

Infinity, ChappellRoberts investments in new processes carries big price tag

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Terry Hedden, CEO of Infinity Technology, meets with Phillip Marshall, network support, and Stephen Twait, system engineer, about helping a client prevent a security breach.

TAMPA — Infinity Technology Solutions spent 2010 transforming everything it does from good to its definition of “best in class.”

The company spent \$335,000 on a “good to great” initiative, introducing new processes, controls and procedures to improve the way it provides technology consulting and management services.

Inspired by the bestselling book by **Jim Collins** “Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t”, Infinity Chief Executive **Terry Hedden** undertook a sometimes-painful self-evaluation. Hedden looked at every aspect of the company he launched in 2003 with \$24,000 and grew into a \$5 million operation with offices in four cities.

Infinity put geographic growth on hold while it revamped its staff and cut roughly 15 percent of the work force. Hundreds of hours were spent documenting each of the 120 processes in place at the firm.

And, at a time when the tough economy presented financial challenges, the company invested in new technology.

The changes weren’t optional, Hedden said, because being good simply wasn’t good enough.

“Through this year we went through a transition from pretty darn good to very good, but not great,” he said. “The delta between very good and great takes time. We’ll continue in 2011 and probably never end.”

Tasting greatness

[ChappellRoberts](#) is entering the sixth year of its “good to great” project. The advertising and public relations agency constantly reviews different areas or concepts of the Collins’ book and ties them into strategic planning and discussions at weekly staff meetings.

“Good to great creates a culture where the status quo isn’t good enough,” said **Colleen Chappell**, president and CEO. “There’s a thirst to move things to a new level. That comes from tasting greatness and feeling the difference between something that’s good and something that’s great. The more you do that, the more you want that on a regular basis.”

In order for every worker to buy into the concept of greatness, Infinity created hundreds of documents with a step-by-step description of the processes involved in each employee’s job.

“Before, we told people how to do things,” Hedden said. “Now they see their [job] processes and how that fits with all the processes around them. Now everyone wants to be great.”

Infinity also taught employees to keep examining the processes so they can make improvements over time and established new programs, including a customer advisory board, said **John Starr**, president of [Astrum Consulting](#).

He worked with Infinity on its project.

“This is one of the things most companies only look at when times are good, but I find when you do that you end up with shelfware, a big pretty binder on the shelf,” Starr said. “Terry was doing it when the economy was in a downturn, simplifying some processes and cutting costs, but also having processes in place so when the market turns he is prepared.”

A “road map” posted prominently on a central wall at Infinity reminds employees of the goals of the project, such as keeping clients’ IT networks running 99.99 percent of the time.

At ChappellRoberts, Chappell measures success first by year-over-year increases in net and gross revenue, and then the creative product produced and employee satisfaction. She also cited the agency’s steady advancement in the *Tampa Bay Business Journal*’s list of largest advertising/marketing agencies, ranking No. 4 with \$20.6 million in billings in 2009, compared with \$17.6 million in 2007.

Budget concerns common

It’s unusual to have a business owner who recognizes the need for change and puts resources into the effort, said Starr. He said many executives understand the concept on a high level but budget concerns and the effort to change an organization’s culture can stall projects.

The right employees are key, both Chappell and Hedden said.

“The most important decision we make is who we add to our team,” Chappell said. “You have to get the right people on the bus, then figure out where to drive it.”

Infinity eliminated people who weren’t “great” but Hedden said the company got by with a smaller staff as it focused on the services it was best at providing. Infinity established partnerships with other firms that could provide services it no longer did on its own.

“You can’t be all things to everyone, but we have refined the business model so we know exactly the type of client we can best serve,” Chappell said.