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[PCT Leadership Winner] Terry Clark

Everyone is busy. It's a fact of life. In fact, some of us are so busy that we make up excuses so that we don't have to do something we don't like. Not Terry Clark. Clark, 41, serves as vice president of Clark Pest Control, Lodi, Calif., and he oversees the wood-destroying organism division of Clark Pest Control, which includes more than 50 inspectors. You want to talk about busy? Clark also manages the acquisitions and sales of a fleet of 880 service vehicles and personally inspects every vehicle annually.

"Terry Clark gets under every one of Clark's 800 vehicles," said Bob Dold Jr., director of operations, Rose Exterminator, Chicago. "He is literally underneath every vehicle and if he finds something wrong, the car comes out of the fleet until it's fixed. The fact that a member of the Clark family is under a service technician's vehicle has to make those technicians feel fantastic. He doesn't delegate that to someone else. He's the one doing it."

Clark doesn't mind the extra work. "Our best and biggest public relations are our vehicles," he said. "It hurts me when I see a technician from another pest control company with a stained shirt, blowing through red lights or driving a leaking truck."

Those negative qualities are something you'll never see from a Clark Pest Control technician if Terry Clark has anything to do about it.

CLARK HISTORY. There's a long history of pest control running through the Clark family tree. Terry Clark's father, Charlie, founded Clark Pest Control in 1950. Charlie, a 1992 PCT/Syngenta Professional Products Leadership Award winner, is a California native, born in Stockton. Terry's mother, Shirlene, was born in Oklahoma. (Terry's uncle and Charlie's older brother, Jim Clark, also was a PCT/Syngenta Leadership winner.) Terry is the youngest of their three sons. (His two older brothers are Jeffrey and Joe.)

Charlie's older sister, Arlee, was married to Charles Delk, who owned and operated his own pest control firm, Delk Pest Control, in Bakersfield, Calif. It wasn't long before young Charlie started working for Delk.

Upon Charlie's return from World War II, he became a salesman for his brother-in-law's firm. He recognized that pest control had a bright future in California, where thousands of people were moving in the late 1940s. It soon became clear to Clark that he should open his own business.

"My father worked for Charlie Delk and he realized his sister was having a pretty good living so he decided to go into the business himself," Terry said.

Not wanting to compete with his family, Clark left the Fresno area and opened his first office in Stockton — the office that started Clark Pest Control as it is today.

"My dad taught me that there's no replacement for hard work," Terry said. "All the education, all the technical schools, unless you're out there in the field, you don't know what's going on. That was one thing dad impressed on me from a young age."

Like many in the pest control industry, Terry grew up working at his father's pest control firm. At age 15 he was working on a termite crew during the day and sweeping up offices at night. But that experience paid major dividends down the road as Terry came up through the company's ranks.

"My dad said that if you don't know what someone else is doing, you don't know if they're lying to you," Terry said. "You don't know if they're taking too much time on that job unless you've done it yourself."

And the elder Clark wasn't about to let his sons rise through the ranks without some hard work along the way. "My dad told us if we're going to do this job it's going to be a lot of hard work but there will be a payoff at the end," Terry said. "My dad told us you're going to work twice as hard as anyone else and get half as much pay."

"Terry and Joe are the sons and legacy of Charlie Clark. It is my opinion that Charlie can be very proud of his boys. They are 'good people' who will continue his company with the same high morals and principles that Charlie has inspired and shown throughout Clark Pest Control," said industry consultant Lloyd Smigel, who owns Care Management Consultants in California.

As a teenager, Terry Clark worked at several jobs before deciding his path, he said. "I worked for the Catholic Church at a summer camp for the developmentally disabled," Clark said, "and within six years I rose up to the position of camp director, responsible for over 120 people." Clark tried his hand as auto mechanic but he "found it frustrating to fix cars only to have the owner take it home to break them again." He also managed a phone sales operation before deciding to give it all up for pest control full time. "I started on the termite crew and worked my way through every position from janitor to branch manager," he said.

Today, Terry and his brother Joe work hand in hand in running the business. Joe, who's also a vice president at the company, runs the general pest control division. "He focuses on pest control because that's what he likes," Terry says, but he has a different calling. "I truly enjoy dealing with the termite side, dealing with the most important thing in someone's life at the most critical time in their life, when they're selling."

"FAMILY" BUSINESS. While the "family" atmosphere is difficult to maintain in such a large company, the Clark brothers try to do so. "We found that the farther away from our home base the more difficult it becomes to maintain the right atmosphere," Clark said. The company covers only Northern California and there's not more than two or three hours from office to office. "We try to see our managers once or twice a month. We try to get out into the branches to make sure everyone's happy," he said.

To keep everyone happy, Clark says he overpays people so they don't leave. He gives them the independence to develop their own business (the branch offices). "We use that mantra right down to the route technician," Clark said. "If the work is done on time and the customer is happy and they want to take a break to get a

haircut, by all means do it. Their hair grows on company time. You can certainly get it cut on company time. I don't want to micromanage."

"Terry's management style can best be described as 'management by objectives.' He is not on you day to day, but rather, he holds you to the results and gives you support to 'do your thing.' But, at the same time, he holds you accountable to goals," said Lloyd Smigel.

"The real leaders of companies are out there with the troops — the route supervisors are out there working daily with the technicians," Clark said. "Us generals in the background aren't leaders anymore. I think good leadership means getting out of the way."

Finding those troops is a challenge for most in the industry. Fortunately, for Clark Pest Control, that's been a challenge they've been able to overcome. "Good people come to us. We get people leaving other companies knocking on our door because they're disgusted with what they've been asked to do," he said. "We have a stellar reputation in the marketplace and in our area so they find us."

That "stellar reputation" has led to some exciting opportunities for Terry through the National Pest Management Association. "One of the best days of my life, and certainly the best day of my career, was the day I got the phone call saying that I had been nominated for the board of directors for NPMA," he said. "I hadn't pursued that and I'm not sure really how I was identified or pulled out. I was going through a pretty tough time at that point. My wife had been in the hospital for about three weeks and I wasn't sure when she was going to get out. It was a difficult moment. When I got that call it raised my spirits quite a bit. I thought well maybe there's a chance I can do something good there by going to National."

Clark had, perhaps, one reservation. He said that his father had been president of the California Structural Pest Control Board for eight years and that's part of the reason the company didn't grow during that period. "He was so involved in the day-to-day dealings with the Structural Pest Control Board of the state that it really cut into his time to grow the company," Terry said. "When he got out of that we were really able to blossom.

"I learned that lesson upfront that you can't focus on someone else's issues so much that it hurts yourself," he continued. "But if you can give a little time to help the industry and help others and it doesn't hurt you then you might as well.

"The ability to go to National and be able to give some fresh ideas because I was a new face on the scene it was appealing to me," he said. "I think it's a great thing when you can help out the industry that helps out yourself. Pest control has put bread and butter on my table for 41 years now. It's a great way to give back and if we all give back then we can make this industry better."

"Terry Clark is a very special individual," said Judy Dold, owner, Rose Exterminator, Chicago, Ill. Dold worked with Clark on NPMA's board of directors. "He is very forward thinking, and he has a passion for the industry."

INDUSTRY CHALLENGES. It will take the industry working together to combat threats facing it, according to Terry Clark. Like many in pest management, he says the biggest challenge to the future of the industry are environmental concerns. "The materials have changed but the mentality is that at best (the pest management industry) is a necessary evil. I don't want to be that. I want to be the pest prevention guy," Clark said.

Working in a state as environmentally volatile as California, Clark has particular challenges to face. "I think it has a lot to do with all of the colleges we have in the area — we have very progressive-thinking people," he said. "We have issues like IPM in schools before it hits the rest of the nation. If it starts in California or New York it will end up being in the rest of the nation."

Clark doesn't see the industry as being anti-environment. "We are the first environmentalists. If it weren't for pest management companies properly managing pesticides and other material they apply, the average homeowner would have no idea what to do," he said. "They'd be dumping things down the drain. It really incenses me that they think we're irresponsible cowboys doing what's bad for the environment when really what we're doing is protecting health and property and helping to put food on plates."

THE FUTURE. In 1996, Clark married his wife, Paulette (Toni) Clark. "Together we have three dogs and a wonderful extended family," he said. Clark enjoys jet skiing and boating, refurbishing classic automobiles and relaxing with the family.

Clark has contributed to the pest management industry for many years and will continue to do so in the future. He says his favorite aspect of the industry is being able to make a difference in an individual's life. "To improve the quality of life for someone and get paid to do it is a wonderful thing," he said.

"In my opinion, his greatest quality is split between honesty and respect for others. Aside from his technical expertise, he is basically a real nice person. I have heard this from people in his company (from route people to office personnel to managers) over and over," Lloyd Smigel said. "There's a lot of mutual respect that Terry has earned."

Bob Dold agrees that Terry Clark has a lot to offer the industry.

"I think Terry has an uncompromising zest for excellence," Dold said. "Terry is ahead of his time and on the cutting edge for what the industry is doing. (The industry) oftentimes looks at something conventionally but Terry will take a very different approach. We may say there's one way to skin a cat, but Terry says there are six. NPMA has tapped Terry Clark on a couple of things but he's still a huge untapped resource as to what else he has to give."

Valuable Advice That is Freely Given

Having seen Clark Pest Control grow from \$3 million a year to more than \$80 million gives Terry Clark a rare perspective on the challenges that many pest control firms face. And not everyone has a chance to pick the brain of an executive of one of the industry's largest companies. So when PCT sat down with Terry Clark, we thought we should ask him a question that would benefit virtually all of our readers: "What advice would you give to a pest control company that wants to take the next step?"

"I get asked that question a lot," he said. "I am open about sharing my knowledge with others when they ask. I have helped companies that are not competitors to Clark work through some difficult issues while learning valuable lessons from each of them too.

"My best advise is that you need to take a step back and appoint someone else to do the jobs you're doing. If a company hits a stumbling block at five or seven routes, it's a real hard spot to manage. It's because you don't have someone to manage those seven people while you manage the business."

Clark recommends that company owners focus on the business side of the business. "Rent another office and get away from the phones," he said. "You have capable people who can answer the phones and can schedule service. You don't need to be there to figure out the problem."

Clark says the owner's job is to oversee the big picture. The owner has to find the little edges that will make their company different from the competition. "I think back if my father didn't have the ability to delegate we'd still have one route," he said. "You have to trust your people."

Clark says that when he takes time to share his industry knowledge with others there are benefits to his company as well. "I've had guys who are a \$1 million company who come out to visit us to learn something and I've picked up things from them," he said.

Bob Dold Jr., director of operations at Rose Exterminator in Chicago, says that he has benefitted from Clark's kindness. "He's willing to share," Dold said. "When I asked if I could come out to see his operation he was more than happy to help me. He gave me full access to everything he was doing."

Busy, Busy, Busy

In addition to being a vice president of Clark Pest Control, Terry Clark can also add "inventor" to his resume.

He recently developed the Term-Alert termite interceptor monitor system for Clark Pest Control, for which he received a U.S. patent. (Number 6,526,692 if you want to look it up.)

Term-Alert is designed to detect methane that comes from termites and then to detect them before they enter the home. Clark technicians will surround a home with the monitors, which are filled with cellulose. A methane sensor sits on top and if a

technician sees that methane has collected, the cardboard and wood stake are infused with a termiticide.

Term-Alert was featured by several news sources including The New York Times and The Stockton Record.

According to the Clark Pest Control Web site, "After we have treated your home for termites, Clark Pest Control will provide a full warranty and quarterly monitoring of our exclusive Term-Alert interceptors. If within one year any termite activity is indicated, or if foraging termites sneak into your home, we will treat the infestation at no additional cost. After one year, your Term-Alert warranty coverage is automatically renewed."

"I'm one of six people that have a patent" for a termite monitor, Clark said. "That's something I'll have forever. Not a lot of people can say that."