

CORPORATE REPORT

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small business success stories

Installing integrity as a strategy led to company's impressive growth

BY LAURIE ARENDT

As a new business owner, Kenlyn T. Gretz says he clearly had some assets as well as some liabilities. On the positive side, he'd spent the past 11 years as collections manager at the business he now owns. He had a core group of 12 employees he could count on as well as a deep knowledge of the industry.

On the negative side, he was a business owner in an industry that nursed a continual black eye from rogue collectors.

"I purchased the business with \$10,000 cash and the equity in my house," says Gretz, owner of Manitowoc-based Americollect Inc., a licensed Wisconsin collection agency. "For the first two to three years, I didn't take a salary. It was tough."

He slowly began building relationships as well as a reputation for integrity, adding four to eight employees each year as the company's client base grew. He developed a program called Win-Win Collections, a collections philosophy based on a sales approach that creates goodwill and gives consumers payment options.

"We train employees to think of themselves as extensions of our clients' offices, and we train them on our clients' mission statements," he says. "In addition, new employees are instructed to think of the people they are calling as their brother or sister – I'll fire anyone instantly who thinks that he or she is better than the person on the other end of the phone."

With an approach unique to the collection industry, since taking over ownership, Gretz has added more than 20 hospitals and health care systems, four utilities and numerous other clients to its roster, resulting in 20.39% growth in 2007. Last year, Americollect opened a new 8,400-sq.-ft. facility that will allow it to nearly double its current employee capacity.

"We never overpromise our clients and we're honest about what we



KENLYN GRETZ

do," says Gretz, who has actually turned down business that his company could do, but wasn't what it did best. "Integrity is very important to me. I think that approach, coupled with our philosophy and our steady growth, has really contributed to our ongoing success."



"Just because the consumer doesn't have money today, doesn't mean they are a non-payer forever."

Kenlyn T. Gretz, president of AMERICOLLECT, has confidence in the consumer and knows most people will pay once they're back on their feet financially. "Our collectors treat consumers respectfully. Negative comments can create complaints."

Complaints, in fact, are almost nonexistent at AMERICOLLECT. Their collectors are trained to use the Win-Win dialogue to control responses, create buy-in and eliminate complaints. The result: More money for your revenue cycle.



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