



BUILDING LASTING CONNECTIONS

Ultimate Technologies Group



By Anthony Schoettle

Will O'Brien spent 20 years in executive leadership roles at Fortune 500 companies, including General Mills, Phillips and Equifax. The last stop on his global corporate tour was at Angie's List, an online marketplace that connects homeowners with home service providers. He had such high hopes for the job with the growing Indianapolis company he promised his wife and two children there would be no more moving.

With his son and daughter school-aged at the time, it seemed like a good time for the Chicago native to plant roots.

Then Angie's List was acquired in 2017,

and within a couple months of moving to the Hoosier state, O'Brien found himself unemployed. But he kept the promise to his family.

O'Brien and his wife, Tiffany, took a collective deep breath, and out of that unexpected period of tumult – or even because of it – was born Fishers-based Ultimate Technologies Group (UTG).

Going all in

O'Brien sunk all the money from his Angie's List severance package into the startup, which was profitable in year one. He and his wife put in more of their own money as well, totaling around \$1 million.

Because O'Brien spent so much of his corporate career pulling employees from across the country and around the world together for strategy sessions and other corporate meetings, he understood the importance of video conferences long before many others did during the pandemic. He also knew how

much customer service was lacking in the corporate audio-visual sector, he relates.

The O'Briens launched UTG to provide customers an effortless experience with premium commercial grade audio-visual, collaboration and communication technology solutions. Today, UTG continues growing rapidly and has expanded its capabilities into implementation of Microsoft Modern Workplace and digital experience centers. Its customers include Cummins, Goodwill, Infosys, Subaru and Toyota among other corporate clients and various government entities at all levels.

While the pandemic provided an important growth opportunity, it also presented a critical crossroads for the O'Briens.

"During COVID, our toughest decisions came," O'Brien emphasizes. "My wife and I were faced with do we pull out now, because it was clear additional funds needed to be invested in the company."

After deep contemplation, the couple



UTG employees credit the owners' HR backgrounds for the company's family-like culture. Year-round gatherings for team building and fun are a big part of creating that culture. A chili cook-off with prizes, a summer picnic and Christmas party with employee gift reveal are among the year's most eagerly awaited events.

decided to do something that O'Brien doesn't recommend. "We cleared out my and my wife's 401(k) (retirement) accounts," he says. "It was a bet we made – and it was a big bet. But by then we had 30 employees and their families depending on the company. As it turns out, it was a good thing we made that bet."

Coming through the first year of the pandemic, suddenly a bevy of companies – big and small, local and global – needed their offices and conference rooms equipped with better audio-visual and meeting solutions.

The company now has about 500 clients, O'Brien relays, and "to this day we haven't lost a customer. That's because of our service-first approach." When the O'Briens emptied out their retirement accounts to invest in UTG, the fledgling company had \$3 million in annual revenue. That has now grown to \$13 million.

Being good to people

Service is the bedrock of everything the O'Briens do with their customers, employees and in the community.

"When I tell other businesspeople that I've given 28% of my company away (as reward to employees), they look at me like, 'What a shmuck!' I can tell you this company wouldn't be what it is if I didn't do that," O'Brien contends. "I know there will be people who leave here as millionaires just because of that stock. There's something to be said for not being greedy."

In fact, O'Brien says it's in giving that he and his wife have received. "Before I started UTG, I didn't know it was possible to love my job," O'Brien stresses. "Of course, solving our customers' challenges is immensely rewarding. But I've also seen employees pay off credit card debt, buy a nice home, a dependable car. I absolutely love that."

All but one member of UTG's management staff have been developed from within. "Before they weren't being recognized for what they could do for the company they worked," remarks O'Brien, a man of deep faith. "We thank God every day not only for the company's success, but for all this company has been able to do for the people who make the company what it is."

He continues, "It's a false dichotomy to think you either need to be good to your people or be profitable. That's lazy thinking. By investing in your people, having a good hiring and development program and giving your leaders the resources they need, you can triple your operating profit."

'Like none other'

O'Brien "truly cherishes" each of his company's 50 full-time employees, 47 of which reside in Indiana. "The difference we've made

for people who were not utilized to their potential and were underpaid, and watching their career just blossom here (at UTG), that's meant everything to me."

The result of the O'Briens' approach is a one-of-a-kind culture, employees agree.

"The teamwork across the company is like none other I've ever seen," offers Sunny Robinson, UTG vice president of sales.

"It's crucial to believe in a company that you're selling for – and its ownership and management, and that's no problem here. It's truly the best job I've ever had. That's not blowing smoke," adds Robinson, who has worked for several companies in sales and sales management during a career that's spanned nearly 20 years.

Anthony Marco, UTG's technical innovation and quality engineer, credits the O'Briens' extensive background in human resources for the company's flourishing culture.

"Tiffany and Will really understand people, and that makes all the difference," Marco suggests. "They never act like primary owners. They're just here to remove barriers and help UTG, and I appreciate that mindset. I never hesitate to go to my boss with anything. There's never any conflict. We're all striving for the same goal."

When interviewing with UTG three years ago, the first person Marco met with was Tiffany. "It was just such a nurturing environment. It was clear they weren't just looking for people, they were looking for the right people. It was very evident it was the right atmosphere," Marco states.

Cameron Walters, a 25-year-old engineer apprentice with UTG, is hoping to get the "apprentice" removed from his title in the coming months. When he was just 22, he too initially met with the owners during the interview process.

"With my initial interactions being with an owner of the company, I was blown away. They are very down to earth," Walters recalls.

"It's been even better than I thought it would be. I started doing customer service (remote support for clients). I was pushed harder and harder through training and was provided support opportunities for learning more and was taught the key components to be successful. I was mentored personally by executives and guided through a genuine career path I was excited about. I never thought I would get this lucky right out of college," enthuses the Anderson University graduate.

Inspiring efforts

Beyond the culture, staffers are energized by the big customers and projects they work on.

"We're out there competing against some big goliaths," Robinson

relates. “UTG is not the Titanic. It’s a motorboat or a jet ski. It’s full steam ahead and we can change our minds and direction. It keeps us on our toes, and it’s really exciting.

“The best is yet to come,” she adds. “There are some significant opportunities to make pivots with audio-visual installations. We’re branching out to be more than a typical conference room integrator. The roadmap for where we’re headed is really exciting, so stay tuned.”

Of course it’s not all business at UTG. Managers and employees always make time to gather socially, celebrate holidays, birthdays and more with get-togethers in and out of the office.

The employees are recognized for their work in various ways, including the annual UTG Difference Maker Award, which comes with a sizable pre-paid Visa card and/or UTG stock.

The company makes charitable endeavors another priority.

One of UTG’s primary causes is World Vision International, an interdenominational Christian humanitarian aid, development and advocacy organization. Additionally, the company does a lot of work to fight human trafficking.

UTG even has a matching program for causes brought to it by its employees, provides them paid time off to volunteer and gives away a portion of its profits each year.

“We provide a lot of at-cost products for local charities and churches, and we do some pro-bono work,” O’Brien notes. “Giving back to the community and the world in which we live is a big part of who we are as a company and as people. There’s nothing more important than that.”



One of the things UTG employees revel in is the firm’s office full of high-tech gadgets and gizmos. The showroom is a big hit with clients too.

RESOURCE: Ultimate Technologies Group at www.ultimatetechnologiesgroup.com

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