

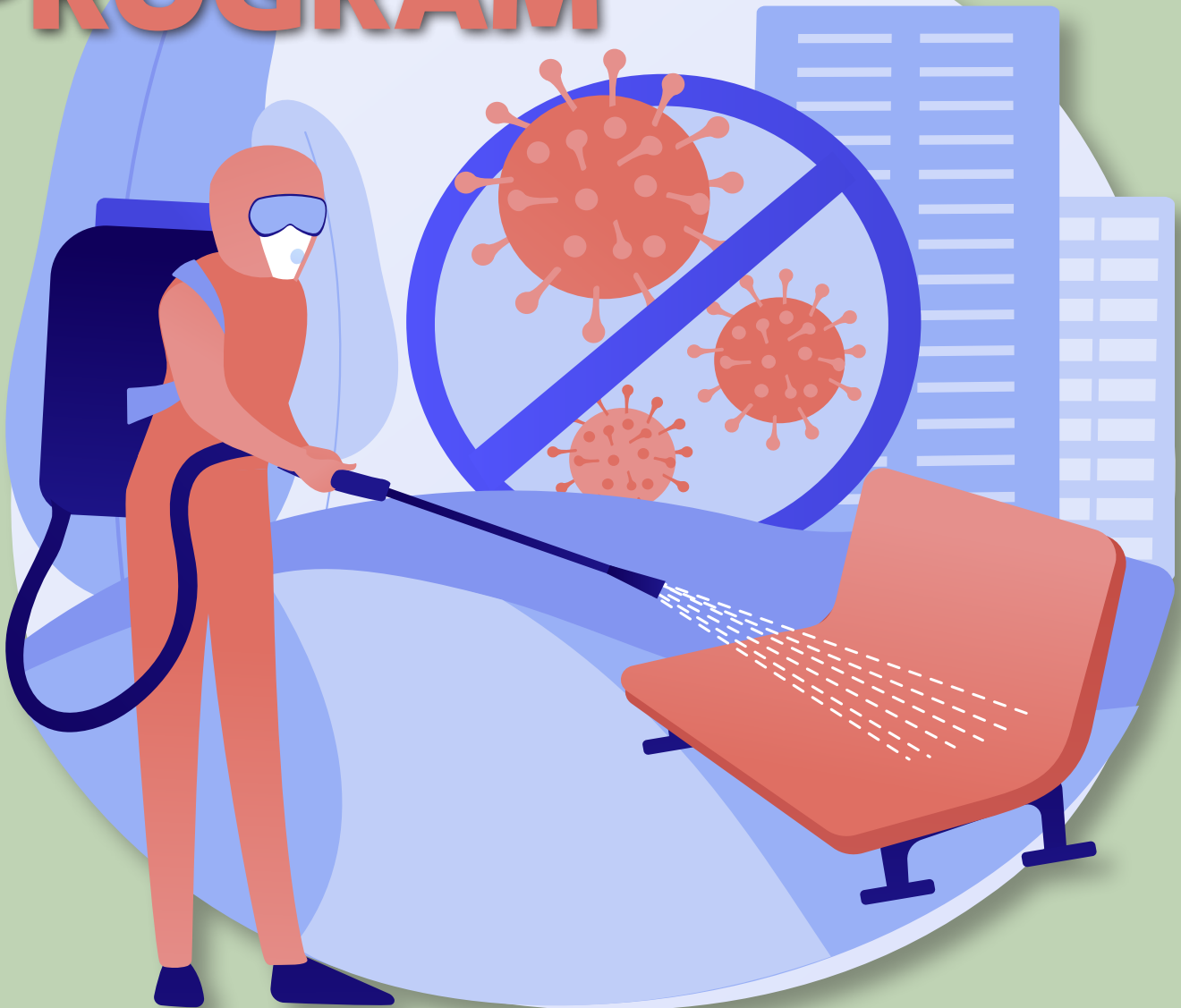
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By Erica Shatzer

According to the results of an online survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of CareerBuilder, only 32 percent of employees are satisfied with their opportunities for career advancement. What's more, although 37 percent are satisfied with the training and learning opportunities at their current company, more than half (58 percent) believe their company does not offer enough opportunities to learn new skills that could help them advance their careers.

While these statistics may have fluctuated since the beginning of 2019, the underlining message suggests that many employees are dissatisfied with their prospects for professional progression. However, within the self-storage industry, one company has been able to successfully offer both advancement opportunities and professional growth to its team members through its culture of caring.

The StoragePRO Way

Walnut Creek, Calif.-based StoragePRO® Management, Inc., which landed the No. 26 spot on *Mini-Storage Messenger's* 2022 Top Operators list, prides itself on having a family atmosphere despite the company's size. And like any good family, its members encourage growth and help each other succeed.

Steve Mirabito, StoragePRO's president, built the company around those fundamentals, putting his employees and their personal and professional growth at the forefront of operations. He established a training program,

called StoragePRO University, that enables employees to learn the ropes and advance within the company. But should employees decide to seek opportunities with other companies, it's his hope that they leave better people than when they arrived at StoragePRO.

"StoragePRO provides tools to be successful," says Christina Rita, the company's COO. Some of those resources include peer mentoring and outside training coaches; these complement StoragePRO University's rigorous syllabus for new hires and monthly training for current employees.



Left to right: Arianna Valdivia,
Rosa Gonzalez, Yaneeka Powell

“We want to see you grow and succeed. It’s a great culture. Everyone wants everyone to succeed.”

Like many other StoragePRO employees, Rita has advanced within the company. She joined StoragePRO as the vice president of operations more than four years ago and spent about 2.5 years in that position before being promoted to COO.

“The company empowers you with knowledge and experience,” Rita says, adding that her transition to chief operating officer was easier thanks to the field experience she had overseeing the day-to-day operations of StoragePRO’s properties and team.

As for personal growth, that goes hand in hand with StoragePRO’s emphasis on professional advancement. Rita, who says the StoragePRO team is like a “second family,” notes that the company goes out of its way to foster that kind of camaraderie. For instance, employees receive corporate birthday cards signed by Mirabito, recognition for successes, and acknowledgements at various milestones. The company also hosts annual events, such as holiday parties, family barbecues, and outings to professional baseball games, zoos, or amusement parks—all of which focus on having fun and celebrating together.

Promoting From Within

Why does StoragePRO place an emphasis on training and advancement? Besides increasing employee satisfaction and employee retention, “some of the best employees come from within,” says Rita. “We want to give anyone who’s interested that chance.”

Three of StoragePRO’s current team members decided to take the chance to which Rita refers: Arianna Valdivia, Rosa Gonzalez, and Yaneeka Powell.

Although Powell has been with the company for less than a year and a half, she’s already advanced from an assistant property manager to corporate office manager. With many years of office administrative experience under her belt before



Christina Rita

joining StoragePRO, she jumped at the chance to return to her roots as an office manager.

“I was grateful to be considered for the promotion,” Powell says. “I was in the right place at the right time to accept the opportunity for advancement.”

In her corporate position, Powell handles administrative duties that link the home office to the facilities managed by StoragePRO. She’s “hands-on with everyone in the office,” ensuring everyone has everything they need to perform their jobs to the best of their abilities. She orders their office materials, supplies documents, handles business licenses, works with the accounting team on invoicing, and assists the onboarding team with obtaining documentation for employee records.

“I do a little bit of everything,” says Powell, who is quick to add that the StoragePRO team is “close knit” and “works together to ensure smooth operations.”

Powell most appreciates the company’s inviting environment, one in which everyone feels like they can be themselves. She looks forward to continuing

to grow professionally within the corporate office and learning more about HR to possibly pursue an opportunity in that department in the future.

November 2022 marked Gonzalez’s sixth year anniversary with StoragePRO. Like Powell, she joined the company as an assistant property manager. She stayed in that role for four years before transferring to the corporate office as an office manager. After a year in that role, Gonzalez made the decision to move to the accounting department as an accounting specialist.

Similar to other self-storage professionals, Gonzalez came to the industry with no storage experience. While she had a lot to learn about property management, Gonzalez did have sales skills from working in retail and fast food.

“I’ve gained a lot of experience,” says Gonzalez, “and a wide variety of knowledge.” She mentions that this is the first company she’s worked for that has had so many opportunities for growth. “You’re given tools to grow.”

Moreover, unlike some businesses that try to pigeonhole employees into

Benefits Abound

StoragePRO Management, Inc., which has been recognized as a “Top Workplace” for the past three consecutive years, offers its employees world-class benefits, including paid holidays, vacation time, paid health insurance, and 401(k) retirement plans.

specific roles, Gonzalez points out that StoragePRO actually invites people to advance and change occupations. “They’re open to teach you,” she says, adding that a lot of folks have moved up from property management positions.

Gonzalez goes on to describe StoragePRO’s environment as “open door,” stating that the district managers are very involved and speak to managers daily. “You can reach out to corporate with questions too.”

As for her current position, Gonzalez “loves the flexibility” of her job and the non-repetitive nature of her assignments and tasks. “I get to do new things daily,” she says.

For Valdivia, who’s been with StoragePRO for 6.5 years, this is the career she didn’t even know she wanted. At first, when she started as an assistant store manager, she “just needed a job.” Her mindset quickly shifted after receiving a promotion within two short weeks. “I didn’t know it would be a career.”

Two years into her career, Valdivia was approached by a district manager about an opening in the corporate office. Within a year, the company’s former controller spoke with her about filling a position in the accounting department. She’s been serving as a junior accountant for about three years now.

“I’ve always been able to ask for help, advice, and direction,” says Valdivia, adding that the company “puts a positive outlook on mistakes,” turning them into learning opportunities.

StoragePRO also makes it a habit to cross-train its employees so everyone can “pitch in” and help each other get tasks done. Valdivia adds, “People care and want everyone to be successful. It’s not a ‘me’ environment. It’s a team environment.”

Of the office team, Valdivia says its diversity makes for a great culture, one that enables everyone to learn from each other. She truly appreciates her “work family” and the closeness they share. They carpool to events and spend quality time together. Valdivia recalls the time they attended a Warriors game and parade as a group to celebrate the once-in-a-lifetime occasion.

“I’ve never been at a company where I could introduce my boyfriend to my co-workers,” she says. Even her boyfriend was impressed that they remembered his name and made an authentic effort to get to know him.

Valdivia plans to continue building her skills and learning as much as possible. She’s currently trying to find her “niche” within accounting, exploring different departmental areas and looking into taking classes outside of work. Her advice: “Don’t let opportunities go by!”

Keep Growing

Clearly, StoragePRO has found an optimal formula to keep its employees growing, and Rita doesn’t see that changing anytime soon.

“We want to continue to mirror what Steve has built with the company,” says Rita. “It’s a great company to work for!”

Erica Shatzer is the editor of Mini-Storage Messenger, Self-Storage Now!, Self-Storage Canada, and MiniCo Publishing’s annual Self-Storage Almanac.

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