

Refining what's essential in break rooms and beyond

Sure, coffee is nice. But today's employee is looking for more

BY ANDREW SHELDON

Corporate Essentials was in the coffee business, providing break room basics for offices, when one of its clients was purchased by a company on the West Coast and gave it a front row seat to a new idea:

What companies provide for their employees can do more than keep them caffeinated. It can set the tone for, and foster, an entire office culture.

That's what Senior Vice President of Operations **Joe Simonovich** found out in 2011.

"One of our clients was acquired by **SalesForce.com** and, when they came in, they said, 'Listen, this is the way we do things on the West Coast and this is the way you're going to do things here,'" he said. "They really laid out a road map as to what they like to provide for their employees, and he had the opportunity to adopt this different ways of doing business."

It led to Corporate Essentials adopting a different way of doing business.

After seeing the effects on employee morale on the trip to see SalesForce.com, Simonovich said the company began to focus on specialty foods for the growing number of health-conscious workers eating specialty diets.

CEO and President **Judson Kleinman** said the move paid off in many ways.

Kleinman said he found providing these specialty items for employees can be an investment, one that ultimately pays



off in worker engagement and productivity. If only for the simple reason that employees are no longer leaving the office to get these products.

"What we try to do as a company is really try to be on the cut-

ting edge with all the products that we offer so that the people in our working environments are really excited," Kleinman said. "They want to come to work, they don't want to go out."

That investment, Kleinman

Above, Judson Kleinman, left, CEO and president, and Joe Simonovich, senior vice president of operations, Corporate Essentials. The company break room, left, offers healthy snacks and drinks.

-PHOTOS BY AARON HOUSTON

said, can be customized to fit the budget of any one company: The daily cost per employee can run a company anywhere from \$2.50 for coffee essentials to \$10 for a stocked pantry of healthy snacks and beverages.

Kleinman said Corporate Essentials also works with various caterers and food service companies to provide lunches for an additional \$15 a day.

"It's an opportunity for employees to gather, communicate and share ideas," Kleinman said.

Biz in brief

COMPANY: Corporate Essentials

HEADQUARTERS: Parsippany

FOUNDED: 1996

EMPLOYEES: 75

ONE MORE THING: To make sure the company stays on the front end of the products it offers, **Corporate Essentials** recently added a new position not often seen in Corporate America: director of coffee.

"And they're not leaving the office for lunch; what's better than that?"

What kind of companies are enlisting the services of Corporate Essentials to bring that West Coast office culture to the Garden State?

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Well, **Audible**, for one.

Mike Schwartz, director at Audible, said the company made a push to provide its employees with healthier options in the fall of 2015.

"Before the changes we made, soda filled the entire cooler," he said.

The changes include new options such as teas, water, cheese, carrots and hummus.

Kleinman said the case that improving the product offerings in break rooms keeps employees in the building is evidenced by the consumption habits Corporate Essentials has witnessed at Audible.

"We just changed (the stock) two months ago and their consumption went up a lot by getting healthier products and a wider variety," he said.

And Schwartz said it's a larger part of the company's aim for efficiency.

"There's not a lot of people going out for Starbucks," he said.

That's because they don't have to leave for Starbucks: Corporate Essentials provides the Seattle company's famous brand of coffee in the break room as part of the service.

But it doesn't just keep employees from leaving for breaks. According to Schwartz, offering workers a comfortable

environment plays a large role in recruitment and retention.

"Our competition is so big and we're close to one of the biggest cities in the world," he said. "In order to attract and retain talent, there are certain things that we'd like to do as an organization and this is definitely helping us create an atmosphere that is attractive.

"That's especially with the young people."

Simonovich agreed that this type of

attention to food offerings is essential in attracting the most coveted of worker: the millennial.

"They're the generation that falls into the idea that these type of perks really appeal," he said. "That's who companies are trying to attract and retain with these types of benefits."

There's something else Kleinman has noticed: This culture has expanded beyond technology companies. Now, companies in completely unrelated industries

are investing in their offerings for the same reasons as Audible.

"It's not just in the tech field; it's anywhere," he said. "Attracting and retaining is very important to any business. It's the lifeblood of business, I don't care what you make.

"You need good talent and you want them to stay; you don't want to train someone and have them go somewhere else."

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Rebranding to culture

Joe Simonovich, senior vice president of operations at **Corporate Essentials**, said the company has noticed a trend over the last 18 months: Companies outside of the technology industry, he said, have begun to eschew the traditional break room fare in favor of more modern offerings.

With that, the company has recognized these services as the best opportunity for growth over the next four to eight years.

"This part of the business has the largest growth opportunity," he said. "We actually rebranded ourselves around this idea of fueling culture with what we do."

For Simonovich, this means an entire shift in the perception of what a "workplace culture" can mean.

"We've gone from focusing on selling coffee, which you can say keeps your employees running and increases productivity, to focusing on something much more holistic," he said. "The products and services we provide help make up a foundation of a great company culture."





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