



Homegrown: Why SMS Assist looks within for its future leaders

By Brian Nordli | July 31, 2018

In a rapidly growing company, it can be easy for team members to get lost in the shuffle. But at [SMS Assist](#), CEO Taylor Rhodes knows the best leaders don't come from the outside — they're already with the company.

As the company quickly grows, Rhodes' goal is to fill the majority of its leadership positions through promotions. To tap into that existing potential, the company has invested heavily in internal professional development programs designed to bring out leadership qualities and the skills needed to lead a team.

We spoke with Rhodes to learn more about how he's developing his team.

FOUNDED: 1999

EMPLOYEES: 826 (790 local)

WHAT THEY DO: SMS Assist simplifies facilities maintenance services for companies through its proprietary cloud and mobile-based platform.

WHERE THEY DO IT: Chicago

THE PERKS: Employees can work out in the building's free onsite gym and receive free shuttle rides from Metra stations to the office.

MOVING ON UP: SMS Assist Chief Human Resources Officer Becky Lowe seeks candidates who pursue their passions and never stop learning. [Learn more.](#)

Taylor Rhodes, CEO

Taylor Rhodes works with the rest of the leadership team to develop and fulfill the company's vision, and to create an engaging company culture that brings the best out of the team. His goal is to provide value to customers and help the company grow.

BEYOND WORK: When Taylor isn't at work, he enjoys spending time with his family and exercising.

He's currently helping his wife train for her first marathon.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I'm a hands-on leader, and I concentrate on company culture and engagement. I like to walk around our office and check in with each of our employees across the business to make sure we're all on the same page. On Fridays, I'll send a check-in email to update everyone on what's happening within the business. I also host two roundtable discussions a month, where a small group of employees across the company can share their thoughts. Nothing is off the table.

But most importantly, being an effective leader requires building a great leadership team. I want to make sure our leaders not only bring world-class skills but are humble, accessible and accountable to their employees.

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What is your biggest hiring challenge as you grow your company?

Our biggest challenge is the constant battle to attract the best talent possible, train them well and create an engaging culture for them to thrive in. We're in a stage of hypergrowth, so we have constant hiring demands, which becomes a training challenge. All of this rolls up into a culture challenge. How do we strengthen our culture amidst all the new people joining us every week?

These are all good problems to have, but we still have to address them. As a leadership team, we're keeping a sharp eye on these areas.

What role does investing in that professional development play in the company's efforts to grow?

When you're a fast-growing company, you have to make sure your staff is ready to take on new, expanding roles. Investing in our staff is the best way to keep up with those demands. It is also directly correlated with retaining engaged employees. So we make it clear that our team members have the ability to grow their careers with us.

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How do you help facilitate that professional growth?

Healthy companies meet their future talent needs primarily by promoting current employees into new roles. As a rule of thumb, we aim to fulfill 75 percent of our promotions internally. This creates alignment with our team members who want to know they have a path to a more valuable career with us. The remaining 25 percent is made up of new people, who tend to ask great questions and teach us new things. For this system to work, we have to constantly prepare our people for their next jobs, which is why we've invested so heavily in internal professional development.

What professional development programs have you introduced?

In the past year, we introduced two new leadership development programs — Amplify! and Anthology. Anthology is designed to prepare our newest managers to be great small team leaders, while Amplify! is designed to foster career growth within the organization for those who exhibit exceptional leadership capabilities.

Can you give us an example of an employee who has grown through one of those programs?

One SMSer who stood out in our first Amplify! class was Charity Taitt. After completing the program, she began mentoring an up-and-coming leader from the next class. Charity is an example of an employee who grew as an SMSer, a leader and a person through this program.

She now channels those skills to help her team members' personal and professional growth. Charity's impact as a mentor and coach to others has magnified our investment in her development.