

Real Estate Company 'Core Values' Its People

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Hughes Marino Involves, Builds Up Employees

When Shay Hughes, Chief Operating Officer of commercial real estate company Hughes Marino, started to plan the business' quarterly retreat three years ago, she wanted it to be memorable, not only for its stunning location—Pelican Hill Golf Club—but also for what people would take away from the event.

She brought in Mike Robbins, an inspirational speaker, business coach, and author who had coached employees of Google, Wells Fargo and LucasFilm.

Robbins' message wasn't about how to be a better salesperson; nor did he share tips for getting ahead in business. He focused on teaching people how to infuse their lives with authenticity and appreciation. That was exactly the message Hughes wanted to share with the people on her team.

She said she believes people perform better in their careers when they're happy with who they are and have an "attitude of appreciation," as she describes it.

Hughes has helped guide the company into one that invests financially and personally in team members' individual development.

The approach has redefined what it means to work in commercial real estate, a particularly competitive business in which brokers are often lacking proper support, said Director Tucker Hughes, Shay's son.

Hughes said she believes that when a company takes care of its team members, the business will take care of itself. That's why Hughes Marino, which opened its Orange County office less than two years ago, has been voted the No. 1 small business on the Business Journal's Best Places to Work lists.

More Than Lip Service

Hughes joined Hughes Marino officially three years ago, but the company has been in existence in San Diego since her husband, Jason, founded it with a partner in the early 1990's.

It was originally known as Irving Hughes. In 2011, the company, which exclusively represents tenants, underwent a philosophical management transition when the original partner retired.

Jason Hughes, who serves as president and chief executive, joined forces with another commercial real estate veteran, David Marino, who serves as executive vice president. Together, they restructured the company's operations, starting with the development of ten "core values."

Shay Hughes said they developed the values with the input of all Hughes Marino employees—the company refers to them as team members—and that the guideposts serve as far more than a feel-good nod to corporate responsibility.

"Our core values are truly a driving force behind everything," Hughes said. "They guide our interactions with our clients, they shape our brand, and they



Shay Hughes, COO of Hughes Marino, which was named Orange County's #1 Place to Work, small companies division, by the OC Business Journal.

create an atmosphere where we truly enjoy working with each other and spending time together."

Hughes said she and her team carefully select employees with character and integrity who embody the values. Once hired, employees are given freedom to make decisions that they feel best serve customers and the business.

"We are a flat organization, which allows us to have many effective leaders," said Vice President Mike Lewis. "That really catalyzes everyone's commitment to pursue a clear and compelling vision that the company has created of what it is that we do as an organization."



“It all boils down to having wonderful people.” -Shay Hughes

Taking Care of the Team

The company’s approach has helped employees make Hughes Marino a strong force in San Diego commercial real estate - Tucker Hughes said it currently represents up to 85% of downtown San Diego commercial real estate tenants.

He said the Orange County office’s staff, which he oversees, has grown 500% since it opened 18 months ago.

“When we restructured three and a half years ago,” he said, “we made a massive reinvestment in the company. As a result we can recruit the best brokers.”

Hughes Marino provides its 10 brokers with support in the form of 11 operations staff members. The company also offers unique benefits beyond the typical medical and dental, 401(k), and vacation. The entire company is closed from Dec. 22 through Jan. 2 each year for the holidays. Employees get their time off with pay in addition to their regular vacation time.

And because staff spend so much time together in San Diego and Orange County, the company has created

opportunities to bond through nonwork activities.

“The last Thursday of every month, we hold Fun Thursday,” said Tucker Hughes. “We do all kinds of things, from courtyard barbecues to K1 Speed Go-Kart Racing to three-on-three basketball tournaments.”

The quarterly company retreats are centered on providing opportunities for team members to grow as people, not just as workers, company executives said. In fact, Mike Robbins made such an impact at the retreat three years ago that Shay Hughes now regularly brings him in to coach all employees.

In the spirit of giving back to the community, employees on average donate one Saturday each month to a charitable cause, working at a food bank, running a 5k for charity, or painting school classrooms. Whatever it is, they are doing it together.

Even the decor of the company’s OC and San Diego offices is designed to convey a warm, supportive atmosphere that feels almost like home. The refrigerators are stocked every Monday with food for employees’ lunches and snacks, and farm tables in the break

rooms are the lunchtime gathering place in both offices, Shay Hughes said.

“It all boils down to having wonderful people,” she said.

When employees are well cared for, they have a greater feeling of loyalty and strive to do an even better job for customers, executives said.

“The undeniably compelling culture at Hughes Marino cannot be matched within our industry,” said Client Relations Manager Julia Myers. “I feel incredibly welcomed and appreciated, and I have felt that way every day since joining this team. That is exactly how we want our clients to feel and what we work so hard to accomplish day in and day out.”

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