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Realty ONE Group's 'Unbrokerage' Approach Gains Strength

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#COOLTURE

REALTY ONE GROUP'S 'UNBROKERAGE' APPROACH GAINS STRENGTH

by Maria Patterson

While many see disruption as a bad thing, **Kuba Jewgieniew** believed it was exactly what the real estate industry needed when he founded **Realty ONE Group** in 2005.

"In my first full year as a REALTOR®, I sold \$30 million worth of dreams and opened doors to 111 homes. I started with an audacious dream to build one of the world's 10 most recognizable real estate brands and fix a broken system," explains Jewgieniew, CEO of the Irvine, Calif.-based franchisor. "I was receiving little support from my manager but getting unexpected surprises on my commissions. My mission became clear: Provide real estate professionals with the broker and marketing support they need to succeed, and offer better commission rates than the conventional industry standards. The idea of a 100-percent commission structure was risky and largely untested in a well-established industry, but I believed it could ignite change in a market that desperately needed it."

But it wasn't just Realty ONE Group's commission structure that fueled its growth over the past 12 years—the firm's expansion was also

the result of something far less tangible, something Realty ONE Group refers to as "coolture." A playful combination of "cool" and "culture," the term embodies the company's high-energy, people-focused, can-do environment, punctuated throughout with a healthy dose of fun.

"Our unique coolture is supported by our philosophy that everyone has a voice," explains Jewgieniew. "Our people have proven over time that they are the true building blocks of our company. Encouraged and empowered to 'disrupt the industry' and 'wake up to win,' they have taken up the challenge. By sharing a common passion with a positive attitude and igniting 'wow' experiences, we've created raving fans that have contributed largely to the success of our company."

The formula has been working for Jewgieniew, who has steadily grown Realty ONE Group since its inception thanks to the "ONE Family" philosophy, which espouses 6 Cs for

success: Commissions, Coolture, Coaching, Care, Connect and Community. In 2012, the firm took a big leap into franchising. Since then, franchise offices have grown 89 percent year-over-year. From the humble beginnings of one location and a handful of real estate professionals, to 80+ locations today and over 9,000 professionals, Realty ONE Group continues to "multiply."

"At Realty ONE Group, we lead with an agent-first focus. What that means is that your success matters most and without your success we wouldn't exist. Realty ONE Group offers a unique model, combining a dynamic brand with technology and innovative marketing that helps professionals achieve greater success, faster. We give our professionals the opportunity to reinvest back into their business with our 100-percent commission structure. Our 24/7 supportive, non-competing brokers and amazing coolture is also a factor in what makes Realty ONE Group so attractive and sets us apart."

THE APPEAL OF THE 'UNBROKERAGE'

Realty ONE Group's people-centric, high-growth business model is exactly what has attracted not only top real estate professionals, but top-level executives, as well.



Top: Much of Realty ONE Group's large-scale growth has been a result of the company's ability to adapt, innovate, and listen to the ideas of their passionate and ambitious professionals. Bottom: ROG leadership: Founder & CEO, Kuba Jewgieniew (left); President of CORE Partners Group & Head of Marketing, Tara Johnson (right); Managing Broker of the Summerlin office in Las Vegas, Wally Kowis.

For Realty ONE Group's new COO Mike Clear, joining the firm was an opportunity a long time in the making. "For me, the real estate industry was always a customer of mine," says Clear, former president of HSA Home Warranty and vice president of Operations at ServiceMaster's American Home Shield. "I liked the kind of passion I saw in the industry, and I wanted to get on the franchise and brokerage side of the business. Instead of the industry being a customer, I wanted to be the one helping lead something in the real estate space. Realty ONE Group was the right fit because it has high growth and high energy, and I really liked the people. When I looked at what else was available, I realized that Realty ONE Group was the 'unbrokerage.' We think differently and push the envelope in terms of what we do for our agents."

The firm's agent-first focus was exactly what attracted industry veteran Burke Smith. As a licensed California broker, a real estate coach, and former executive at Prudential California Realty and HSA Home Warranty, Smith knew that Realty ONE Group offered something completely



different—something the industry needed.

"This is an agent-first company, and that's something unique and different from agent-influenced," says Smith, who recently came on board as Realty ONE Group's chief development and learning officer. "Our mission is to help take real estate professionals from self-employed to self-sufficient."

According to Smith, the firm's coolture is motivating agents in an entirely new way. "Oftentimes, peo-

ple in our business, including myself, wake up and say, 'How did I end up as a real estate agent?'" he explains. "But this company is expert at creating excitement around being in this business. Realty ONE Group makes real estate fun again by creating a coolture agents can brag about to their friends and family or the world via social media."

TAKING ON THE ROLE OF DISRUPTOR

While disruption usually gets a bad rap, at Realty ONE Group, it's a tes-

tament to the firm's success.

"Disruptors get attention, and that attention can be good or bad," says Smith. "If you can create a disruption that fills a void in the marketplace, then you have a true opportunity for success. Realty ONE Group is proof of that as the only market disruptor in our industry that is truly pro-agent, and the only firm that is actually investing in the real estate professional. Other market disruptors like Opendoor are built around limiting the role of the local real estate professional. We are the only brokerage that is disruptive and supportive of real estate professionals."

Alex Mihai is Realty ONE Group's general counsel, practicing law in California since 2006. He joined the firm two years ago for three reasons: its agent-first culture; the fact



"IF TRADITIONAL REAL ESTATE BROKERAGES ARE NOT WILLING TO ACCEPT CHANGE AND POSITION THEMSELVES FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT, THEY WILL FEEL A GREATER IMPACT IN THE FUTURE."

- KUBA JEWGIENIEW, CEO, Realty ONE Group

ceeding path forward—it's a case of change or get left behind.

"If traditional real estate brokerages are not willing to accept change and position themselves for a paradigm shift, they will feel a greater impact in the future," believes Jewgieniew. "Individuals still thrive on experience, but we live in exciting times where our future is greatly dependent upon technological advances. I believe it's important that companies adapt and embrace the ever-changing market."

SUPPORTING AGENTS ON EVERY LEVEL

A big part of adapting to meet the changing needs of agents and their

Global and Proxio, so our professionals are connected and their listings are global. Our offices are within reach, and our network runs from coast to coast, with the future goal of launching internationally."

"Realty ONE Group was created to open doors instinctively for everyone. We're all about attracting more agents, retaining our agents through great service, and helping them become more successful," says Clear. "We've become better in what we do and we're always looking for new folks and faces to join the team. If agents can be more productive, we will all win. We are focused and bringing in cutting-edge technology to keep people successful and part of the organization."

Realty ONE Group holds nothing back when it comes to providing the tools, training and technology agents need to be successful. In fact, during its recent ONE Summit, the company introduced ONE University, an in-house educational program designed specifically for its real estate professionals. The extent of Realty ONE Group's dedication to training was especially impressive to Smith, who has coached and trained thousands of real estate agents over the course of his career.

"The importance of coaching has never been higher," says Smith. "Unfortunately, the availability of real, practical coaching from people who actually sold real estate is not available to most agents or is financially prohibitive. That is why at Realty ONE



"IF YOU CAN CREATE A DISRUPTION THAT FILLS A VOID IN THE MARKETPLACE, THEN YOU HAVE A TRUE OPPORTUNITY FOR SUCCESS."

- BURKE SMITH, Chief Development and Learning Officer, Realty ONE Group

that its branch managers are onsite and non-competing; and the support Realty ONE Group provides for its agents.

"For me, disruption is a term we use about ourselves because we feel our brokerage is untraditional," says Mihai. "We're not a traditional real estate brand, so we're disruptive in the sense that we are an agent-first focused company. Every decision we make, we ask ourselves, 'How will this benefit our agents?'"

At traditional brokerages, it's about doing what's right for the brokerage."

According to Jewgieniew, Realty ONE Group's future-focused approach to the real estate business is necessary for suc-



consumers involves technology. And Realty ONE Group believes it is ahead of the curve on that front.

"We attract high-level industry professionals who understand the demands of our clients while respecting their desire to communicate behind a veil of technology," says Jewgieniew. "The support we offer our professionals says a lot about the service consumers will receive from their agent. We offer many resourceful tools, such as ListHub

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- MIKE CLEAR, COO, Realty ONE Group



Top: Realty ONE Group's supportive brokers, coalture and commission structure sets them apart from the 'Goliaths' of the real estate industry.

Bottom: Founder & CEO, Kuba Jewgieniew (right), with General Counsel, Alex D. Mihai, Esq. (left).

Group, it's our focus. The same coaching and training that agents pay money for at our competitors, we provide for free. That's a big reason why I came over here. The industry keeps looking at how much can be made off each agent, nickel and diming them for everything and charging exorbitant fees. At Realty ONE Group, we keep finding more and more ways to provide tools and services that agents would typically pay thousands for."

Realty ONE Group agents also benefit from a mentorship program carried out by the firm's non-competing branch managers. The firm's goal is to do whatever it takes to foster agent success and support their journey toward becoming true business owners.

"We are teaching agents how to be self-sufficient," says Smith. "We are turning them into business-minded professionals who should be thinking about things like building teams and succession planning. Whether they started 30 years ago or last month, the whole idea is to get them away from living paycheck to paycheck. We are coaching and training them to operate not around the transaction, but around their life and business."

Realty ONE Group's commitment to hiring the best agents and supporting their success in every aspect has one ultimate benefactor: the consumer.

"We're not just growing our agent count larger," explains Clear. "We want to attract top, ambitious real



estate professionals in order to provide the best service for consumers. We are focused on hiring the right type of agent. We also feel we have the right transaction management platform and that helps drive the experience for consumers—we are paperless, we offer SkySlope and Moxi Works, all of which help ensure a smoother experience for the homeowner."

CHANGE EQUALS GROWTH

Continuing to grow the company while ensuring success for agents and the best possible experience for consumers means that Realty ONE Group must also remain open to change. And that's no problem, since change is built right into Realty ONE Group's DNA. Privately held and 100-percent debt-free since day one, the company has the freedom to pivot and respond as the market demands.

"What sets us apart is our willingness to embrace change," says Jewgieniew. "Much of our large-scale growth has been a result of our ability to adapt and innovate based on finding new ways to see, and we

have been very successful by listening to our passionate and ambitious professionals. Companies who fail to improvise, innovate and accept change could be headed down a dangerous path. We are always finding new ways to innovate, and increase the support and technology for our professionals so they can run their business more efficiently and affordably."

"The one thing about our culture is that we're open to change," agrees Mihai. "If something is not working, then we are going to be nimble and change it. We don't have to respond to a board."

Ultimately, it's a combination of factors that allows Realty ONE Group to stand apart, paving the way for future growth.

"There are a lot of copycat business models, but what they can't copy are the tools, resources, coaching, intellectual capital and leadership at every level," says Smith. "The majority can't compete when it comes to our investment in agents. Realty ONE Group will continue to grow by reinvesting back into the resources that tomorrow's real estate professionals need."

And growth is a big part of the company's game plan. "Our successful business model, the people, ambition, loyalty and support, all contribute to the future success and growth of our company," says Jewgieniew. "We will continue opening doors, knocking on new ideas and turning our dreams into action. We have an incredibly talented executive leadership team that is paving the way for international growth, and I have always encouraged our professionals and employees to go beyond the finish line. If we are to expand on an international scale, then we must continue to consciously make the decision to act ambitiously every day." **RE**

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