

NewPro Containers

Intrinsically Caring to Do the Right Thing

By Rebecca Patrick

When Jeremy Darringer and his wife bought his father's interior landscaping company in 2015, he was intent on "breathing some new energy into the business and focusing on growth again and seeing what we can accomplish."

He had worked at NewPro Containers in his youth and became CEO the year prior to purchasing the business, after he had spread his wings – including co-founding national online marketing firm Slingshot SEO.

"I think the (NewPro) business was right about \$3 million in revenue for 2014, the year we took it over, and we were just over \$8 million for 2019," Darringer shares.

"I got my masters in internet marketing through Slingshot. ... I developed a lot of experience and was able to bring that into this."

While he's had an eye on increasing NewPro Containers' balance sheet, he's put an equal – if not greater focus – on culture and staff success.

"I consider my No. 1 goal is to improve the lives of our employees through this company."

Darringer has done that in a variety of ways – indirectly by increasing the product line to implementing employee-centric policies that others might be hesitant to attempt.

At a glance

You won't find NewPro Containers' interior landscape products – planters and plant care accessories – at the local Home Depot or Lowe's. It's more along the lines of what landscapers and interior designers use in "high-end residential all the way up to a hospital, mall or a large hotel chain."

One new item in particular, Darringer says, has jumpstarted the company's growth: directly importing fiberglass planters from Vietnam.

"We carry a massive amount of inventory of that, and we can paint it any color you



At NewPro Containers, it's encouraged to get away and take time off – on your own or through a staff outing (canoeing was a popular one).

want within three to five business days. So, imagine you're putting on a big event. Let's say it's a breast cancer awareness event in a few weeks. You need a specific color pink for 50 planters that are 60-inch cubes. We're the company that can do that."

Hand in hand with what they do is how they operate internally.

"I want the work environment to be as close to a social environment or a home environment as it can be," Darringer asserts. "What I mean by that is with the language and the dress code and just the vibe we put off. That's the goal.

"That's selfish to be honest. I want to be comfortable when I come in here, and I'm not comfortable unless the people around me are comfortable."

Back to nature

That extends to the physical setting.

He declares: "Your space doesn't define your culture, but it creates a fertile ground for a good culture to grow out of. And you have to have that positive physical work environment before you can really hope that you're going to start to have an extraordinary culture."

With that in mind (along with enticing

tax incentives), Darringer relocated the company from Zionsville to Westfield in early 2018. The 50,000-square-foot facility is akin to an indoor greenspace.

It's all about biophilia – the science of human connection with nature. It's why you subconsciously want to be on the beach or why you want that office with a window.

"We've tried to replicate a lot of stuff called biophilic design in the workspace. That's plants, moss walls, green walls, ample access to natural light for the entire space. Natural finishes like concrete, sand and stone, plus carpet designs that are not symmetrical and mimic nature," Darringer describes.

The conference room has a nature scene on one side – the entire wall appears as if you are peering into the woods. Facing the other direction, you get natural light from floor to ceiling.

Darringer contends, "It just puts people at ease when you're having a meeting. ... We almost start off on a more positive note because of the comfort level in the room."

Common workplaces were not overlooked in the makeover. Even the warehouse has natural light shining in.



From planters to plant care accessories, NewPro Containers helps its clients transform spaces with natural beauty and biophilic design.

In sickness and in health

The ability to work remotely and have flexible work schedules are frequent hallmarks of Best Places to Work honorees – NewPro Containers included. The company ups the ante with unlimited paid sick days, which can be used for employees or their dependents.

“We have only one limit on it really – that it’s (no more than)

three consecutive weeks (at a time),” Dearing explains.

The policy, which has been in place for over three years, is possible due to the culture.

“We trust each other. And that doesn’t happen overnight,” he acknowledges.

“Generally, what I try to tell business owners is if you have a problem with people abusing a policy like that, you might not have the right people on board.”

Health insurance is also handled uniquely. None is provided directly, but instead each employee is given a \$330 monthly allowance (and an additional \$250 for dependents) to supplement individual health care costs.

Operations/warehouse manager Anthony Mackovic estimates that translates to “about 75 to 80% of us aren’t really paying much, if anything, out of pocket for our health insurance. We also do get (paid) coverage for dental and vision, and don’t pay anything out of pocket.”

All for employees

Need to bring your children to work? No problem. You might also find two to six dogs running around. TVs and lounge areas with video games and streaming service dot the office and warehouse. Monthly potlucks and catered meals, a 401(k) retirement plan and \$500 annually in new clothing for warehouse workers are other perks.

A philosophy of autonomy makes being on the job all the more appealing.

“We stopped micromanaging people. I don’t keep track of the exact minute people get to work every day. I’m not tracking lunch

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hours,” Derringer stresses. “There’s a lot of freedom and flexibility for people here to be treated like responsible individuals and not be hovered over.”

Case in point: Mackovic does all his own hiring; Derringer is not involved.

Part of the reason that works so well, Derringer admits, is “we have a fairly aggressive profit-sharing plan for everybody. That probably contributes to it, but the autonomy is a big deal.”

That empowerment has been a catalyst for employee growth.

What started out as merely a job after high school graduation for Mackovic turned into a career.

“I took it upon myself over the (13) years to take on responsibilities that led Jeremy to put me in the position that I am now.”

Longtime employee Steven Sack, the chief financial officer, sums up the owner’s attitude this way.

“It’s not just to make money for himself. Jeremy looks to try and make everybody successful in the company and reward everybody as best he can. I think the people appreciate it and, in turn, they work harder.”

Just as meaningful for Derringer is “when somebody is comfortable enough to leave (work) – go golfing, go fishing, enjoy a nice day with their kids – when people take the work-life balance seriously. We want them to take advantage of our flexibility in a good way.”

RESOURCE: NewPro Containers at www.newprocontainers.com