

A Relationship Business

An Interview with Michael A. Rodriguez, Chief Executive Officer and President, Alliance Building Services

EDITORS' NOTE Michael Rodriguez began his career as a porter at the World Trade Center in 1988. Following the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, he left janitorial services and began a supervisory role at a prominent security company. Rodriguez then returned to his roots at the World Trade Center as a janitorial supervisor before joining First Quality Maintenance in 1995. In 2000, he was appointed President of Alliance Building Services and assumed the additional



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role of CEO in 2020. In 2009, Rodriguez was chosen as one of Crain's 40 most dynamic businesspeople under age 40 in New York City. In 2010, he received the Los Niños Image Award for Business for the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. and in 2014, he was honored at the National Jewish Health's AIR Society The Sky's The Limit Benefit. Under the Alliance banner, he has sponsored several community events including "Swing for a Cure" Golf Classic to benefit The Herophilos Fund for Pancreatic Cancer Research at Columbia University Medical Center for the last ten years. Rodriguez also advocates for the betterment of the Latino community by serving on the Board of the Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc. and the Diabetes Research Institute. He provides substantial contributions to several organizations including Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW), Big Brother Big Sisters of New York City, St. Francis Food Pantries and Shelters, Nassau Suffolk Services for Autism (NSSA) and enCourage Kids Foundation.

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1992, Alliance Building Services (alliance.us) provides comprehensive facility-related services for approximately 75 million square feet of space in the New York Tri-state area. Alliance has become an industry leader in building maintenance and security services by taking the time to understand client's needs and creating partnerships for mutual success. Its unified management team, seamless communication, use of the latest industry technologies, and cost-effective procedures create the most dynamic solutions for its clients' facilities. Alliance offers facility maintenance and janitorial services, security officers and security technology systems, building restoration, and flooring through its brands—Alliance Maintenance, Alliance Security, Alliance Restoration and Alliance Flooring.

Will you highlight the history and heritage of Alliance and how you define its mission?

Alliance was created in 1992 when my business partner, Gary Green, saw that service companies were not fulfilling their promise to clients and providing high-level, quality service. He felt that there was an opportunity for a company to lead in the industry by doing what it says it is going to do, being transparent and being laser-focused on client service. Alliance started as a small company and when

I joined in 1995, we had roughly five buildings and approximately 35 employees. We have built the company through organic growth and developing deep client relationships and today we are servicing somewhere in the 75 million square feet range with well over 3,000 employees. It has been amazing to see the growth of Alliance and it is because we have a firm commitment to always mean what we say and to execute on what we say. We are open and transparent with our clients and when we make a mistake, we acknowledge it and fix it. They know they can trust us which has allowed us to build a very strong reputation in the industry.

How important has it been to maintain the company culture and service mentality as Alliance has grown in size and scale?

I have been with Alliance for 26 years and if I think back to my early days at the company, it was challenging to sit with an owner and try to convince him that we could clean their building better than anybody else. It helped that I had gained hands-on experience in cleaning early in my career, so I knew what it took to

clean a building and to provide quality service. I brought that experience to Alliance and it helped lead to our being able to work with some great building owners who gave us a chance to service iconic buildings. When you get that chance, it is an opportunity to prove yourself and to build a long-term relationship. We are focused on building relationships and every person on our team is committed to serving clients and executing on our mission.

How challenging is it to differentiate in the industry and how do you describe the Alliance advantage?

It is a challenge since we all use the same labor force so when we take over a building, we are required to use the same employees at the building. The key difference becomes the strength and expertise of the management team. Our management team believes in taking care of employees and investing in our workforce. We know that if we care and support our people in the field, they will care and support the buildings that they service. This includes acknowledging their birthdays, being there for them when they have a death in the family, and supporting them when they need time off or are dealing with an illness. We want our employees to come to work wanting to do their best for the company because they know that we want to do our best for them.

Will you discuss Alliance's leadership in providing security services?

One of my first responsibilities in management during my career was in security at the World Trade Center after the bombing in 1993 when security was at a premium. While I did not have past experience in security at that time, I did have experience in dealing

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with labor – whether that was motivating or disciplining employees or negotiating with the unions – which helped shape the security goals of the World Trade Center. This experience made it a natural fit when I joined Alliance to have cleaning and security as service offerings because the foundation for both is labor which is our specialty. We also have a restoration business which is another offering that is based on labor.

How did Alliance adapt its business to address the challenges caused by the pandemic and how proud are you to see the resilience of your team during this unprecedented time?

At the beginning of the pandemic, our services were at a huge premium and we were able to help our clients deal with their sanitizing and safety concerns on a daily basis. However, when New York City closed down, it put us in a difficult position as there was nothing to clean. We were fortunate to land an account with the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) which allowed us to employ 400 people sanitizing every NYCHA building in the city and boroughs which comprised of 2,200 apartment buildings. This was clearly a challenge. The first few weeks the people in the buildings were nervous when we would show up at their building as they did not know us, but over time our staff was able to build relationships with them and make them feel comfortable which allowed for them to embrace us. This was a difficult assignment and we made sure that these buildings were safe and sanitized and our team stepped up during this difficult time to meet the challenge.

Alliance is a leader in the Tri-state market. Are there opportunities to expand into other markets and parts of the country?

We are not opposed to expanding and are always looking into opportunities and will continue to do so. At the same time, New York City is so big and has so much density and such vast real estate that there are still tremendous opportunities for growth here. We want to capitalize on all of the new developments happening in New York City and we are focused on continuing to grow our business in this market.

What have been the keys to Alliance’s ability to build client loyalty and long-lasting business relationships?

It is a privilege to service the buildings we work with and to have clients that are some of the best real estate owners and landlords in

the industry. We do not take these relationships for granted in any way. Our clients allow us to be a part of special buildings that they have put their hearts and souls into creating, and this is a responsibility that we do not take lightly. We also build relationships with the tenants in the buildings since while the owner gives us the right to service the building, we need to have the tenant want us to be there and know that our goal is to execute on their vision for the space. We need to know what the priorities are for the tenant and to meet their needs and expectations so that the employees working in these spaces are comfortable and able to perform at their highest levels.

You mentioned the talent of your management team. Will you highlight how critical it has been to build such a strong and experienced management team?

This has been one of our biggest differentiators. In 2009, we landed the cleaning contract for Yankee Stadium and Citi Field at the same time which was a massive undertaking. It took the talent and expertise of our leadership team and all of our employees to meet this challenge. I remember at the time we had a young man who worked for us as an analyst and his job was to put the numbers together for these two accounts. He had recently graduated from college and was a numbers person. When we started the project, he was so knowledgeable about it because he had been working on the numbers for so long. We decided to put him out in the field and he worked closely with me and we worked long hours running the project. He was so eager to learn and so hungry that he was promoted to supervisor and then manager, and he is currently our VP of Operations. This is one example among so many that I could give you of the people in our company who have a desire to learn and lead and who grow into management roles with Alliance. It is my responsibility to provide our people with the tools and skills needed in order to grow in the company since this is a service business and our biggest asset is our talent and human capital.

Alliance is a company that is committed to the communities it serves and supports many causes. What has made this so important?

We have a diverse workforce and employ many minorities from all of the boroughs, and I am a minority leading the company who grew up in Brooklyn, so I think the right thing to do

is to make an impact on the community. We live in the communities we serve and want to help keep these communities strong and vibrant.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you describe your management style?

I have never gone into a meeting and introduced someone from the team by saying that the person works for me. I say that we work together. I believe in teamwork and collaboration and working together in the best interests of the company and our clients. I also believe in providing opportunities for growth and advancement in the company in order to keep our people interested and excited about the business so that we retain our talent. Our goal is to build the best team and to provide careers for our people where they are challenged, enthused and fulfilled every day they come to work.

What do you feel have been the keys to your success as a business leader?

I had great mentors and was fortunate at a young age to find people who were willing to share their time and expertise with me. They saw something in me, and even though I knew my ability, they were able to see it and help me reach my potential. I believe in hard work and never quitting which are characteristics that I possess, but the mentorship was so important to help me see opportunity and they tried to not only teach me what to do, but also what not to do. There is no substitute for hard work and putting in the time, but one piece of advice that I offer to all young people beginning their careers is to try to find mentors who can help guide you and support you in your career journey.

Alliance has had strong growth and success during your time as CEO. Do you take moments to reflect and celebrate the wins?

We work hard, but we certainly play hard as well. We make sure to celebrate the wins since I think it is so important to build that camaraderie as a team and to let our people know that we could not have done it without them. We recently had a company outing which we held outside to manage all COVID protocols. There was a moment when you could look around and see that everyone there was having fun and enjoying being together which is a special feeling and makes you appreciate and value that you are part of a company like Alliance. ●