresh air in that there was a... oh wow there's other people that function like I do. So 2012 came over. And you know we started talking a lot about you know the evolution of the firm and where things were, and it was it was very interesting to me as as we had these talks that you know all of the conversations weren't met with no.

Peter: [00:03:09] Hahaha

Brad: [00:03:09] You know I told someone in the beginning I said I've got to be careful when I come up with a new idea or new though because there is a chance that, within two weeks, we might be rolling with it. And you know that was pretty abnormal given where I came from, which was a more traditional accounting firm.

Peter: [00:03:31] So let me ask Rich. Let me ask you this: So you started the firm and Brad's over saying that he came from a traditional firm and yours was not a traditional firm. Can you explain that, as you describe your background?

Rich: [00:03:49] Well I can explain it in the sense that when Allen Deleon and I started the firm, neither one of us other than maybe a summer internship that he had done in college had worked in public accounting. And as we tried to start the firm, we didn't have perhaps the knowledge of how a CPA firm runs. In some respects, that maybe hurt us a little bit. But in a lot of respects, I think it helped in that we didn't have some of the idiosyncrasies that you hear about in traditional CPA firm. So I think things like putting family first and you know having fun in a business was what we started out to do, not really knowing exactly what a public accounting firm did. So I think in the long run, that helped build a business that, hopefully, is seen as a very good opportunity for our staff outside of some of the traditional things you hear about accounting firms.

Peter: [00:04:51] You know my introduction to your firm. I knew-- I'd met Jeanie and knew her but I didn't really know the firm as much. And then I came in and did that course for you guys and really my eyes just got huge because you guys are different. I mean you guys are are really innovative. As Brad said, he's used to hearing no and I cut my teeth in public accounting where no was the-- but you guys say yes, and the culture

that you guys have created - I find it refreshing. I find it something that I've always said I'd love to have-- if I had a firm, I would love to have something like that. And just for the listeners out there, I have included a case study in my upcoming, Taking the Numb out of Numbers, on their firm because it's so fascinating and that's why when you get them on the podcast so they can talk more about that. So you didn't grow up in a public accounting and your business model-- But even back when you started with I think maybe 10, 15 years ago, when you were doing your mission statement and your core values, you had shared with me that-- Because you had at the time like 15 core values and you said you had the whole firm participating in this decision making, which I find refreshing, but it's also very unique that we get the whole the whole company together, get the whole firm together, to help make these decisions and provide this input.

Rich: [00:06:16] From my perspective, I think if everyone is involved, I think you're going to have a better buy in to living those core values. Plus in our case, I think part of the-- part of the yes, part of it moving forward, is the sense that if somebody has a good idea then let's put it into place. Let's not wait around and you know see who's going to pump up and get the most credit for it. Let's just get it done. So I think we've always been looking for good ideas and good information from from all of our staff. That's just been the way we've operated.

Peter: [00:06:51] And then you brought Brad in and as said, he came from a typical accounting firm and he's got a lot of ideas. He's had a lot of energy. Brad I assumed it was very easy to assimilate into this culture.

Brad: [00:07:03] Yes. Oh absolutely. You know and it's it's still relevant today, an example, it was on Tuesday last week. It was like the first day that it was actually like just gorgeous outside. And we just landed a new client, got back to the office. There were several folks there and you know I checked everybody's calendars. And like you know what? Guys let's let's go grab a happy hour. It's gorgeous out. And you know that was like three o'clock. And I said I said to one of the staff, who just happened to be Rich's son, I guess it doesn't help that you know I'm I'm more of the problem when it comes to this than the help. And Chris looks at me and says actually it's almost like an unspoken fringe benefit to have this type of behavior. I was like excellent.

Peter: [00:08:05] You're non-smoking fringe benefit. That's awesome. [laughs] But it's so-- just all this culture that you guys have created really empowers people, and it has to distill upon your clients in such a positive way. Can you share some of those stories, things along those lines?

Brad: [00:08:26] Well you know just as recent as last week, we had picked up a new client in the Frederick market. And it was from-- We got them from one of the larger accounting firms in the Frederick market. And after meeting them and we talked about you know entity selection and blah blah blah, but we spent a lot of time just talking about what their plans were and what they what they thought they saw the future being. And you know their workforce, their fleet, their you know things that had nothing to do with numbers really.

Peter: [00:09:07] Right.

Brad: [00:09:08] And we got we got you know halfway through that meeting and they're like this is this is stuff that you know that the other firm never even thought to ask us. And you know it just kind of continued on. They they said on that and they come in, they hang out. We took we we did a couple of promotional things that we had them come to. And they-- you know we didn't even have to sell ourselves. They were they were the ones speaking to the other folks in the room telling them how fun we were and how awesome we were to work with, and that we've talked about stuff that they never even thought to consider. So you know the clients feed off of this environment and you know they stop by and will just stop in and say hi to Danny or Chris or whoever else is in the office. And you know if they're walking past or whatever because they know it's you know it's an environment that that is fun. You know they just hope they don't get hit with a stray nerf gun bullet.

Peter: [00:10:15] So I love that story. The question I have is this culture - I feel, maybe I'm wrong here, that with your core values, your first core value is putting your people first, not putting your clients first but putting your people first. And I think by doing that - because you care about your people - that same care goes into when you're having

conversations with existing clients, with prospects, because it sounds to me that you want to know them as a person, as a business, what makes them tick, where their passion is. And where the other firms are traditional firms are going in just looking at the numbers, you're trying to find out that the whole the whole entity and how it's evolved as as a unit, which is quite unique in that process. Would you agree with that Rich?

Rich: [00:11:15] Yes I would. I mean we've had the opportunities-- you know the clients notice that in our case, and we did make a change in our mission statement to put staff first and then clients, and I've had a few conversations with clients about that and they were intrigued as to why we did that and what that meant for us. And it means that if we take care of our staff first, that they're going to be here from a you know continuing with us, there's not as much turnover. And so that's ultimately going to be good for the clients as well, especially in the market, the job market that we're in right now. I've had the opportunity to sit with clients that actually have gained some services for clients to talk about what we've done as it might relate to them, especially other professional services businesses.

Peter: [00:12:03] I love that and it sounds like you have a dialogue. For lack of a better term, a rich dialogue when you're having these conversations with your clients, and I assume you've got long term clients and they've got to be some of your best referrals as you continue to grow your business.

Rich: [00:12:20] Yeah definitely.

Peter: [00:12:22] What's the biggest strength that you see in your firm?

Brad: [00:12:24] It goes without saying the culture the environment from which we work in. You know we had staff this tax season actually say man I'm glad it's tax season, I get to hang out here more. That's kind of unheard of.

Peter: [00:12:45] What?! Wow. So they like to come to work because you provided a great culture. And you know when you guys said you put your people first. It reminds

me of Richard Branson, the Virgin Airlines guy. He says if he hires the right people, they will take care of the customers. Kind of the same philosophy that you guys use.

Brad: [00:13:09] Absolutely

Rich: [00:13:10] So yeah I think it is. You know I think when we give everybody we give everybody a voice, they know that their voices are heard. Yeah so that drives you know that's a little bit more detail. I think they feel it, and I think that's what drives culture.

Peter: [00:13:24] And thinking about that and you're empowering your people just from the simple act of listening to them and gaining an understanding of what they're trying to say, and then acting on it.

Rich: [00:13:40] Yep

Peter: [00:13:40] That's unique in so many ways because you know the improv guy in me... you know I hear the word no and I cringe, but you guys are really going yes, and tell me more verses No I'm sorry we can't do that. It's much more of a positive attitude in the firm.

Brad: [00:13:59] Well and I mean-- The clients... You know so I know you love Yes And. I would like to say that I've used that a lot. But really it's well maybe, let me hear. You know the same same philosophy, but you know having children you learn that if you say yes, you're in.

Peter: [00:14:23] That that is true. I taught my son yes and early on and he's gotten away with a lot of stuff.

[00:14:31] [laughs]

Peter: [00:14:31] But along those lines, Brad, thinking back to a conversation that we had for the book, and you were telling me - and I use this all the time and I give you

credit for it - sometimes you'll come up with an idea and they said we can't do that. And what's the phrase that you use?

Brad: [00:14:50] If someone says no that won't work, you say well if it did, what would it look like?

Peter: [00:14:54] If it did, what would it look like. And you're giving them permission at that point to explore an idea that they initially poo poo'd.

Brad: [00:15:04] That's right. Well and it's kind of to some degree, it's combining many different philosophies on on this whole consulting thing. I mean there's you know Burrus has the you know if you're stuck on a step, skip it. And this one was from one of my teachings earlier on and it was you know that you know that won't work, but if it did what would it be? It's kind of the same thing, you're skipping the No it won't and moving on to the-- you're really trying to get to the root of their desire, and that works real well in sales meetings too. If you get in front of a client who is very pessimistic, you can you can kind of get down to what they're really trying to have what they really want, and get them there without you know telling them they're wrong. You know. And that happens a lot. I mean a lot accountants-- You know Rich and I had this conversation earlier in the week of Why are we different? You know so many folks want to go in, they meet the client, and they tell them what they need and they tell them what they don't need. And it's just insane. We've had so much success just sitting, listening to the client, talking to them, asking them lots of questions, and you know finding out what they really want. What I mean you know it's... if you provide great service but they didn't want it, there's really no value.

Peter: [00:16:33] Right. Clients, prospects, organizations are looking for that value. But a lot of times, they can't put their finger on it until they see it or experience it.

Brad: [00:16:45] Yeah

Peter: [00:16:45] And when you guys provide this service and this opportunity and this ability to sit down and listen to what their needs are what they need - And I think you

shared this with me and I've heard many times before - Tell me one entrepreneur, one business owner, who doesn't want to talk about their business. If you just let them talk, they'll tell you everything you need to know. So then you can formulate an opinion and provide them what they need, but you have to allow them to talk and tell and describe.

Brad: [00:17:17] Yes sometimes they're willing to pay you just to listen to them, if you let them. As crazy as that sounds. You know they want to just unload on all the good stuff they've done or all the problems they had. You know. If you don't interject with a solution and you let the you let the conversation flow, you get a whole lot from them.

Peter: [00:17:43] Exactly. And Rich I have a question that I want to ask - the teacher in me is coming out now, and it's how do you teach, or how are you guys teaching this - the skill set that you all have - to the younger staff.

Rich: [00:18:03] Well actually Brad has been very instrumental. It is just simply you know as we get these client meetings and get in front of them. It's it's really asking everyone to take someone with them into these meetings so they can hear and listen to what's going on. Brad has done that since day one, taking one or two of our staff people out to sit in on these meetings and just hear what we're doing. There's you know a lot of it is that you're just doing it off the cuff and sometimes you can't just sit with someone say here's what you do. So it's it's just more having them experience it.

Peter: [00:18:38] I think that's great. And I can imagine some of the clients go why do you bring in all these people out here? What are you going to bill me for every individual?

Rich: [00:18:46] Yeah.

Peter: [00:18:46] But you really get them on the job training, as well as I think a lot of the value there is the car ride out and the car ride back.

Rich: [00:18:53] Right

Brad: [00:18:54] Especially the one back.

[00:19:01] [laughs]

Brad: [00:19:01] I mean you know the reality is you have if you have a Rcih you have an AI, someone who has you know 35 years of experience of being in front of clients and doing this, it's to me - it would be a crime to not have as many as possible, the younger staff, you know watching and following and seeing that happen in real time. Yeah there's some time burn on it, but the value for the firm down the road is so huge.

Peter: [00:19:36] And I don't know-- some other firms that I know they're still not really doing that as much, there's still the layers and this is what you do at this stage in your career. And I've always been a firm believer that if someone walks a new employee, after they kind of figure things out in the office, just get them out in the field and have them observe the conversation that's going on. So by the time they become maybe a manager, they've obtained some of those interpersonal skills and have seen it live and in person, where they can bring a bigger bang to the organization, versus not seeing it and getting thrown into the fire.

Brad: [00:20:13] Yeah well, and sometimes the fire is not bad as long as they have backup. I mean seriously. Like if the whole like-- empowering is awesome and I love empowering the people that work with me, but they have to know that you've got their back and you know it's good for them to feel you know the sweat every once in a while when the client calls and asks the question. Because they really - you know and that's what I refer to as the fire - that really drives home then the need of understanding, and not just moving the product along because then they know wow I need to know this. So the next time Sally Smith calls, I can answer this right away and it instills the understanding that that they need to understand.

Peter: [00:21:03] The experience of this, them going through this, experiencing the burn, also as you describe it as a motivator to avoid that burn again and to be prepared and to be able to have recall almost immediately in order to answer the client's question that they have.

Brad: [00:21:21] Yeah and once a client calls the staff, you know that's what client interaction with staff is, as early as possible that that isn't it... You don't want to put them in a bad situation, but the more that the staff has to interact with the client or get to interact with the client, I mean at least our staff, the vibrant millennials that we're getting a hold of, they want to know you know. And that just drives them more, when they can when they can then call the client and give them the answer and not have to go through a manager or a partner. So you know it goes full circle.

Peter: [00:22:00] That says a lot. So Rich I have to ask you this question. You said you've been doing this for about 35 years.

Rich: [00:22:06] No Brad said that. I didn't say that.

Peter: [00:22:11] Hahaha. You've been doing this for a number of years and you've gone through a number of quote unquote busy seasons. How did this one go for you guys, as compared to some observations that you saw from them this year versus maybe prior years?

Rich: [00:22:27] Every year we've evolved a little bit. And I know that this year, you know especially with what's fresh in my mind now, between really good communications with our clients and having our staff prepared, we finished at the end as smoothly as we ever have. All the extensions were done, all forms are back from e-filing. Literally Thursday or Friday before the 17th, you know at that point we were finished. So you know Saturday we were we left early, Sunday I didn't come to the office at all, Monday we just were you know chasing down a final few forms. So you know I think also our use of electronic means, portals, and getting you know encouraging clients to scan. And this year electronic signatures. It really did go as smooth as it ever has.

Peter: [00:23:20] Wow that's great.

Rich: [00:23:22] And you know in spite of the tax law change and everything else that was on people's minds too.

Peter: [00:23:29] Oh that's right. I Forget about that, that little change in tax code. So as busy season began to ramp up and the tension began to get a little bit more heavier in the office--.

Rich: [00:23:41] What tension?.

Peter: [00:23:44] I think he just had to my question because I still hear stories and I remember as we started getting into February, the tension level within the office you know would get extremely high and you know people's nerves would be wearied upon and tired and working, and ultimately something would go sideways, and sometimes something will go sideways pretty large that had a major impact. But it sounds like that never happened to your organization.

Rich: [00:24:15] People work harder. People get a little more tired you know in that time you know towards the end of March, but as far as everybody pitched in and worked together. I think I said in our post-season meeting we just had, I think our teamwork this year is best it has ever been. Whether it's allowing our staff to get the data that they need or making sure that we were there for them, I think our teamwork was better than it ever has been.

Peter: [00:24:46] Brad anything to add to that?

Brad: [00:24:48] I mean that's that's it. It's it's everyone working in a similar manner right. I mean everyone's planning correctly, everyone's pulling data in, everyone's shooting for the same goal, and you didn't have that you know you know a couple outliers that you would in a normal organization that could you know kind of sabotage the planning, good planning, of others. So you know they keep on burning burning burning burning up to the bitter end and then you know they're asking for the help of everybody that did plan properly. Everybody was on the same page and working cohesively.

Peter: [00:25:27] How rich put it, the what you've just described, in my mind when I'm thinking about a team, the best teams I think every individual in the team knows that somebody has got their back. If they make a mistake, they fall down or something, there's someone there to pick them up, dust them off, and move them in the right direction. And I think that's what you guys are saying, that the teamwork and the I got your back, I'm here to support you, was instrumental in this very fluid and best ever busy season at your organization, at your firm.

Rich: [00:26:03] I think it's a great way to describe it. You know next it extends beyond just our tax teams. I mean it extends across every every facet really.

Brad: [00:26:12] I mean it fascinates me that you know we've hired many people from many other accounting firms. Clint Lehman and Michele Mills, they came in from other organizations and they were previously partners of those organizations, and they both during - and this is Michelle's first tax season and Clint said this similarly in his first year - he walked around and said, "when's it get ugly? When do people start getting crazy?" And you know I'm grabbing her out of the office to come out and join us for a happy hour. Like tension only exists if you let it. Like if you can handle it correctly, you don't have to have tension. Sure we had similar urgent scenarios and things of that nature that that other firms would have. But if you don't let it escalate to a a you know a a bad situation - use it as an opportunity. If it's a client relation, you use whatever went wrong as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship. You know you know be forward, call them. You know there's there's plenty of ways to diffuse tension.

Peter: [00:27:28] Yes. And and transparency and honesty and all of that goes into that diffusion. But I think also the big piece is they know everyone is there to support them. Nobody's nobody's walking around looking at you like you want to punch that person out, or you know you just avoid people in the office because of something. But it doesn't sound like that you know existed, or if it is, it's very minute within your organization. Even at the most busiest time of the year when panic leads to stress and all of a sudden all the wheels are falling off. It sounds to me that when something happens, and even if somebody had made a mistake, that's an opportunity to learn versus a punishable offense.

Brad: [00:28:17] Well yeah. The other element - and this is going to sound not as positive - but you know the right people on the bus, sometimes you have to remove folks that don't buy into your culture and who you know can on a regular basis cause that type of environment because they're you know they're deteriorating what you want, what you want to grow. And ultimately you find that most people are very appreciative that you're maintaining what they love.

Peter: [00:28:48] Yes. Yeah. It's it's interesting to watch organizations. There was a woman who wrote the book Stop Knocking At My Door: Drama-Free H.R. and she describes that within an organization they were having high turnover, and they spent some time working on the mission, vision, core values, and they flipped the hiring process. So it used to be you know we will post for job. Here's an application, fill it out, interview. So on so forth. They flip the process so your first interview, first process here, is to go to our Web site, read our mission vision core values competencies, and then we'll have a phone call. And if you can articulate how you would fit into that structure, that culture, and what it means, then you would get the application and go through the interview process. They said their attrition went down almost to nothing. They were able to retain because everybody they hired understood the culture of the organization and were able to articulate it at the very beginning, and as well as through the interview process. Now I don't know how you guys hire whatever, but finding those people that are right fits - that's tough to do. And if I don't fit-- I applaud you guys. If somebody doesn't fit, hopefully you're not waiting until after busy season or whatever for the first time maybe to say this isn't going to work out versus doing it sooner than later.

Brad: [00:30:14] Want to talk that on Rich?

Rich: [00:30:14] I would say that you know you can always look back and say boy you know we waited way too long. So we've been a little nice in that regard. That's saying it mildly. We did have two people leave during the season this year and you know simply the time it took to get that to happen became a little stressful, but ultimately it was the best thing that we could do. And I would say that you know it is-- we're getting better at recognizing those that are better fits for our culture and I think we are looking there first,

regardless of background or other things. At least that we're trying to very hard and like when you look back, the best people that we have are the ones that we brought in using that as our target first, and letting the other things take care of themselves.

Peter: [00:31:12] That's a great approach. Someone said -- I don't remember who it was or whatever -- but I can teach anybody accounting, I can teach them how to do this. But a lot of times I can't teach them these intangible skills.

Rich: [00:31:25] Right.

Brad: [00:31:25] Can't teach personality.

Peter: [00:31:27] No you can't teach personality, and you can't teach engagement to some degree, but that that fit in, let's get the job done, let's take care of our clients is something that sounds easy - but for some, hard to adopt and execute on a consistent basis.

Rich: [00:31:44] Yeah I mean I remember there was a hiring period that we really needed to hire some folks back in 2013, 14. And Rich made the statement then that in his in his past -- and I won't go into how many years now...

Peter: [00:32:01] Hahaha!

Brad: [00:32:01] That every time he is hired for a position, it's been horrible. And when he's hired the human, it's worked. And that's that's you know that's really it, that's really true. And I mean all that meant was you know when when you hire them to fit into the organization and you like them, it's going to work out. Or it has a better chance.

Peter: [00:32:29] I love that. Don't hire for the position, hire for the human being - and then they all fit into that position. That's that's a great philosophy. And speaking of this culture and hiring and stuff, you all have rolled out earlier this year your mission, core values, and how you serve. But you also did something quite unique within an

organization as a benefit to your associates: You kind of changed, from what I heard, the vacation policy. Can someone speak on that?

Rich: [00:33:03] Well we have, yeah. In fact we really been talking about it for a number of years. We have an unlimited PTO policy. It is still a work in progress. But we decided that we were going to implement it even though we hadn't you know talked about it for 100 years. We knew it was going to be perfect and that it would all be over time, but we thought that that would be you know best for the firm. So there isn't any more this counting you know do I have enough time, do I not have enough time? You know we still have strides to make, but we thought it was the best thing to do. We just want people to do their jobs. And we're... especially with you know everybody grates about the millennials. It doesn't really matter when they go home, as long as the clients are happy and as long as things are getting.

Peter: [00:33:57] So unlimited PTO, they can take vacation time, personal time, throughout the whole 12 months, or is it carved out after busy season?

Rich: [00:34:06] We are certainly flexible during the busy season, although you know somebody is not going to come in and say I'm going to take this week off during busy season, that's not going to be approved. But this year for the first time, we said look you know, if you're if you're at home working and there's not a client coming to the office you have to be with, then work at home. We have some core hours on Saturday still, we haven't done away with those, but you know people were working from home in that case. Whatever they whatever they felt most comfortable with.

Brad: [00:34:37] Just to elaborate on that. First off, Rich spearheads the flexibility train. There's no doubt about that. So even on Saturdays, the you know the funny part was as we as we were introducing the non-mandatory in-office Saturday, we went around the room and you know I think sometimes there's there's apprehension when things like this are introduced as to who's going to poopoo it and whatever. I was wondering if I was the one that was feared to pooh pooh it. And I looked at him and I said I thought that's how we were already doing it. And Richard looked at me like well I guess that's good for him

then. So the reality is you know there is core hours on Saturday. But even then, we... if you have some you need to go do, you do it a different time.

Peter: [00:35:35] So I think I heard you correct. Did you say that you also part of this benefit you have non-mandatory Saturdays.

Rich: [00:35:45] In effect, yes. I mean like I said this is really about for the most part making sure that our clients are taken care of and people are getting their jobs done, and so there's a lot done as to you know what that plan looks like. Like I say. If the client... The only time they can come in and see us is on a Saturday at 11:00, then you know everybody accommodates that, that's not an issue. But yes there are there are not mandatory Saturdays.

Peter: [00:36:15] Not mandatory Saturdays, unlimited PTO. If I was 35 years younger, I want to join your firm.

Rich: [00:36:23] Well actually--.

Brad: [00:36:24] This is what you talked about earlier. The having the back. So you know if that client that Rich mentioned that has to come in and meet on that Saturday, really needs to come in, that client if everything is working correctly, has already met one or two other people on their team. And if one of those other two other people were there, they take the meeting. So you know it's kind of like the full circle effect of that teamwork process. You know it manages to scratch its back.

Peter: [00:36:59] That's what makes you guys so unique. And like I said if I was younger and I was coming out of college and I had a chance to be with your firm, I would be blown away. I imagine you have more people knocking on your door down than not. Yeah. People talk and clients talk and it's just it's it's a great culture and it's a great testament to the hard work you guys do and what you have created. And as we wrap up, I do want to ask this question because when I was out there, it's been just a little bit over a year, when I did that course. Were you guys able to - because one of the takeaways afterwards is how are you going to hold people accountable. Because you

wanted to have much more of a smooth busy season than maybe in the past, and it sounds like some of that that we talked about back in April of 2017 actually worked. How were you able to hold people accountable after the fact, after the even, and not let them get back into that rut?

Rich: [00:38:01] I think part of it is just covering the plan-- that their execution plan, whatever it might be, up front, and hopefully having more discussion around what the expectations are. As well as allowing them you know the freedom or the growth opportunities to get out with those clients and be involved in taking care of those clients, and then they get excited and want to make sure that they're accomplishing their plan and their goals or whatever.

Peter: [00:38:28] Brad, anything to add?

Brad: [00:38:28] A lot of them are starting to -- and I see a lot of them -- they're starting to really buy into this teamwork approach. And so they don't want to let their others down. So there's a lot of them holding each other self accountable. And you're you're leading not managing, which is way more fun. You're encouraging, you're strengthening, you're doing that stuff. You're not standing over top of them telling them what to do. They're holding each other accountable without you know a whole lot of oversight.

Peter: [00:39:08] Exactly. And that is the beauty of what you guys have created. And I just one last question I want to ask. I understand that you guys opened a new office. And is that the office in Frederick?

Rich: [00:39:25] Office in Frederick, yeah.

Peter: [00:39:26] And you've got an office in Gaithersburg.

Rich: [00:39:29] Yes.

Peter: [00:39:30] And Frederick and what else?

Brad: [00:39:32] Leesburg.

Peter: [00:39:33] Leesburg. So you have three locations, but what was the reasoning behind opening an office in Frederick?

Rich: [00:39:41] Well it's a great market. It's a growing market. But in reality, as we looked we looked at a couple of of firms to acquire there, you know we thought well we need to have a book of business before we go there, it became really a commuting benefit. We have a number of people that live in the Frederick area and you know for those that are familiar with the Washington D.C. area, traffic is not fun.

Peter: [00:40:09] Haha

Rich: [00:40:10] I mean literally. And the office is incredibly well done. Brad spearheaded that. It's it's it's an incredible office environment, but we really opened it more as a commuting benefit when it came down to it. And the people there that go to that office are thrilled with you know the quality of life that comes around their commuting time right now.

Peter: [00:40:31] That by far blows me away. We started, we opened an office-- we should maybe get a book of business or acquire a firm -- but we opened this office so our folks and have to commute on a daily basis and lose maybe two or three hours of their life stuck in traffic. Or they can get to work, they can do the job. And with technology there's no there's no walls, there's no borders or anything like that. And that one - when when when Jeanie told me that that's what you guys did, that was the cherry on top of the whipped cream. That by itself is so unique and it shows how much you care about your staff, the people that you hire.

Brad: [00:41:12] There's more to it than even that. And I encourage you to stop by the place and see it. To say that-- I mean it's well done and I can't take all the credit by any stretch of the imagination. When we asked several times was asked you know why make it this nice? Why spend this on this? And the reality is many firms struggle with

how to interact with the millennials, and we want to be... We want to be the first to the race with those guys, with the Millennials, because they're going to be the future of the firm and they want cool space, they want flexibility. They want the stuff that we're offering and that we that we work so hard to to offer because you know it's not actually easy to keep this culture moving. This space was just kind of the next step in that... in that statement. The bullet point on we're here to accept and challenge the millennial workforce, and we want them part of our team.

Peter: [00:42:16] So it's it's a benefit and a great marketing tool, a recruitment tool, for folks to come and work at your firm because of how cool it is. I've seen some pictures of the Frederick office and when I am up in the D.C. area I am going to come and visit. But yeah nobody really wants to work in a drab environment.

Rich: [00:42:38] Right.

Peter: [00:42:40] We work in a nice environment that's got some excitement, some energy to it that... the days of think of the old hardwoods darks and all of that have kind of gone wayside. It's much more this open atmosphere and cool setting and it is an attraction. I mean this firm will continue to grow, continue to survive. You will have folks within your firm who want to be a partner, who what they have that ownership, who want to continue this firm. And you guys are doing all the right things. Yeah you probably have a mistake here, but they're probably not even close to the win and gains that you guys have seen over the years.

Rich: [00:43:19] Well we kind of figure if we're not making a few mistakes then we're not pushing the envelope far enough. So that's kind of always been our culture as well.

Brad: [00:43:27] Rich loves that one. He's always pushing to be willing to do that. You know that's just it's really just a testament to those guys, the ones that were here before me, the willingness to take a risk and the willingness to say yes instead of No. It's just created an environment where I could thrive and others will as well, and others have and are going to continue to thrive.

Peter: [00:43:57] Well Brad and Rich, I want to thank you so very much. I've enjoyed this conversation. I think people are going to be fascinated by what you guys-- what has been created within D&L firm. I want to thank you very much for allowing me to include you and your firm in my book. It was a great story. And allowing me to learn more about your organization, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I think you got one of the most unique firms in the country. I wish you all the very best and I look forward to when our paths cross that's not virtual but in real life.

Rich: [00:44:32] All right. Thanks very much for having us.

Brad: [00:44:34] Thanks Peter. Appreciate it buddy. Lets go have Margaritas.

Peter: [00:44:39] Hahaha. I would like to thank Rich and Brad, along with Allen, Jeanie, and Dan, for opening up your firm and sharing your story with my audience. Greatly appreciate it. Thank you all. In Episode 6, my guest is Jennie Scheel, who's a CFO of Five Nines technology group, located in Omaha, Nebraska. This episode will be available on Monday, July 9th. Thank you again for listening and beginning the process of changing your mindset and getting out of your comfort zone and develop new skill sets to become more future ready. Your call to action is to determine if your organization is future ready, and if not start now. Part of becoming Future Ready is being an improviser. So go out, improvise, and look to the future. Thank you.