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Stepping Outside Of The Janitor's Closet

BY NICK BRAGG

George Abiaad could have never predicted that taking a low-paying job as a janitor in his freshman year of college would turn out to be one of the best decisions he's ever made.

Abiaad, the current president of **Royal Corp.**, Santa Fe Springs, Calif., had to find a job that would help pay his bills and earn an income for his family who came to America (California) in 1980 after losing their home, property and nearly their lives because of the Lebanese Civil War in their home country of Lebanon.

To Abiaad's surprise, he found the janitor position ideal in its flexibility of hours and was thankful for the peaceful nights – contrary to the fearful violence of his yesteryears. And, while working as a custodian, Abiaad began to observe and examine the processes, the tools and the relationships of the cleaning company he worked

for as well as its customer base. Within two years on the job, Abiaad built up enough knowledge of the industry and was encouraged to start his own cleaning business at the age of 19.

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After four years as a building service contractor, Abiaad realized that he had reached the rate of diminishing return. But, recognizing the many deprivations that suppliers at that time were not fulfilling made him sell his cleaning business and jump over to the distribution side. Abiaad eventually helped form Royal Corp., alongside his wife, Marianne Abiaad, and Michael Rashtchi in 1994.

Today, George Abiaad's passion for the cleaning industry has helped Royal Corp., step outside of the traditional janitor's closet. On top of the company's abundant jan/san accounts, Royal Corp., also services the movie theater industry where it supplies over 700 theaters across the United States and Canada.

Q: How did your company get started in servicing the movie theater industry?

A: After cleaning few of the local theaters, we developed an appreciation for what their management has to deal with to attain good customer satisfaction and realized the range of issues that they have to deal with by employing high school kids and young adults who perceive that job as a temporary stage in their life. We noticed that most of the suppliers had taken the standard path in relaying on a branded manufacturer who usually cannot cover the wider spectrum of needs that there are many elements in running a theater in which the needs can fall through loopholes that are not typical janitorial or foodservice.

We felt if we do the reverse, start from the needs and piece meal it in a customized manner by hitting the mark in implementing specific solution through many sources under a simplified uniform program, then we can differentiate ourselves and be a unique and dependable partner to our customers. The harder and more elaborate the effort on the distributor's end the simpler and easier the program would be on the end user's part.

Q: Do you think that by going outside of the box and servicing the movie theater industry has helped your company flourish?

A: We figured out early that for us to succeed and compete we need to focus on few limited market segments such as the theater market and become the expert in it. That focus allows us constantly to look (at cross industry and beyond the normal channels) outside the box to find innovate methods, products and technologies to help solve challenges for our customers and never limit our services by policies or procedures, whatever it takes. Certainly the theater segment today has given us enormous buying power, expanded our geographical coverage and constantly raises our bar of service, enabling us to

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redirect these resources at segments with similar needs by bringing our expertise and resources with humility and a listening ear to service their needs.

Q: What is involved in servicing movie theaters?

A: We are actively engaged with all segments of the theater management to establish their separate needs and put into a total frame that will cover all their diverse criteria. The programs are tailored piece by piece alongside the managers, staff and corporate executives. Our product offering ranges from all chemical and typical jan/san items to specialty products for their booth and projector maintenance, then into foodservice (cups, napkins, trays, etc.) and packaging, and in some regions we do offer and supply their food, candy and drinks. Our infrastructure at all levels interacts with our customers constantly, our field technicians work diligently with their staff in training and repairing and refurbishing all dispensers and equipment. Our graphic design department is always working with their staff on new illustrative means in multi languages to accompany the field training.

Q: How hectic has business been this summer for movie theaters with the number of blockbusters hitting the big screen?

A: It has been a great summer, it goes to prove that the theater-going experience is at the core of this great culture and still the most affordable outing and value event for couples and families of all ages, a safe, pleasant and certainly clean (for Royal's customers) venue. A lot of effort and thought by the theater managements is put to make the movie going experience is a great one for all the guests. Just from our part ensuring total compliance with ADA, Health department, best sanitizing practices, safe (green) products among many other processes to create a great atmosphere for the patrons.

Q: Since we're on the topic of movie theaters, what's your favorite movie and why?

A: There are many great movies in every genre that come to mind, but my absolute favorite is "Saving Private Ryan." The script, acting and

cinematography capture the reality of war in an unparalleled manner, and personalize the story by making it about private Ryan. Most effectively, the last scene sums up a powerful theme and lesson for all: When Ryan (Matt Damon) is kneeling to hear Captain John H. Miller (Tom Hanks), (commanding officer of the C Company, 2nd Ranger Battalion that is dying from his injuries and lost most of his men attempting to save Ryan and bring him home alive) uttering his last words as he dies "Earn it" and Ryan asks again, "What" .. "Earn it" he says again and then the camera morphs young Ryan's face in that scene to the old 80 year grandfather with his wife, children and

scene to the old 80 year granddaddy with his wife, children and grandchildren saluting the cross/headstone of Captain Miller (in the Normandy cemetery) and he looks to his wife and asks her "Tell me I earned it, tell me I am a good man..."

Every American has a Captain Miller who paid a price somewhere, somehow, could be a parent, friend or a great grandmother. Someone paid a price for us to have the greatest opportunity to be Americans but with it comes the responsibility to "Earn it!"

Q: You've helped open several movie theaters across the country. How many days do you live out of your suitcase on average in a year?

A: Our team (including us) is regularly on the road, we participate in assisting the theatre staff in opening new locations by ensuring they pass all Health inspections and our team installs fixtures (ADA compliance) and train the staff and cleaning contractors on all chemical and sanitizing systems. We have been a part of over 500 new theatre openers over the past 20 years.

Q: How would you describe your company's use of technology? Does it help further opportunities for your company?

A: Technology has been a great tool to expand our value added proposition to our customers; For instance, over 50 percent of our order processing, invoicing and payment is done electronically, whether on our B2B site or Cinema Solutions (Cinema Solutions E-Procurement is a complete browser-based purchasing management system tailor made for the cinema industry), this gives our customers control of the ordering process and live, on-demand information, affording our team more time to assist them in solutions for other issues outside basic processing.

From e-commerce, to our wireless warehousing, logistics and transportation management technologies, to our extensive reporting (which we have invested to interface with many of our larger customers), to web-training, etc.... are all great advantages leading to converging synergies in our world of distribution.

Q: In your company's mission statement one of your goals is to provide "balance to our family life." How do you separate work and family life being that you and your spouse work together?

A: When you spend most of your waking time with your team and business partners, these people become your family and friends, and having your spouse involved in every aspect from creating to execution is a rewarding experience and a blessing. The trick is respect in all directions. When you witness at a young age how precarious life is and how little control we have you train yourself to

precious time and not take control we have, you train yourself to defer your will to the Lord by simply not imposing yours. It is funny how then the lines of important and urgent things in family and business align themselves in much easier manner. You have to be passionate about everything you do, I cannot imagine how miserable it would be otherwise.

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